

Kyoto— Tapestries of Delight

Story and Photos by Bill Tingey

Measuring some 470 meters in length, approximately 60 meters deep and standing almost as high, the scale of the new Kyoto station building alone is enough to arrest people's attention.



Now very much a symbol of the city, Kyoto Tower reflected in the façade of the new station building



A selection of glowing Nishijin brocade silk yarns

But its vital statistics are not the only thing that is making the public talk. After all, it stands within an urban fabric more than 1,200 years in the making, in a city where people nonchalantly refer to the late 15th century *Onin* Wars as if they were a recent event. Anything new or even the slightest bit avant garde is therefore bound to be treated with suspicion.

The appropriateness of its form—a physical barrier and eye-stop only serving to exaggerate the divide created by the railway—can perhaps be questioned. But the architect, Hiroshi Hara, has skillfully modified his own distinctive design vocabulary to suit the requirements of the scheme and, more importantly, to reflect the refined, elegant tenure of life and design that characterizes Kyoto.

Functionally speaking, it is more than just a station building: it is a complex of commercial and cultural facilities linked by a variety of public spaces, topped off by a hotel. Externally the façade is defined to express some of these functions, while a rich toccata and fugue of surface motifs and patterns moves unashamedly across the exterior, graphically decorating what is essentially a series of



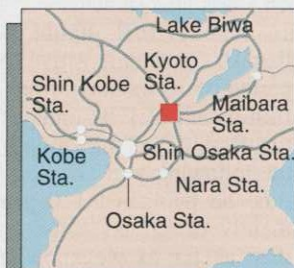
The animated, kaleidoscopic, cavernous interior of the station building

cubic forms.

The relative flatness of the exterior makes the cavernous interior something of a surprise and provides thrilling spatial experiences, not least of which is the soaring space above the central concourse. From here the eyes are drawn to the west where, some 40 meters above, natural light floods into this high roofed interior, cascading over the escalators and broad flight of steps, which climb perilously to an open court at the top of the building. To the east of the concourse is a more gentle climb to a secluded court from where it is possible to rise to the covered catwalk spanning the central concourse. With so many connected spaces, the building asks to be "explored" rather than simply "used," a fact that weekend shoppers in their droves were quick to realize almost as soon as it opened in the autumn of last year.

Much of the open space is punctuated by artworks and animated not only by people but by shafts of light penetrating the shell to create an ever changing kaleidoscope of light and shade across parts of the granite faced interior. Samples of all the granites used are displayed let into the surface of a group of columns to the east of the main entrance facing Kyoto Tower. So despite the criticism that is levelled at the building, it combines a rich tapestry of spatial and architectural effects in an original and intriguing manner.

Kyoto is best reached by train. Displays and information about Nishijin cloths can be found at the Nishijin Textile Center, 602 Horikawa, Imadegawa Sagaru, Kamigyo-ku, Kyoto (Tel: 075 432 6131). It is open from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday to Friday. Nishijin cloths can also be seen and purchased at the Japan Traditional Craft Center, Minami Aoyama, Tokyo (Tel: 03 3403 2460). Other Japanese crafts can be found at <http://www.wnn.or.jp/wnn-craft/eng/index.html> For tourist information contact the Japan National Tourist Office in English (Tel: 03 3201 3331), or access <http://www.jnto.go.jp>



Equally rich in color, pattern and motif are the textiles known as *Nishijin ori*—a collective name for a number of silk cloths produced in the Nishijin district of Kyoto. The most elaborate of these is the tapestry cloth known as *tsuzure*, its intricacy making it necessary for the fingernails of the weaver to be used in place of a beater.

It seems that the origins of

sericulture and silk weaving in Kyoto date back to the 6th century but the eleven year period of the *Onin* Wars curtailed the development of weaving within the city. Returning after the strife, weavers who had perfected their craft elsewhere in the meantime, set up once more in the "western camp," in Nishijin where distinctive brocades for *kimono* and *obi* are still being woven

from glowing silk yarns. And, if Hara's station building and Nishijin cloths have anything in common, it is a sense of rich, alluring vitality, which both of them possess.



In cooperation with the
JAPAN TRADITIONAL
CRAFT CENTER

TABLE TALK

Charcoal Grilled Meats at Daruma



Since the dawn of mankind, almost certainly the simplest way man has found to cook the meat of the animals he has hunted is over an open fire. On my various travels around the world, I have sampled many dishes cooked in this manner and they have all without a doubt surpassed the finest steak served in any of the best steak houses. Take, for example, the *syashlyk*, a joint of mutton seasoned with salt and pepper and cooked over a fire on a metal spit in a Russian forest; the *churrasco*, the hump of a zebu served at the best of the fifty or

so restaurants in Rio de Janeiro; the shish kebab I enjoyed at a street stall in Istanbul when I visited Turkey; the barbecue in the suburbs of Los Angeles or the broiled meat in downtown Seoul; the taste of all these delicacies still lingers on my tongue even today.

The broiled meat served at *Daruma*, a specialist meat restaurant in Yokohama, is in my opinion of the same caliber. The restaurant gets its name from the traditional Chinese red wooden tumbler dolls called Daruma. They are images of the great Indian priest Dharma who introduced Zen Buddhism into China in about A.D. 520 and spent nine years sitting cross-legged in deep meditation at Shaolin monastery in Luoyang, China. The reason therefore for choosing to call this restaurant Daruma was in the hope that it would flourish because of the connotation the word has with being able to get back on ones feet again just like the tumbler doll, when it is pushed over. It has proved to be a very apt name, for the 74 year old chef and owner, Mr. Yamada, who established the business 41 years ago, looks as young as ever and can always be found standing behind the counter. There are a total of just 14 chairs set around the counter and as bookings are not accepted as a rule, customers must be resigned to a 30-minute wait, if they are unlucky enough to find all the seats taken.

It is a set menu with green peppers sandwiched between three slices of beef, chicken hearts, the chef's original dish of fatty chicken called *mi saki*, a choice cut of ox tongue, cow's liver, duck with pieces of Japanese onions as well as the widely acclaimed fat-streaked beef, which is so popular with the Japanese. All of these

delicacies without exception once tasted become addictive.

The various meats are put onto skewers and seasoned basically with salt, pepper and garlic powder with the addition of a little light soya sauce on the beef, before being cooked over charcoal. In order to bring out the flavor, Mr. Yamada adjusts the seasoning while cooking by quickly dipping the skewers of meat in Japanese sake.

The price is reasonable at around ¥5,000 per head for the full course with ample quantities of beer or sake. As there is no menu, however, non-Japanese speakers might be advised to go with a Japanese-speaking friend.

Daruma

1-1 Hinode-cho, Naka-ku, Yokohama-shi
Tel: 045-231-2917
Hours: 5:30p.m. to 9:30 p.m.
Closed: Sundays and holidays

Hori Yoshimichi

President, Fukui Oil Storage Co., Ltd.

