

From Kiso to Paris: The true story of a wooden Japanese house. Part 1

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Once upon a time ...

Jane COBBI, a CNRS researcher in ethnology, went to Japan in the 1970s in order to study relations existing between the inhabitants and plants, namely in the Nagano mountainous area. She met an old woman, named TAMI, who taught her her process secrets and her own values. As a matter of fact, Mrs TAMI was making traditional hemp weaving items, and used to bleach the fabrics by unrolling it at night over the snow.

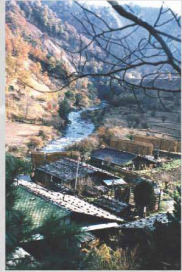


Photo: Jane COBBI

As Mrs TAMI fully mastered this ancestral weaving process, she was designated as a Preserver of Important Intangible Cultural Property: Jūyō Mukei Bunkazai Hojisha.

After Mrs TAMI's death, her family left the house in 1990, which then became threatened with destruction. As this traditional wooden house had remained untouched by modernity, avoiding any steel slides cover as so many others had, Jane Cobbi believed it was vital to protect it as a heritage from the past. So, she preserved the walls, roof and floors unchanged, and furnished it with all the traditional everyday life tools she could gather, such as stable tools, a 600kg stove, an altar for the ancestors, furniture, mats and basketworks... all of which that could possibly convert this house into a rural lifestyle museum.



Photo: Jane COBBI

重要無形文化財保持者

Reconstruction and restoration

Within the framework of her research in ethnology on Japan, Jane COBBI, was offered that wooden house in 1999. Thanks to numerous supports and friends, she could finally transport it from Kiso (Japan) to Paris (France). In 2007, a temporary reconstruction was organized in the Museum of Man, Palais de Chaillot (Paris). Then the old farm cottage moved again in June/July 2010 to its present location, in the precincts of the Jardin d'Acclimatation, in the Bois de Boulogne (Paris). This rural cottage is currently the sole Japanese farm to be seen in France.



Work discussion between J. Cobbi (left), C. Lavier (second left), the carpenters team and architect Furihata (right).

Japanese architect Makoto FURIHATA, chief carpenter MIYAZAWA and carpenters SARUTA, FUJII and AKAIKE came from Nagano (Japan), especially to reconstruct the house.

Thanks to their work, we could watch the progress of the reconstruction, and could make numerous movies and scientific pictures on the know-how of these highly specialized craftsmen.



Restoration of a wooden pillar lying on a flagstone, showing details of the assembly of the old and new parts.



Inside view of the house during the reconstruction: The place of each part was thoroughly noted before dismantling. Floor of the main room.

This farm cottage is designed according to Japan traditional means and ancestral techniques, with wooden pillars lying at equal distance on uncarved flagstones and connected by wooden walls.



Photos: Rémi BRAGEU and Catherine LAVIER

Its roofing is in wooden shingles, made out of local conifers, mainly HINOKI (*Chamaecyparis obtusa*) and SUGI (*Cryptomeria japonica*). The house weighs about 10 tons and its surface is 97 m² for a 4,5m height.

From a dying house to a fully living farm

This traditional house dates back from 1861-1863. Some details in its arrangement and decoration reveal valuable information on everyday rural life at that time.

It still have its protective inscriptions « ofuda » 御札, a special shelf dedicated to deities worshipping « kamidana » 神棚, a traditional ground loom « takahata » たか機 and this insistent, typical and so pleasant smell of wood logs burnt around the « irori » 囲炉裏, square fireplace dug in the middle of the floor.



Main room with the entrance, the « irori » and viewing over the shed and the stable



Everyday life utensils, all made out of wood: Buckets, washing boards, ... all tools of the time.



Hanging in the shed, some hemp ready to be worked upon.



Akiyo KAJIWARA, a traditional weaver, gives life again to the loom

See also : <http://www.ecliptique.com/kiso/> © ecliptique 2009

Wood sampling during reconstruction

We took the opportunity to collect more than 250 wood samples, by means of taking cores or small chops, picking some unused parts, as well as taking numerous in situ photographs of tree-rings. This was also a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to witness the construction



Non reused wood are collected in full



Transversal face of a non cut wood: photo of tree rings will be used as sample



Re-used wood in the house are either photographed or cut in a part which does not bother its employment

process of a traditional Japanese house, namely the wood selection (quality, origin, reuse, repairs and addition cases), and to establish local chronologies for Japanese wood and tree species.



Architect FURIHATA learning wood sampling drilling, using a manual auger.

This outstanding event could hopefully be the first step of an exciting scientific experience, to be undertaken in association with our Japanese colleagues, specialists in wood anatomy and dendrochronology.

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