

Celebrating a 90th Anniversary

A Little-Known Treasury of Japanese Art

Photography by Yuji Ono. Text by Toko Suzuki. Map by Honey-g

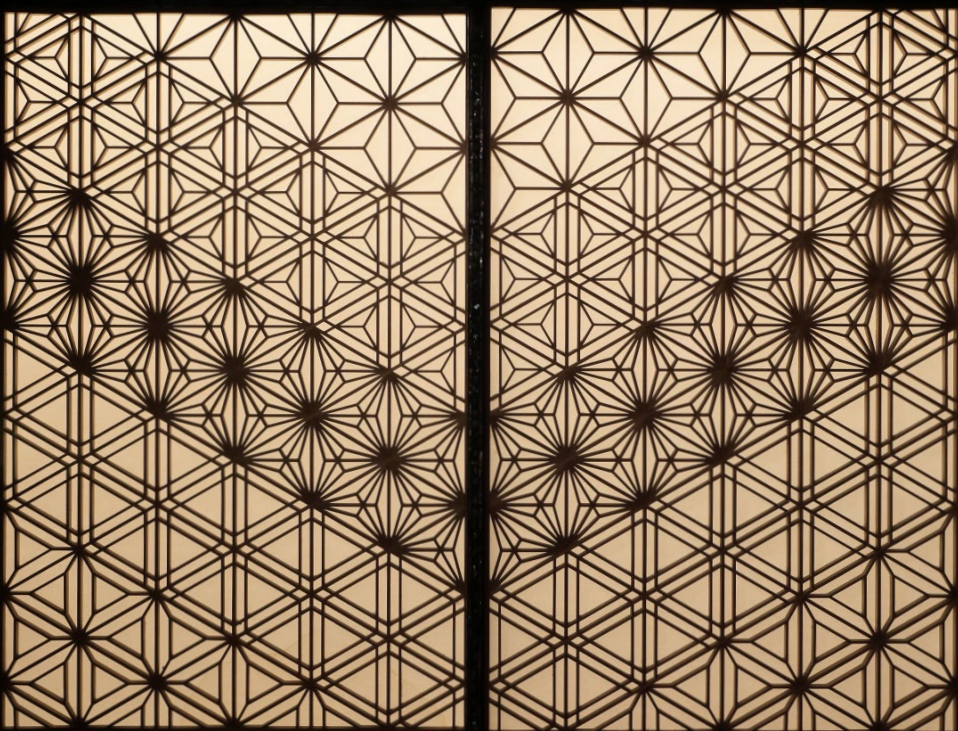
Rikizo Hosokawa opened the first Gajoen restaurant 90 years ago, in 1928. Soon afterward he embarked on creating a magnificent new space where guests could delight in original art and be carried away to a world of enchantment. To ensure that it had the refined look he wanted, he invited leading artists of the time to decorate the interior; in 1938 his palace of art became a wedding venue. Now operating as the Hotel Gajoen Tokyo, it continues to attract large numbers of visitors. It's a perfect place for anyone who wants to be immersed in the Japanese aesthetic during a stay in Tokyo.

The Hyakudan Kaidan (Hundred-Step Staircase), one of Tokyo's designated cultural properties, preserves part of the original wooden building. The staircase, which actually has 99 steps, leads to seven tatami-floored rooms filled with art.

Opposite page: In the Gyosho no Ma hall, delightful images in the *nihonga* style cover the wooden columns and panels.

This page: The Kiyokata no Ma is named after artist Kiyokata Kaburaki, renowned for his portraits of beautiful women. In addition to splendid paintings by Kiyokata, this room features a remarkable ceiling made from Japanese cedarwood and elegant wickerwork, adorned with intricate designs of folding fans showing seasonal plants and flowers.

Restaurants & Banquet Rooms



1. The sliding screen doors in the Ushiwaka no Ma room are a gorgeous example of *kumiko* latticework.
2, 5. The posts flanking the alcove in the Ushiwaka no Ma are covered with carved allusions to ancient tales. The left-hand post shows Susano'o, who, according to Japan's oldest historical record, the *Kojiki*, killed an eight-headed, eight-tailed monster called Yamata no Orochi. On the right is Ushiwakamaru (later known as Minamoto no Yoshitsune), who learned swordsmanship from long-nosed *tengu* goblins on Mount Kurama.
3. Two private dining rooms in the Chinese restaurant Shunyuki have been reconstructed to match the original building. In one, the Gyokujo no Ma, charming nihonga paintings by Gyokujo Masuda depicting dancers wearing flower-decked hats take pride of place on all four walls. The restaurant's meals are prepared not only with an ideal combination of flavors, but in harmony with Chinese principles regarding the energetic properties of different foods, and are served on tables luxuriantly decorated with mother-of-pearl inlay.
4. A thatched-roof building within the grounds of the hotel houses the Japanese restaurant Tofutei. Amply lit through a broad veranda that overlooks a traditional Japanese garden complete with flowing stream, the restaurant and its surroundings make you forget that you're in the heart of the nation's capital city.



The crane murals that cover two of the walls in the Chikuha no Ma, one of the private rooms in Tofutei, are made from painstakingly inlaid mother-of-pearl. The images sparkle in the soft light, making this calming and elegant space one of the hotel's greatest attractions.

The ultimate in refinement and splendor

Guest Room & Library



All guests stay in luxury suites



Above: All guest accommodations in Hotel Gajoen Tokyo comprise at least 80 square meters of space; the Ambassador Suite, shown here, is 120 square meters. It has every conceivable amenity needed for a supremely comfortable, carefree stay. On a clear day, Mount Fuji is visible through the large window.

Left: The bedroom is ideally appointed for a luxurious sojourn, with an atmosphere that is enhanced by calming elements of Japanese design.

Below center: On the top level of the guest rooms is a cozy library with distinctly Japanese touches like the tatami mats topping the benches along the walls. It's an ideal place to relax and read or plan for a day of sightseeing. There's also an executive lounge where breakfast, a morning coffee, or even an aperitif can be enjoyed in style.

Below right: Though predominantly modern in design, the library features mother-of-pearl inlay on its wooden columns and nihonga paintings on wall panels. All the different elements blend together brilliantly to create a special beauty.



With world-class features and amenities, the Hotel Gajoen Tokyo possesses a unique and inimitable beauty

Gajoen started out as a restaurant, originally opening in Shibaura, Tokyo, in 1928. In 1931 it moved to its current location in Meguro, changing its name to Meguro Gajoen. The founder, Rikizo Hosokawa, envisioned a magnificent structure that would resemble the fabled palace of the dragon king. Built in the Japanese style, his restaurant incorporated materials not just from all over the country, but from around the world. Hosokawa invited leading artists of the day, including painters, sculptors, and experts in mother-of-pearl inlay, to provide the decorative elements, with some rooms being wholly entrusted to one artist. Depictions of ancient legends and historical events were carved in relief on columns and walls, and ornamentation studded ceilings and even window frames. Each and every element was an original work of art. The enormous scope of this undertaking illustrates Hosokawa's dedication to his dream.

Hosokawa had another groundbreaking objective as well: he wanted his palace of art to be open to as many people as possible. He believed that everyone had a right to come into contact with great art and to dream. Accord-



ingly, in 1938 he turned Meguro Gajoen into Japan's first specialist wedding venue.

The Hyakudan Kaidan (Hundred-

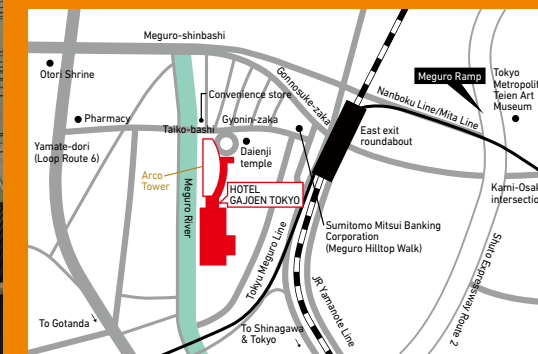
Step Staircase), which has been officially designated as an important example of wooden architectural tradition by the Tokyo metropolitan government, was preserved and incorporated into the new structure when the building was renovated. All the artworks, too, were carefully removed and restored in the reconstruction, taking on a new brilliance in their modern settings. The venue was renamed Hotel Gajoen Tokyo in 2017, reopening with luxurious suites where overnight guests would be pampered in style. December 2018 will mark the 90th anniversary of the original Gajoen, an event worthy of celebration.

Upon entering the hotel, visitors are welcomed by a Japanese garden complete with waterfall. The interior rooms are spacious, with elaborately decorated ceilings; colorful woodblock prints adorn the corridors. Even the restrooms, with their arched bridges, are unique. All in all, it's a lot to take in at first; you'd be forgiven for wondering what you've walked into. But that's how it was intended to be. This is a place that is hard to fully imagine, let alone understand, without going inside and seeing it with your own eyes. There's little chance that another palace of Japanese art like this will ever be created again. Hotel Gajoen Tokyo is an experience not to be missed.



Above: The famed Hyakudan Kaidan staircase is made of 5-centimeter-thick planks of zelkova wood. **Left:** This sliding

door of kumiko latticework is said to be the oldest in the hotel. The three designs on it are, from left to right, a zigzag diamond pattern resembling pine bark, a fishing net, and a folding fan. It can now be seen in the lobby of the Japanese-style function hall. **Below:** The building's interior in the early years of the Showa era (1926-1989). Facilities included a Shinto shrine, a photography studio, and a beauty parlor. **Below left:** The entrance of the Meguro Gajoen around the time of its opening.



By train: 3-minute walk from Meguro Station
By car: Approximately 40 minutes' drive by expressway from Haneda Airport
By Shinkansen: From Shinagawa Station, about 7 minutes by JR train or 20 minutes by taxi; from Tokyo Station, about 20 minutes by JR train or 40 minutes by taxi

1-8-1 Shimo-Meguro, Meguro-ku, Tokyo
 Tel. 03-3491-4111
www.hotelgajoen-tokyo.com

Room rates:
 Executive Suite (80 m²), from ¥260,000 per night for double occupancy
 Ambassador Suite (120 m²), from ¥400,000 per night for double occupancy
 Gajoen Suite (240 m²), from ¥880,000 per night for double occupancy
 All rates include tax and service charge