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Spacespace House (Osaka, 2018)
by Takanori Kagawa and Junko Kishigami, SPACESPACE

The Spacespace House is located one kilometer from Umeda, a downtown area in the northern center of Osaka. It is an urban area with many remaining row houses from the pre-war period. This house was first built in 1913, on one of the many shopping streets in Japan. In recent years, more and more have become streets with closed shutters due to the expansion of extensive commercial facilities in the vicinity. Nakatsu Street was no exception until we renovated this house. Before, the first floor was used as a dry food and grocery store, and the second floor was a residence.

We turned the first floor into our design office and the second floor into our own home with a renovation. Renovations varied from soft interventions, like replacing wallpaper, to earthquake-proof structural reinforcement. Renovations are common in other countries and also increasingly so in Japan. In many cases, old materials are combined with new ones, creating a contrast from an aesthetic perspective. As we designed this space, we aimed instead to identify and follow through a methodology that is unique to renovation. Specifically, we inserted various components below the architectural scale, smaller than elements such as floors, walls, ceilings, beams, and columns. We call the components “gadgets” and in this house, we have created a space with the totality of these gadgets.

(Images: EN p. 20, JP p. 20)

Takanori Kagawa and Junko Kishigami
SPACESPACE

Garden Alley House (Kyoto, 2017)

by Kentaro Takeguchi and Asako Yamamoto, Alphaville Architects

We named the project Garden Alley House for two reasons. First, it is situated in the center of Kyoto—a traditional Japanese city—close to the Imperial Palace. The traditional Kyoto townhouse plot has the shape of what we call an “eel’s bed,” a linear and long space. Traditionally, small courtyards called *tuboniwa* (坪庭) would have been placed in the middle of the site, cutting the volume of the house into several parts. In this case, however, we didn’t want to cut the house into several parts, so we created a long south-facing garden. Second, the house is a complex—a shared house and a tea house—so we needed to have three different doors facing the road. We wanted to make a small alley leading from the road to the front of the house.

Traditionally, a house has a kind of transitional space, from public (*hare*, or ハレ) to private (*ke*, or ケ). Usually, the house has *hare*, the public space, in front. In the depth of the house, we have the private *ke* space. We have three layers, from public to private, and the most interesting is the *ke* space of the tearoom. In the tearoom, the client can welcome other people in an extended public space. But if clients invite people they know, the room becomes the extension of their private space. The deepest area of the house, where the tearoom is located, can be private but somehow open to other people too. It is a reversed space.

(Images: EN p. 37, JP p. 37)

Kentaro Takeguchi and Asako Yamamoto
Alphaville Architects



Spacespace House

NESTED SPACES

with Takanori Kagawa, Junko Kishigami, Kentaro Takeguchi, Inge Vinck,
Jan De Vylder, and Asako Yamamoto. Moderated by Erwin Viray.

Viray Both these houses are characterized by a spatial interweaving with their urban fabric. They reinterpret the existing structure and refer to the typology and history of their very different surroundings. They trace the fine line between private and public space and offer ways for the urban landscape to enter the building.

Let us start the discussion with the reinterpretation of the *machiya* typology of the traditional house. How is the courtyard space perceived and accessed by the public?

Takeguchi I first want to explain the *machiya* house type, a cultural import from China, that forms the urban structure of Kyoto. The *machiya* has several small, private courtyards. But in the front, they sometimes are used to welcome people, so they become half-public, forming a gradation of publicness across the site.

Yamamoto I would add that an alley is also a feature of a traditional *machiya*. It's not outside, but inside. It leads from the public space to the private space, so the house owner mainly uses it, but sometimes it leads the guests to the innermost part of the house.

Viray How does the existing structure of the city affect the way you make architecture in Kyoto? How does it affect your design for new buildings?

Yamamoto It is a difficult question because the way we build today is very different from traditional techniques. Also, we need parking lots these days, even in the middle of the city. These things lead us to making houses that are different from traditional houses. Still, we are always trying to maintain features of traditional housing in our projects in Kyoto. As a city, it has maintained its density and housing stock over the centuries, and we respond to that.

Viray You mentioned the difference between the traditional wooden construction methods and your new wooden structures. Could you enlighten us about what the difference is?

Takeguchi We are concentrating on new methods of wooden technology, but in the Garden Alley House we focused mostly on the urban context. This house, the third in a series of five Kyoto houses, concentrates especially on the city structure. Maybe the Spacespace House is special because it concentrates

on an architecture structured by the gadgets. The Arimaston Building might be about a body-scale architecture, whereas Tadao Ando's Nihonbashi House is a kind of urban contextual architecture. There is a parallel there to the Garden Alley House. But we really concentrated on the shape of the garden, which is of great importance for the urban structure of Kyoto and its greenery. We made use of urban green space with the shape of the house.

Yamamoto Seeing the point cloud video, I felt that the continuity between the housing and the context becomes really clear. Because even in Kyoto, this kind of continuity between the interior and the exterior is increasingly interrupted, mainly because of the parking lots. These days we can construct a three-story building with a wooden structure. Traditionally it was impossible, but now it is possible.

Viray In creating this series of new Kyoto houses and studying the relationship to the city—the urban condition—how do you see the limits and possibilities of the point cloud or digital scans to help you achieve what you want to do?

Yamamoto If we were to show this point cloud system to a client, they would see how our house has a continuity between the interior and exterior that new contemporary houses have lost. I think this is one of the powers of this system.

Viray Mr. Kagawa and Mr. Kishigami, how is the situation in Osaka? It is a different geographical context, a different urban landscape. It is fascinating to observe public space entering the house, like merging the old and the new building. Could you speak about the transition from the urban space to the interior space of the Spacespace House? What are the key transition elements in the building, from big to small?

Kagawa*¹ Our house is located on a postwar shopping street in Osaka. The first level is our office and the second level is our home. The first level opens to the street, and people can see that we are working there. We also have a display window where we place objects. It creates a relationship between inside and outside, but also between old and new. We give elements certain functionalities. We use a pillar as a hat rack, for example, transforming it into furniture. In that sense, we mix and dissolve the dichotomy between old and new.

Viray Could you share with us your impressions of the point cloud animation and maybe relate it to your way of doing architecture at SPACESPACE?

Kagawa* The integrated sound made for a livelier experience. I could imagine being there. Before the building was renovated, the old pillars were quite irregular. So, we had to remeasure them many times and from different positions. During that process, the point cloud would have been a helpful tool in mapping the existing situation. But we use lines rather than points when we design. If the technology could translate the points into lines, the technology could be of use to us.

Viray Jan and Inge, I wonder what you think of the point cloud, and how you view Japanese architecture in general and in relation to the work of your office.

De Vylder For me, it is energizing looking at it. I was asking myself why and I think that the point cloud is to me at the same time a *mind cloud*. It is what we receive in architecture. Of course, we know plans, sections, facades, everything—all the instruments we have—but in the end, we experience architecture not as a plan, not as a section. We experience it as being in a space. I like that the point cloud comes very close to how the human mind experiences architecture and space. In that sense, it is not just the next medium of the many mediums we know and use in architecture and that have been wildly growing around us in the last decades. No matter how digital it is, it comes close to the human understanding of architecture. We could immediately imagine working in that cloud as practitioners or architects and introducing a new world where sound plays.

Vinck I think I am a little bit more puzzled with the point cloud. As Mr. Kimura said, you lose a certain kind of detailing that then maybe misses the architecture. Jan says it is like how our brains work. I am not so sure if we really think like that when we are making our architecture. So, unlike the others, I don't know how to deal with point clouds, how to look at them or how to move in them—even in my mind. But there is something interesting: I liked very much that all of a sudden there is a kind of deformation in the architecture.

I think the point cloud worked marvelously for the Arimaston Building by Keisuke Oka, who was building it with his own hands and, in a certain way, it helped him understand the way he was building. Maybe I have to experience point clouds more to better understand them.

Viray What sort of form and medium do you use to imagine and study your architecture?

Vinck Of course, we use computers, 3D renderings and mediums like that, but we still work a lot with our hands. We make a lot of models and

hand drawings. From there, we start to imagine our architecture. And like this, I have the feeling we are able to make liveable architecture. It is very much related to the people who are living in or using the projects we are making for them.

We had a nice experience at TOTO Gallery Ma when we did an exhibition with students in Japan. By letting them remake some projects, it was possible to look at our own work anew. That was interesting for us. The students made models or fragments from what we have been making in Europe, setting them into sites in Tokyo. I think we have a very emotional approach to architecture.

De Vylder Generally, I think architecture exhibitions are boring in the sense that they present something dead. How is it possible to present ideas as a living understanding? As Inge said, we had the chance to work together with the TOTO Gallery Ma, the Chair of Yoshiharu Tsukamoto-san, and his team at Tokyo Tech. Instead of simply sending our models from Belgium, we let them remake models from our projects. In a second exercise, we asked them to imagine what they learned from our work in a Japanese context. So they reshuffled, remodelled, and reinvented according to what they understood of our work and brought it back to a Japanese context of history and tradition. They arrived at marvelous understandings. To us, this method was very important to explain our work and also our culture. By making this crossover, by working and talking to young people, they made us understand what we should really understand.

What we observe in Alphaville's house—the corridor, the in-between space, how it connects and disconnects—is also how it is reshuffled again. So what happened in the reshuffling of the models in Japan is visible in both SPACESPACE's and Alphaville's projects today—the wishing and wanting to understand other cultures and how they are brought into Japanese architecture. When we look at Japanese architecture, it is often folded around a traditional understanding of context. What we learned—maybe this is still some misunderstanding on our side—was that the Japanese don't have a specific word for space as we have; it is more about the in-between.

How do we behave? How do we take a position in between the private/public? This is what I appreciate very much in the works of both offices. And to me, this is visible in the point cloud documentation.

Viray You mentioned that it is wonderful to work with young people and that you learned so many things. What did you learn from this generation?

De Vylder The importance of refurbishment and of living and working with what we have. In Japan, that is a quite new phenomenon; we have seen it also with our students at ETH Zurich in the last years. In forums, studio work, and debates, they discuss the idea that we cannot move on with just producing.

They are deeply interested in reuse, conceptually as well as physically. How to give something an immediate other future without just producing another future?

We are happy that this tendency is nourished by the energy of young people. Clearly, working more carefully with fewer resources does not lead to less freedom. If you look at SPACSPACE's house, where these columns are dancing, the architects are very precise. This is created through a certain shuffling, and all of a sudden there is a big difference. This contains so much of traditional human understanding.

It is also clear that we have to engage in large-scale actions to make it possible to give everyone a home. On the other hand, it is clear that more people seem to understand and want to be able to create their own home. I'm not talking about owning a property, but trying to understand how we can create a place where we can share our history, tradition, everything, and reflect on society today and the challenges we face. I do think that leads to many general challenges in education, the economy, and so on, but also to the challenge of finding your own envelope, finding out that you can make a change and turn things around.

1 Responses marked with an asterisk (*) have been translated from Japanese.