

To Build a Bridge

In the heart of Obihiro, Japan, a homeowner selected an American architect to design his transcultural dwelling that blends rich Japanese heritage and modern Western elements.

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images by **YOSHIHIKO TOBARI**,
Sapporo, Japan; **ROBERT OSCHATZ**

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This unique home sits in the heart of Obihiro, Japan. Here, a view from the living room terrace shows the lawn, where family and friends can sit and look out at a traditional Japanese pond and garden.



Top and right: Inside the first floor of the home, the fireplace features a sunken conversation pit with built-in sofa and is a natural gathering spot for the family.

ASSIMILATING TO A NEW CULTURE IS NEVER SIMPLE.

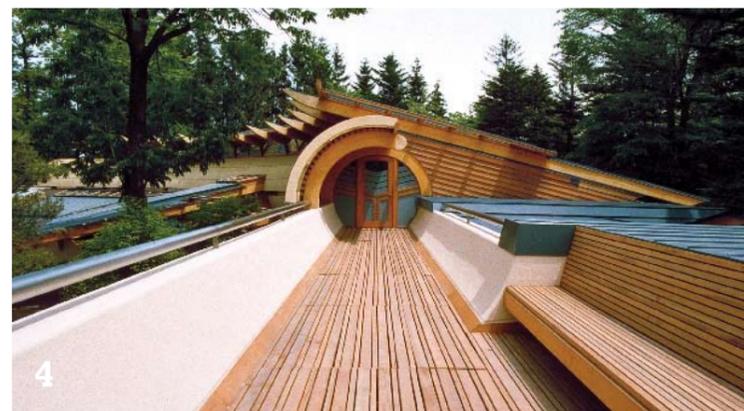
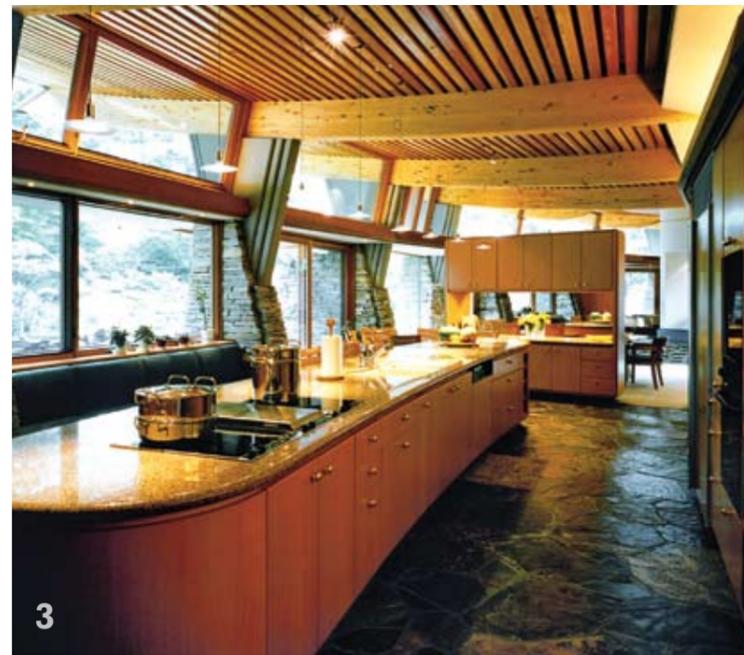
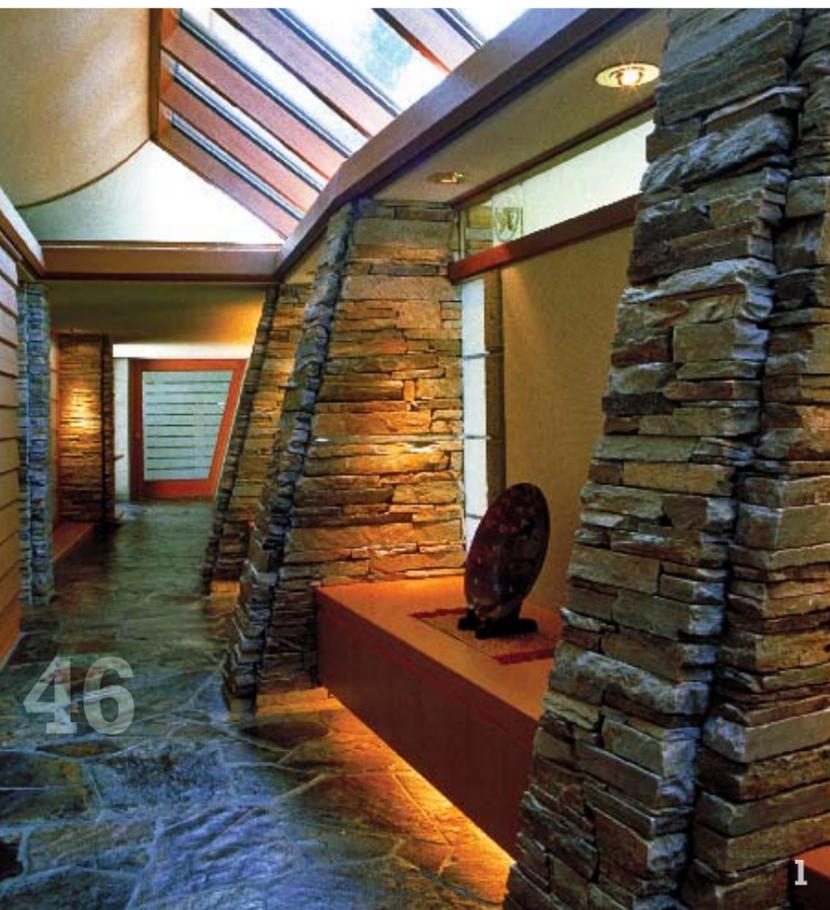
Even when understanding develops, the most simple requests can convolute the translation. After interviewing six architects for the construction of his cross-cultural edifice, this Japanese homeowner and president of a commercial contractor firm realized that only one could adequately interpret his desires.

The homeowner tasked architect Robert Oshatz, principal of the Portland, Oregon-based firm Robert Harvey Oshatz, to meet his desires, as well as those of his aging parents. The homeowner wanted a Western-style shelter; his parents, prominent figures in their hometown of Obihiro, required a traditional Japanese manor. The home was to serve as an emblematic connection between east and west while accommodating both parties.

The Miyasaka family had lived on this particular plot for years, but in 1994, they opted to rebuild on the site in order to adorn the residence with contemporary components. Sitting on 2.4 acres, the home takes the form of an arc. Capitalizing on the existing natural surrounding, it is harmoniously positioned between numerous trees on the heavily wooded lot. "The home had to be visually at peace with the landscape and comfortable for the people to live in," Oshatz said. "We wanted a design that could weave in between the trees, so I was designing in terms of the environment."

To extend unanimity between the home and its environment, Oshatz harnessed solar dynamics to provide light and heat sources throughout the house. In the morning, sunlight illuminates the master suite and kitchen, while the afternoon sun gleams into the





1 The left side of the gallery way provides access into the living room, mother's studio, father's study, Japanese Room (Buddhist altar) and parents' suite. The right side showcases a series of display alcoves displaying paintings and crafts. **2** The second-floor sitting room. **3** The kitchen, which is lit with cable lights spanning the glued laminated beams, features a narrow island, built-in table and window seat. **4** A view from the second-floor roof deck shows the sitting room exterior door. **5** This step serves as the traditional Japanese entry step where occupants remove their shoes before entering the home. **6** The second-floor master suite, which features built-in furnishings. **7** A built-in dresser and lavatories in the second-floor master suite.

parents' suite. The entire home also incorporates passive solar design. "Southern light comes into the structure and hits hard, dense surfaces, which absorb the heat and radiate it back out in the evening," Oshatz said.

Located on the northern island of Japan, Obihiro is an area common to earthquakes. Thus, the home's crescent-shaped design not only serves aesthetic purposes, but it is also designed to protect the home from seismic vibrations. "The house is developed with strength within itself," Oshatz said. The second floor wraps and curves upward to become the walls, creating a jointless, continuous flow from floor to ceiling. Not only does this design make the second floor appear to float in frozen suspension, it also increases the home's structural integrity.

The interior of the home incorporates Japanese Fung Shui—each element of the house is positioned with purpose. The family members practice two religions: Shintoism and Japanese Buddhism. To accommodate both, Oshatz designed a Shinto shrine, facing south with no floors above it, and a Buddhist altar, facing east with floor-

lining Tatami mats.

Glue-laminated, or glulam, beams add structural support for Obihiro's harsh winters, which often produce heavy snow loads. As wood is a choice material in Japan, the beams are made of yellow Alaskan cedar. Douglas fir members, which act as support for the ceilings and floors, also make up the cabinets, while Western red cedar comprises the siding materials and windows. Other strong Western elements, such as floors made with slate from Washington and stone from Idaho, decorate the home.

The first floor features one wing fully devoted to the homeowner's parents' needs, complete with a studio space for the mother's crafts and a library and study for the father. The layout extends to a large master bedroom suite with a copious walk-in closet and bathroom complete with hot tub, cold tub, sitting shower, standing shower and sauna. Concrete, decorated with stone in some instances, adorns the first floor. A cedar fascia stretches across a partial distance, completing the home's interior. The second story is made of curved glulam spokes to aid in

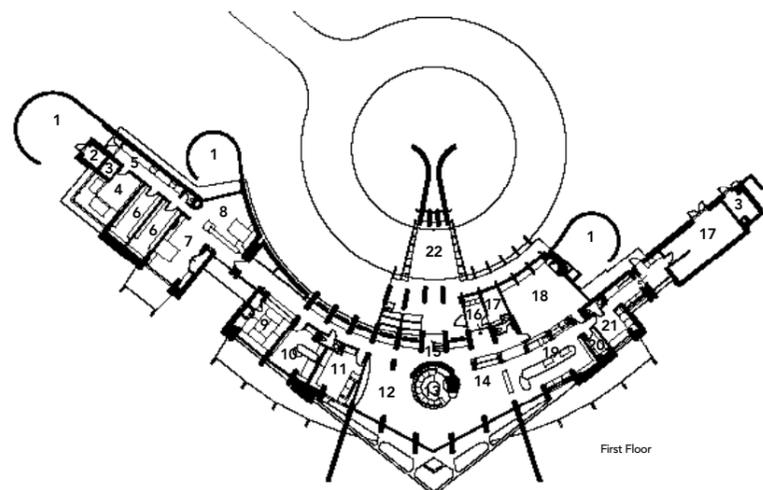
earthquake resistance. The second floor also holds a band of glass to bridge it with the fascia, allowing a flood of light to enter the home, even when the windows are shaded.

Rich gray slate spans the length of the first floor, and a conversation pit sits in the center. Across from the pit, carpeted stairs lead to the second floor. The upper deck extends outward from the central suite on the second story, embellished with rich wooden slats, visually leading into the home's circular entrance. White carpet covers the second-level floor and extends halfway up the wall in

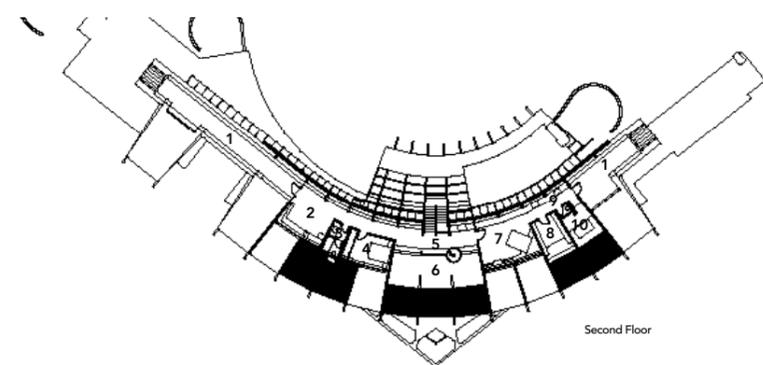


OBIHIRO, HOKKAIDO

DESIGN TEAM: Robert Harvey Oshatz, Architect **INTERIOR COMPOSITION:** Slate, carpet, stone, Western Red Cedar bevel, siding, gypsum board, Douglas fir, granite **EXTERIOR COMPOSITION:** Concrete, stone, radial Douglas Fir glue-laminated beams, Western Red Cedar bevel siding, sheet metal roof **CONSTRUCTION TIMELINE:** Fast track, 12 months **SQUARE FOOTAGE:** 7,600 **COST:** Withheld at owner's request **FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Robert Harvey Oshatz, P.O. Box 19091, Portland, OR 97219, 503.635.4243, www.oshatz.com



First Floor



Second Floor

First Floor

1. Courtyard Garden
2. Mechanical Room
3. Sauna
4. Parent's Bath & Shower
5. Parent's Lavatory
6. Parent's Closet
7. Mother's Sleeping Area
8. Father's Sleeping Area
9. Japanese Room
10. Father's Study
11. Mother's Studio
12. Media Center
13. Conversation Pit
14. Dining Area
15. Stairway
16. Main Entry
17. Storage Room
18. Guest Entertainment Area
19. Kitchen
20. Pantry
21. Laundry & Service Area
22. Porte Cochere

Second Floor

1. Exterior Deck
2. Guest Sitting Area
3. Guest Bathroom
4. Guest Bedroom
5. Bridge
6. Open to Living Area
7. Master Bedroom
8. Master Closet
9. Master Lavatory
10. Master Bath & Shower



some areas, supplying a comforting environment. The generous use of glass facades, whether windows or skylights, further enlivens the space. Recessed florescent lighting throughout the house provides an additional light source.

To connect each of the various elements throughout the abode, the entry's beveled cedar siding complements the exposed concrete and continues across the sandblasted glass of the entry door. The finish materials of interior and exterior space are also juxtaposed in such a way to balance the large exterior gardens. Extensive cabinetry throughout the home provides space to display the family's collection of Japanese artwork, while complementing the use of rich wood throughout the property's design.

Due to the strength of the Yin at the time of construction, the majority of the materials were purchased in the United States, where the pieces were assembled and shipped across the Pacific. "Everything from the stonework to the silverware, linens and garbage cans came from the U.S." Oshatz said. It took a great amount of communication between Oshatz and the contractor to successfully

construct a home prefabricated on one side of the world and assembled on the opposite. "Everything was built off of my computer CAD drawings," he said.

Oshatz began designing the home in late 1995. The design/build process took a year and a half. The family moved in on Jan. 1, 1998. Oshatz attributes the fast-track construction timeline to the efficiency of the Japanese construction crew—they were completing projects in half the time Oshatz slated. "We were trying to stay a month or two ahead of the construction crews in Japan and it was very difficult. At times I would say the glulam beams had been shipped over, and it should take a month to get them in place. I'd get a call two weeks later, telling me they were all in place. That meant that the working drawings were continuously being done."

The result is a home that satisfies all aspects of spiritual, spatial and practical needs of the family. "I find that when I am sitting around and relaxing in the evenings, the house speaks to me," said the homeowner. Comfort of that kind is easily translated across any culture, no matter the distance in between.

Top: A view of the the street-front gateway and the western red cedar privacy fence that spans the perimeter of the property. **Bottom left:** The formal entrance of the home viewed from the driveway. **Bottom right:** A view from the service entry; the large stainless steel family crest sits in the foreground.