TRADITIONAL JAPANESE HOUSES

Samuel Morse *Japanese Homes & their surroundings* 1885.

Japanese houses are “an architecture of absence”: “so many features are absent that go to make up a dwelling at home (in the US)… no doors or windows … no attic or cellar, no chimneys and within no fireplaces and of course no customary mantel, no permanently enclosed rooms, and as for furniture, no beds or tables or chairs……

The Japanese house….. is perfectly adapted to Japanese inhabitants and Japanese needs…. where virtue is to be found in impermanence and transience:

“the Japanese build a house whose very structure enables it to be rapidly demolished … matts, screens, partitions and even the board ceilings can be quickly packed up and carried away”.

“After studying the Japanese home for a while….. one comes to realise that display as such is out of the question…a severe Quaker like simplicity is really one of the great charms of a Japanese room. Absolute cleanliness and refinement, with very few objects in sight ….. are the main features in household adornment …… and which they attain with a simplicity and effectiveness that we can never hope to reach. Our rooms seem to them like a curiosity shop and “stuffy” to the last degree. Such a maze of vases, pictures, plaques, bronzes, with shelves, brackets, cabinets and tables loaded down with bric-a-brac, is quite enough to drive a Japanese frantic.”

The key components of Japanese taste include “the pleasure in the irregular and the quaint, the resistance to mirrors and other modes of repetition, the preference for neutral tints and subdued tonalities, the contrasting textures of rough and smooth.”