

The Japanese “Forest” in São Paulo

The first JAPAN HOUSE has opened in São Paulo, Brazil, as a place to share information about Japan and pique interest in the nation’s charms. The building’s very design is the first talking point.

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IN April 2017, a striking building fronted by a towering frame of *hinoki* cypress boards opened on Paulista Avenue, a street in the heart of São Paulo, Brazil. This is the first JAPAN HOUSE, developed as a place to disseminate information about Japan by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is planning further openings in Los Angeles and London.

The JAPAN HOUSE concept is centered on “introducing striking discoveries about Japan to the world.” Kenya Hara, one of Japan’s leading designers (see HJ Aug.

2017, pp. 20–21), serves as chief creative director for the project. Hara has expressed his intention to introduce “All Japan” (every single aspect of Japan) through a range of “one-stop services” at JAPAN HOUSE, with a focus on creating awareness about the new things Japan has to offer. Japan is home to a unique culture, evident in such fields as technology, architecture, design, nature and food. JAPAN HOUSE was created as a means to showcase the diverse attractiveness of Japan, nurture a deeper understanding of and interest in Japan, and to forge connections.

The internationally acclaimed Japanese architect Kengo Kuma led the design of JAPAN HOUSE São Paulo. Kuma said, “The possibilities and issues for the future of Japan will be shaped if we can determine how to make traditional aspects coexist with highly contemporary aspects. If we can do that, Japan will be greatly revitalized. I wish to show this with JAPAN HOUSE.”

JAPAN HOUSE São Paulo is a converted bank with concrete walls, but is fronted by a huge free-standing frame of *hinoki* cypress boards. Imported from Kiso,

Lines form in front of the *hinoki* cypress facade of JAPAN HOUSE São Paulo on the facility's opening day

Photo: Courtesy of JAPAN HOUSE São Paulo
Rogério Cassimiro



A Japanese paper-coated aluminum mesh space divider at JAPAN HOUSE São Paulo
Photos: Courtesy of JAPAN HOUSE São Paulo
Rogério Cassimiro



Japan, the cypress frame allows fresh air into the building while protecting the interior from direct sunlight. Reinforced by carbon fibers, the free-standing structure successfully creates the impression that an infinitely expanding forest has appeared in the heart of the city.

Inside the building, spaces are enclosed by *washi* Japanese paper – not *shoji* screens, a characteristic feature of traditional Japanese architecture, but hanging dividers made from aluminum mesh coated with paper mulberry fibers.

The dividers were created

through a collaboration between Kuma and Yasuo Kobayashi, a master *washi* maker and designer. Evocative of clouds, the aluminum-paper dividers allow indirect light to pass through, helping to create a warm atmosphere in a space that simultaneously feels both contemporary and traditional.

“Paulista Avenue is located where multiple aspects of São Paulo can be found, and JAPAN HOUSE is at the end of the street, providing a focal point for the area. I believe JAPAN HOUSE will be able to add liveliness and brightness to São Paulo. I hope this facility will enable children without any background knowledge on Japan to find it interesting. Some may be inspired to study in Japan in the future. I really want to enhance interest in Japan through this facility,” said Kuma.

JAPAN HOUSE São Paulo has an

exhibition space, multi-purpose area that can function as a theater, shop, restaurant, library and café. It is a place for interaction and the diffusion of a wide range of information about Japan. The facility will also host events such as exhibitions organized in collaboration with local curators (see pp. 14-15), family workshops to enable visitors to become acquainted with Japan, and seminars.

The forest that has appeared on Paulista Avenue is no mere one-off tourist destination. It has become a space that locals like to visit for a little peace and quiet, and perhaps learn something new about Japan. 4,288 people visited JAPAN HOUSE on the opening day, and many thousands more visited in the days that followed, attesting to its popularity.

The people of Los Angeles and London will be the next to get a taste of All Japan. **J**