

Kitchen Chronicles A Kaleidoscopic Overview of HomeLiving

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Foreword

The kitchen—a space crucial to survival and, therefore, indispensable in a residence. As a space for handling (storing, preparing) food, it is also closely related to the location's land, climate, and culture. As a work place, then, it is a space that continually changes in pursuit of better functionality. Traditional kitchens are nevertheless disappearing in recent years. Because kitchens are contained in private homes, moreover, fact-finding surveys are difficult and comprehensive research is rare. This exhibition takes up the investigative work of an architect and researcher, likening their recorded research to "chronicles." Through their chronicles, we show traditional kitchens around the world and the modern-day evolution of the Japanese kitchen through some 90 materials including re-created models, illustrations, and housekeeping textbooks.

Architect Reiko Miyazaki researched traditional kitchens around the world for about a half century. Her work reveals distinctively different features in the use of "fire" and "water" between the north and south with 40th parallel north as a boundary. Then, Fumiyo Suzuki, a Kanagawa University assistant professor, turned to "housekeeping textbooks" at young women's schools as a source for learning about the Japanese kitchen's rapid modernization from the late 19th to early 20th century. Collecting such textbooks, she has conducted empirical research.

Their chronicles—the one comprehensive (traditional kitchens of the world) and the other focused (kitchens in modern Japan)—make clear the diversity of what is appropriate in the kitchen, depending on the place and time. They also display the relentless invention demanded by the kitchen as a space indispensable to human dwelling.

We wish to extend our warmest appreciation to Fumiyo Suzuki, Reiko Miyazaki, and everyone whose efforts have made this exhibition possible.

LIXIL GALLERY

Kitchens
of
the
World

Kitchens of the World Research Reiko Miyazaki (architect)

Having become an architect and structural engineer on reaching my thirties, I took part in the 30th anniversary event (1982) of the Tokyo Society of Architects and Building Engineers. For this, I proposed to hold an exhibit of overseas townscapes and houses I had photographed in spare moments over the years. As I selected photographs, however, the kitchens appearing in them seized my attention, with result that our exhibit title became "Kitchens of the World." Lacking sufficient kitchen photos for an exhibit, however, I spent the summer of the year before the event chasing about Europe collecting materials. In this way, an innate desire to observe and study kitchens—the most thoroughly human activity space in a house—grew in me, and I embarked earnestly on investigative research of the world's kitchens.

Finding chances to research house interiors proved difficult. Relying on acquaintances whose companies had branch offices in Europe, I asked the offices' locally hired employees to let me visit their families. I also asked foreigners I had met in Japan to introduce me to their families in their countries. Thus, with the cooperation of numerous people, I was able to have contact with the lifestyles of ordinary people. I also visited folklore museums in every region. It was initially impossible to visit nations in Africa and Asia owing to time and budget limitations, but researchers at various institutions kindly provided me with valuable materials. In this way, during a half century of traveling in Japan and the world whenever I had time, I amassed a large volume of materials.

Kitchens from a Map Perspective Reiko Miyazaki (architect)

By establishing my investigations in each region on a world map, I could know that the way people use cooking pots clearly differs between north and south, with 40th parallel north as a boundary.

North of 40th parallel north, where winters are harsh and days are short, heating and lighting are indispensable in the winter months. Fire is utilized in all aspects of living: heating, lighting, and cooking, and the room having a fire is used as a combined living room-bedroom. In ancient times, the fire was placed in the center of the room, and family life took place around it. The word family derives etymologically from the concept of a small group of people clustered around one fire. In the 16-17th centuries, the fire pit was moved to a fireplace in one wall, and its smoke expelled from a chimney. The cooking pot, to obtain a uniform level of heat, was hung over the fire and its heat varied by adjusting its distance from the fire.

In hot countries, meanwhile, it was comfortable to be away from the fire. From the equator to 40th parallel north, the days are long throughout the year, so lighting was not necessary. Fire was only needed for the cooking pot, and the pot was set on three rocks or

a pan holder, just high enough to allow the fire to burn. Methods of keeping the fire's heat from the surrounding living space were contrived. Cooking stoves in southern regions were a simple device, containing the fire inside so it could be moved about and used anywhere.

In Japan, Aomori prefecture is near 40th parallel north and can be called a southern region. Cultural differences can also be seen between east and west. In eastern Japan, the cooking pot was hung on a hook over a sunken hearth (irori), while in western Japan, where influences from foreign cultures were strong, the pot was placed in the sunken hearth on three stones or a pan holder.

Difference in water management also appear between north and south. In northern lands, bacteria do not propagate in the low temperatures, so soil was easily rinsed from vegetables and minimal water was required. In hot, humid southern lands, on the other hand, water was frequently used in cooking and washing, so large quantities of water were needed.

In each region, a lifestyle suited to the local climate developed, with result that differences arose in the use of fire and water.

Kitchens
in
Modern
Japan

Kitchen Innovation
and
the Body
in Modern Japan

Fumiyo Suzuki

(Assistant Professor, Faculty of Engineering, Department of Architecture,
Institute of the Study of Japanese Folk Culture, Kanagawa University)

The Japanese kitchen changed dramatically in the Meiji (1869-1912), Taisho (1912-26), and Showa (1926-89) periods. In the traditional kitchen, the chopping board was placed on the floor, and one sat on one’ s knees to prepare food. Today’ s style of cooking in “standing position” was first introduced in the late Meiji period. The job of cooking also passed from a servant to the wife. I have researched in detail such aspects of the Japanese kitchen’ s modernization, using the home economics textbooks of women’ s schools as my original source.

The home economics textbooks of that time covered all the activities in a household, from clothing, sewing, food, dwelling, infant nursing, child care, old age, administrating house finances to keeping maids and performing the rituals of weddings and funerals. Such textbooks are also offer valuable information about the house, including house layouts and room styles through the passing years. In my research, I have analyzed the spatial development of the kitchen by referring to drawings in these textbooks and suggestions they provide for kitchen improvement. In particular, I have examined three important concepts behind the modernization

of the kitchen: cooking in “standing position” plus “sanitation” and “convenience.”

“The body” is a subject closely tied up with these three concepts. Marcel Mauss (1872-1950) pointed out that “the body is man’ s first and most natural instrument.” The innovation of the modern kitchen was a direct result of interplay between this instrument, the body, and the element of space. This exhibition takes “the body” as a keyword in showing how kitchens evolved.

Innovation was the power driving the kitchen’ s modernization; this is unquestionable. Westernization and improved sanitation in the Meiji period were followed by the Taisho-period movement to improve living conditions in which all sectors—government, academia, and private—played a role. It was home economics education, then, that spread understanding of these modern concepts to homes in general. In our study of lifestyle, either that of individuals or a community, we can obtain important clues in our predecessors’ design practices and innovative endeavors.

The Introduction of Cooking in “Standing Position”

From around 1897 (Meiji 30), the traditional sitting position came to be viewed negatively, and the standing position recommended. It was judged unsanitary to place the cutting board directly on the floor, for this meant cutting and preparing food at the level of people’ s feet as they walked and moved about. The sitting position was also judged inefficient, as it was necessary to stand, move, and sit again each time a new task was begun. Cooking in standing position became a topic of education throughout the prewar period. Innovations based on “body technique” thus greatly transformed the space of the Japanese kitchen.

Hygiene

After Japan's opening to the world, acute infectious diseases such as cholera and plague became rampant, and sanitation became an issue of urgency in Japan as in the West. In the traditional house, the kitchen was generally located in the north where it received little sun, so it tended to be soiled by mold and soot. Therefore, kitchen modernization took “bright,” “well ventilated,” and “easy to clean” as its aims. In time, during Taisho (1912–26) and early Showa (1926–89), equipment for water supply and draining, and exhaust ventilation, arrived as did new materials such as tile and stainless steel. “Hygiene” was an unavoidable issue for the kitchen as a space promoting physical health.

Convenience

Convenience refers to the rationalization of labor, particularly amid the customs of daily living. The active pursuit of improved efficiency, on the other hand, dates from mechanization during the Industrial Revolution. Scientific management, aimed at efficiency in factory production, was also suited to efficiency of bodily movement in the household, and provided a standard for household spaces and equipment just as it had for mechanization. The concept of eliminating wasted effort from housework, in other words, drew attention to the body, with result that specific measurements were decided for spaces and equipment in connection with the burden of human labor. This in turn gave germination to ergonomics. Worthy of note is that this history is clearly visible in the development of kitchen spaces.

The Germination of Ergonomics

At first, the introduction of “standing position” simply meant a change to working while standing. Gradually, however, standards were established for the measurements of equipment—such as “countertops slightly below the height of a woman’ s navel”—and designers grew attentive to the relationship between the body and the burden posed by the labor. With the germination of ergonomics research, Japanese women’ s average height and effort under the applied load came to be scientifically analyzed, with result that specific standard measurements could be established. Kitchen space is inseparably related to the body. For this reason, efforts to create a basis for regulating and standardizing components of architecture focused on the kitchen at an extremely early stage.

Introducing New Materials

In order to make kitchens “brighter” and “cleaner,” new materials were introduced that combined beauty with high durability and fire resistance. From Taisho (1912-26) to early Showa (1926-89), such new materials as tile, artificial stone, glass, concrete, and linoleum became an important feature of kitchen décor. As for the kitchen sink, before the kodan-nagashi (“kitchen set”) became commonly available, mounted kitchen sinks known as jintogi-nagashi (“crushed stone sink”) made of metal sheet or crushed stone were often seen. Jintogi was a composite material with a polished surface, produced by mixing cement with crushed stone, usually sand, granite or limestone. The jintogi-nagashi sink displayed in this exhibition was actually used in Tokyo’ s Dojunkai Ebara apartments. In height, the sinks of this period were generally 700-750mm, some 50-100mm lower than today’ s standard 800-850mm.

Stainless Steel Arrives

Stainless steel, having rust resistance and durability, became popularly used for sinks in Japan and abroad before World War II. Metal free-standing sinks used from Meiji to Taisho featured a sink formed of metal sheet plated with Zinc (aluminum) or tinplate, supported on wood legs. Because the metal sheet had to be bent and shaped or welded, the bowl was shallow, sometimes less than 5cm in depth. In time, welded stainless steel sinks arrived, and after the war, technical innovation by the Sunwave company yielded the first deep-bowl sinks, mass-produced for use in Japan Housing Corporation apartments. Not long thereafter, the sinks came into use in ordinary houses, as well. This exhibition displays sink specifications circa 1952 (left) and a deep-bowl stainless steel sink from a Housing Corporation apartment (below).