



# THE DAWN OF MODERN JAPANESE ARCHITECTURE

*Modern Japanese architectural design began to take shape at the end of the Edo Period (1603-1867) and developed in tandem with the Meiji government's rise. One of the new design movement's main proponents was Kingo Tatsuno, who revolutionized the way Japan built and lived.*

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As Japan modernized during the Meiji Restoration in the late nineteenth century, the Department of Public Works established the Imperial College of Engineering to promote technological studies and engineering as a way to accelerate the advance of architectural studies. Japan had been relying on foreign architects, and this new policy was designed to have Japanese students absorb European architectural skills and techniques. The hope was that they would construct modern architecture that Japan could take pride in and show off to the world.

Josiah Conder was a British architect who taught at the architectural department of the Imperial

College of Engineering (now the University of Tokyo's Department of Architecture). Invited to Japan in 1877, he remained here even after completing his commission and became a permanent resident. Conder designed many buildings—including the Rokumeikan, Iwasaki Residence and Holy Resurrection Cathedral—and was referred to as the “father of Japanese architecture.”

“Besides incorporating European architectural techniques and teaching Japanese architects,” architectural historian Yoshiyuki Kawahigashi says, “Conder also made major contributions by setting principles for constructing foundations on soft soil and enforcing earthquake-resistant construction—both essential for an earthquake-prone country like Japan.”





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Conder had many disciples here, and one of the first was Kingo Tatsuno, who went on to design the Bank of Japan building. After graduating at the top of his class, Tatsuno went to study in England. After returning to Japan, he became an instructor at the Imperial College of Engineering in Conder's place and helped design a variety of Western-style architecture. The Bank of Japan became a symbol of Japanese abilities and progress in making a national structure. "The British Neo-Baroque and Renaissance style exterior is simple but sturdy, a perfect way to present a national structure," Kawahigashi says.

Influenced by the 1891 Mino-Owari earthquake, which struck after construction had started, the exterior of the second and third floors was made with lighter materials to make the building more earthquake-resistant.

Tokyo's main train terminal, which is still in use as Tokyo Station, has an impressive British Queen Anne style dome. The white granite stripes along the red bricks were later called the Tatsuno style, and can be seen in other structures he designed. Applying Conder's teachings, Tatsuno focused on earthquake-resistant structures, using over ten thousand pine pillars in the building's foundation.

Thanks to that sturdy base, the building survived even the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923. The station's dome, roof and interior were unfortunately destroyed in the firebombing of Tokyo during World War II. The original three-story station was reconstructed as a two-story building after the war, but was restored to its original three-story design in 2012. During the restoration process, many were surprised to find the original pine pillars still standing strong and supporting the building.

Not limiting himself to modern buildings, Tatsuno also created traditional Japanese-style wooden buildings like the Nara Hotel. Despite the traditional temple-like exterior, there are many Western-influenced touches throughout the building, such as vertically sliding windows, pillars framing the walls, and a chandelier. Formally referred to as the "state guesthouse of Kansai," the hotel was regarded as the perfect place for royalty and government guests to stay.

Tatsuno was one of several new-wave architects and Conder disciples to refashion the look of Meiji Japan. One of his contemporaries, Tokuma Katayama, designed the massive and ornate Togu Palace in Tokyo, showcasing the best architectural skills, aesthetics and technology of Japan at the time. Known as the Versailles of Tokyo, the palace was the high point of modern European-style architecture achieved during the Meiji Period. Now known as the Akasaka Palace, it serves as the State Guest House, welcoming dignitaries from all over the world. The State Guest House is sometimes open to the public, and visitors can see the marvelous structure and the many fine artworks on display firsthand.

Josiah Conder taught his pupils about European architecture, the starting point from where they went on to create their own Western-influenced styles that became the basis of modern Japanese architecture. Tatsuno, Katayama and other key architects used what they learned from him to continue to strive to create national buildings that harmoniously fused Japanese and Western sensibilities and have stood strong for well over a century. ■

1 In 2012 Tokyo Station was restored to its former glory (Kingo Tatsuno, 1914)

2 The Bank of Japan (Kingo Tatsuno, 1896)

3 The Akasaka Palace is also known as the "Versailles of Tokyo" (Tokuma Katayama, 1909) / Photo courtesy of Cabinet Office, State Guest Houses of Japan website

4 The elegant Nara Hotel harmoniously incorporates Japanese and Western elements (Kingo Tatsuno, 1909)