Tadao Andô: Heir to a Tradition
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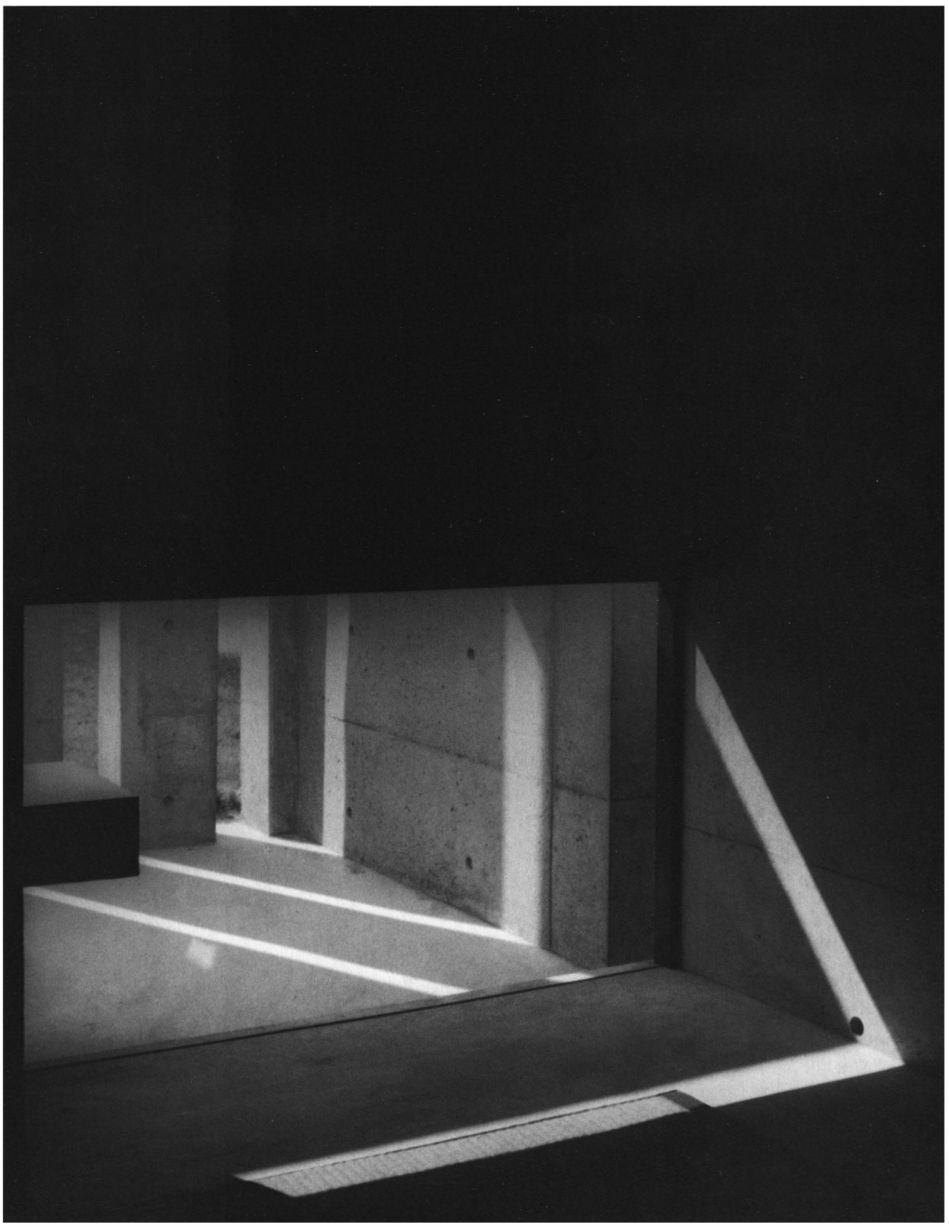
Tadao Andô: Heir to a Tradition



Tadao Andô, Tea Ceremony Room, addition to Sôseikan, 1981, interior.

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1
Ise Shrine, Naigū, (Mie Prefecture).

2
Izumo Shrine (Shimane Prefecture).

3
The Shishinden, Imperial Palace, Kyōto, rebuilt in 1855.

4
Nijô Castle, Ninomaru Palace

1

2

4

His concrete surfaces have textures as smooth and delicate as fine craftwork. His compositions are spare and clean. By these means, Tadao Andô produces spaces symbolizing the relation between human beings and physical objects. His interpretation of this relation is imbued with distinctively Japanese emotions derived from the Japanese cultural tradition. This may best be illustrated by a comparison of his work with that of Sen no Rikyû (1522–91), one of the greatest of all tea ceremony masters, and an important architect of tea ceremony pavilions.

The Tea Ceremony

The custom of drinking tea was introduced to Japan by Zen priests in the thirteenth century, and gained wide popularity among members of the ruling warrior class, the court aristocrats and later the rich merchants. As time went by, the preparation and imbibing of the beverage were worked into an elaborately formalized system demanding a certain number of utensils and architectural appurtenances. Several tea masters concentrated on codifying the hospitality associated with tea, and the result was the *Way of Tea*, or the tea ceremony.

Rikyû introduced fresh vigor into the tea ceremony by designing rooms and small pavilions for it that departed from former architectural traditions. In contrast to all of the major architectural styles of the past–the Shinto shrines represented by the splendid buildings at Ise and Izumo, the aristocratic residences of the *shinden-zukuri* style, the warrior homes of the *shoin* style, and the temple buildings (figures 1–4)–he gave refined expression to the aesthetic value he found in the humble houses of the common people (figure 5).

Rikyû was striving to create spaces that, though small, could bring peace and calm, even for a short while, to members of the warrior class plagued by strife and conflict. In the rooms he designed, guests

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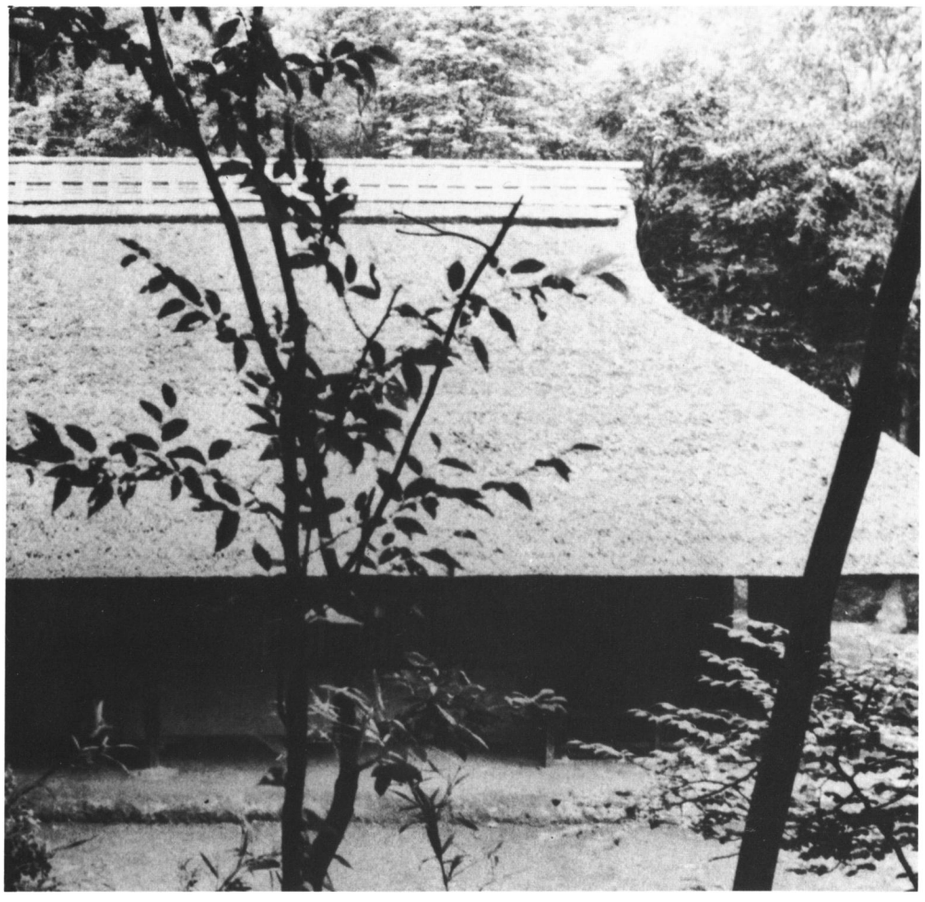
Farmhouse in Towada, eighteenth century.



could become so absorbed in the affairs of the tea ceremony that they forgot the troubles of daily life. The methods he used to produce the kind of microcosm he wanted were enclosure and the adaptation of vernacular elements from folk dwellings. Through Rikyû's tea ceremony buildings (built in a style that came to be called *so-an*, or grass-thatched retreat), these elements became fashionable with the wealthy. Thus, the domestic architectural traditions of the common people exerted an influence on the design of the homes of the aristocracy and the military ruling class.

An outcome of the nature of the tea ceremony pavilion, was the evolution of it as an element of social criticism. As I have said, warriors hoped to find relief from the tumult of their everyday lives in the microcosm of the teahouse. In other words, by fleeing to its peace and seclusion, they were, at least tacitly, criticizing the existing social condition. The same can be said of the aristocracy, who found in the tea ceremony a respite from a world where, in spite of their ancient nobility, they were subordinate to military rulers who were often of much less dignified lineage than they. In short, examples of tea ceremony architecture can be interpreted as statements of criticism of the status quo.

The spirit of the tea ceremony and of everything associated with it as it was developed by and after Sen no Rikyû, is often expressed by the Japanese word *wabi*, which means a deliberate striving for simplicity. But the word carries a connotation of dissatisfaction and is used to point out the failing of things or persons deemed worthy of criticism. For instance, the refined, quiet, calm *wabi* style is sometimes mentioned as an antonym for the gaudy, ostentatious taste associated with the great military leader Toyotomi Hideyoshi (who was a patron of Rikyû). The idea of *wabi* can stand for dissatisfaction with authority.

6
Sen no Rikyû, Myôki-an, Tai-an, 1653, plan.

7
Myôki-an, Tai-an, east wall, interior.

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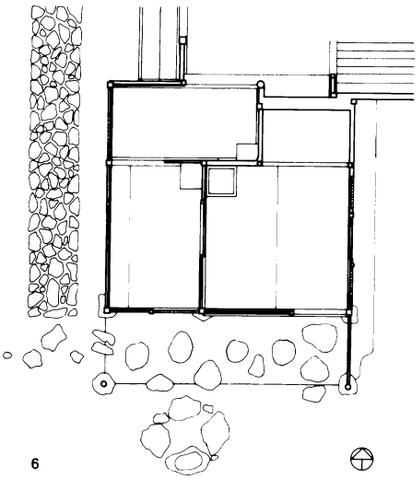
Tadao Andô, Koshino Residence, 1981.



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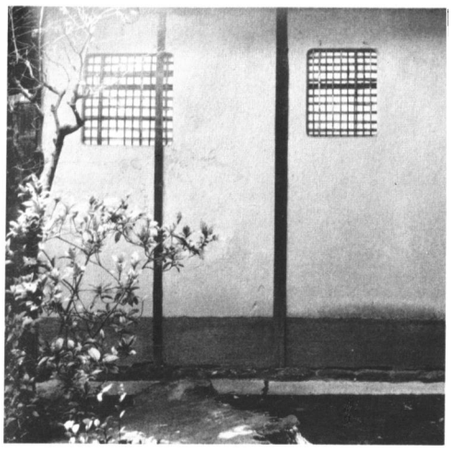

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In addition to its antiestablishment qualities, the tea ceremony and its architecture are the completely individual results of the art and thought of one person. Conceived and created by individual human beings exerting their utmost physically and spiritually, tea ceremony rooms are places for individual human discipline and refinement and never symbols of social or religious status.

Andô's Inheritance

Although there is no resemblance in terms of style or actual forms, there is much in common between the tea ceremony designs of Sen no Rikyû and the residential designs of Tadao Andô in the nature of their spaces. Both are enclosed and concentrated. Both have a deliberately created simple appearance. Both are calm, quiet, and pure. Both are gentle, austere, and clear in mood. Both are dimly lit but have light within their darkness. Both give a feeling of expansiveness in spite of their small size. Though set in cities, both are rural in nature. Though artificial, both are natural. They are neither commonplace nor monumental.

The most decisive of the many ideas and devices Rikyû used to cut the tea ceremony room off from the noisy world and make of it a calm, quiet, inner-reflective microcosm was spatial enclosure. For instance, in the tea ceremony room called the Tai-an of the Myôki-an, in the outskirts of Kyoto, Rikyû created a space that, though only two tatami mats in area, is a broad world of spiritual abundance (figure 6). In rooms of this kind where no one ever feels cramped; the smaller the space, the more intensely fulfilled it is. Andô employs the same spatial concept. In addition, he shares with Rikyû an interest in manipulating light, in overlapping spaces, and in introducing the world of nature.

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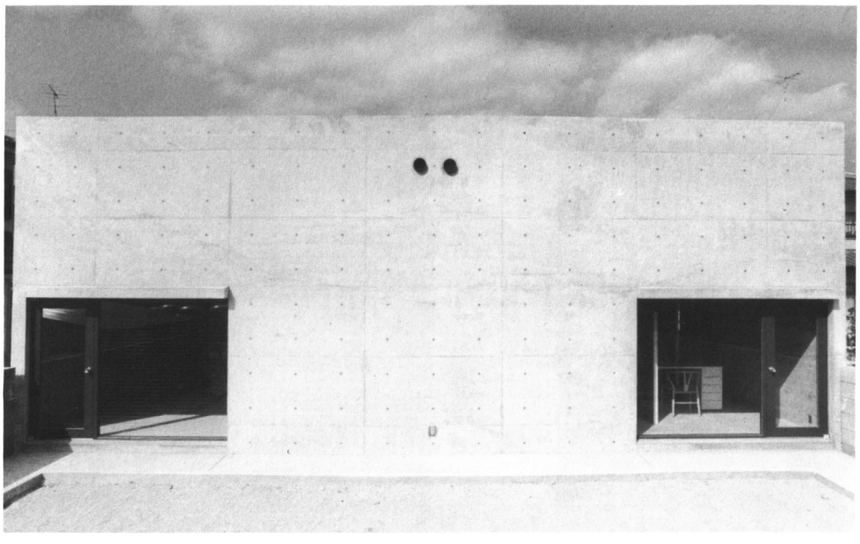
Tadao Andô, Yamaguchi Residence, or Sôseikan, 1975, south elevation.

10
Tadao Andô, Ueda Residence, 1979, south elevation



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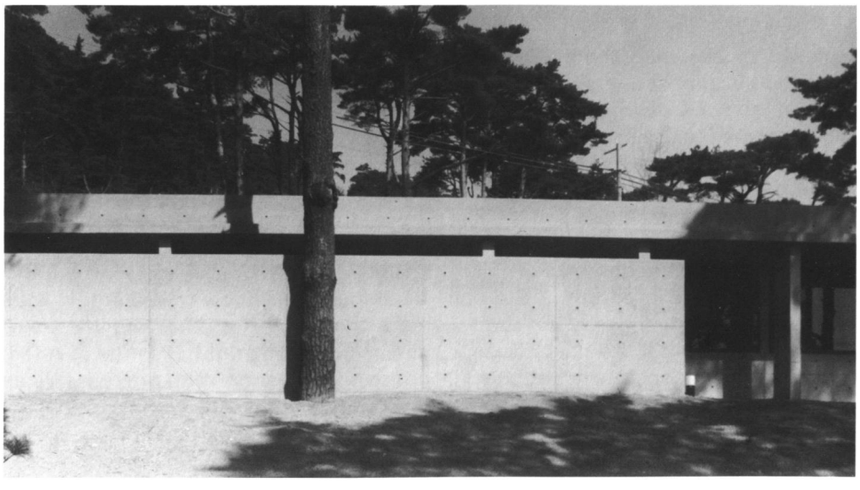
Koshino Residence, south elevation.



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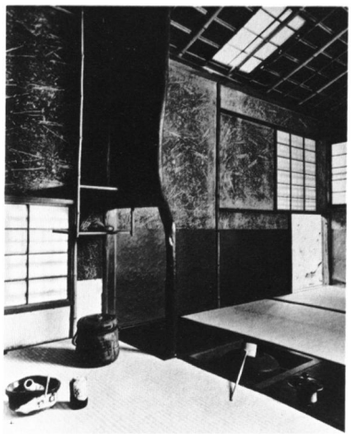
Sa-an Tea Room, Gyorky-in Temple, tsukiage-mado.

13
Koshino Residence, skylight in living room.



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Light

For enclosed spaces, natural lighting, and therefore the placement and sizes of openings in the walls delineating the spaces, deserves maximum care (figure 7). Since the kinds of spaces I am discussing are typified by light within darkness, they are to be calm and settled and their dimness is not to generate a sense of smallness, rendering the question of openings all the more important. If the enclosed world is a microcosm, the shaft of sunlight penetrating it is a ray of hope rendered vivid by the enclosure and the surrounding darkness (figure 8).

The location of openings has a determining effect on the mood of a space. In most traditional Japanese residential architecture, the major openings are on the south, where they receive full sun in winter. For their purposes, however, both Rikyû and Andô avoid southern openings because the bright illumination pouring through them has an unsettling effect on the space. For instance, the south wall at the Tai-an has no windows. Similarly, in keeping with a desire for refracting instead of directly admitting light, in some of Andô's houses, such as the Yamaguchi residence or Sôseikan (1975), the Ueda residence (1979), and the Koshino residence (1981), there are no southern windows (figures 9–11).

Other natural illumination devices of which Andô is fond can be traced, if not directly to Rikyû, at least to his influence and to other tea masters who built on the foundation he laid. Though there is no example of it at the Tai-an, the small skylight window called the *tsukiage-mado* found in other tea ceremony pavilions, is thought to have been originated by Rikyû (figure 12). It may be propped open from within and admits both light and air without allowing the interior to be otherwise greatly influenced by the exterior environment. Andô's predeliction for skylights is traceable to a desire similar to the one that inspired the invention of this kind of window (figure 13).

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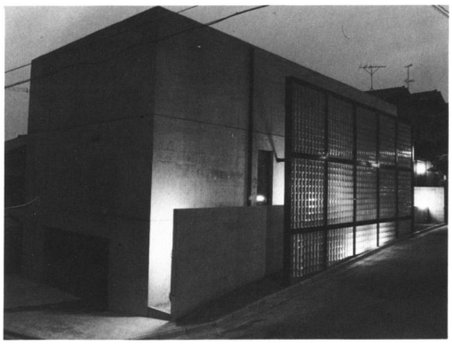

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14
Daitoku-ji, Kohô-an Bôsen, 1641.

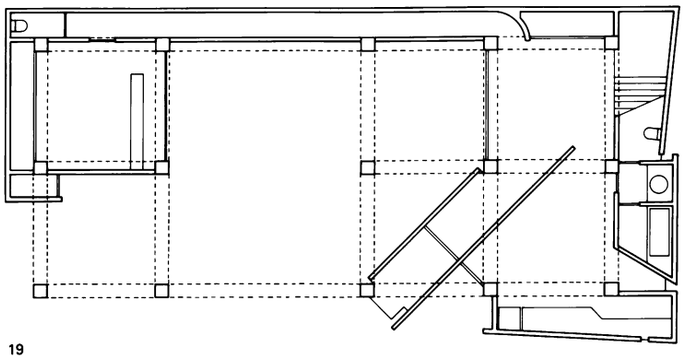
15
Tadao Andô, Horiuchi Residence, 1979, free-standing glass block wall.

16
Tadao Andô, Ishihara Residence, 1978, view through interior court.

Another notable tea ceremony master Kobori Enshû (1579–1647) employed a lighting device resembling those that Andô uses. At a tea ceremony room called the Kohô-an Bôsen, at the Kyoto temple Daitoku-ji, Enshû devised an unusual set of shoji that are completely open in the bottom zone to permit views of the garden and admit reflected light, but are filled with translucent white paper in the top to admit only diffused light (figure 14). In many of his houses, Andô uses walls of glass blocks to admit only diffused light into interior spaces. At the Horiuchi residence (1979), he uses a free-standing glass block wall to define relations between interior and exterior (figure 15). At the Ishihara residence (1978), his composition of glass block and transparent glass closely resembles that of the opening at the Kohô-an (figure 16). In saying this, however, I do not intend to give the impression that Andô is quoting traditional vocabulary. It is only that his thoughts on the treatment of light have led to a conclusion similar to the traditional one.

Overlapping Spaces

In an enclosed world, shut off from the exterior environment, spaces which overlap and figuratively fold in on each other add depth and richness to the composition and stimulate excitement and expectation in the person experiencing the space. The approach is one place where such an effect can be achieved. For example, the approach to a tea ceremony pavilion often leads through a garden space called a *rôji*. In the course of traversing this garden, the visitor must pass through several gates, usually delicately and exquisitely designed, before finally reaching the pavilion where the tea ceremony will be performed (figure 17). Since the site is very small, a series of gates was impossible at the Tai-an; but similar anticipation and excitement are generated by detours deliberately included in the stepping-stone walkway (figure 18). The same kind



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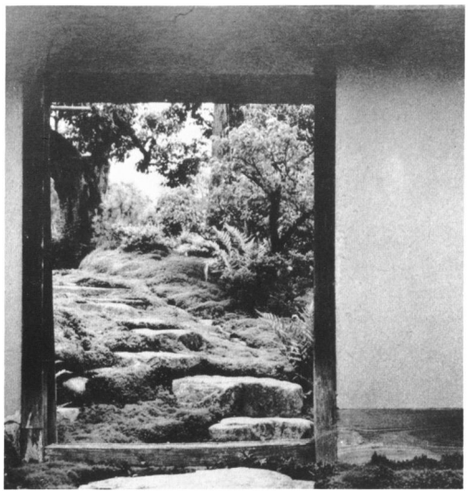

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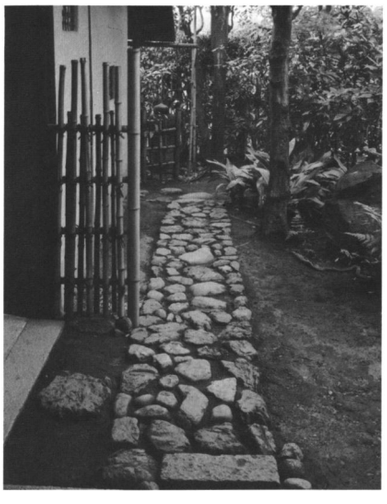

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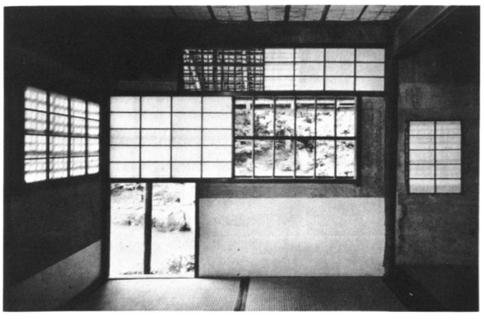

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17
Katsura Palace, gate in rôji

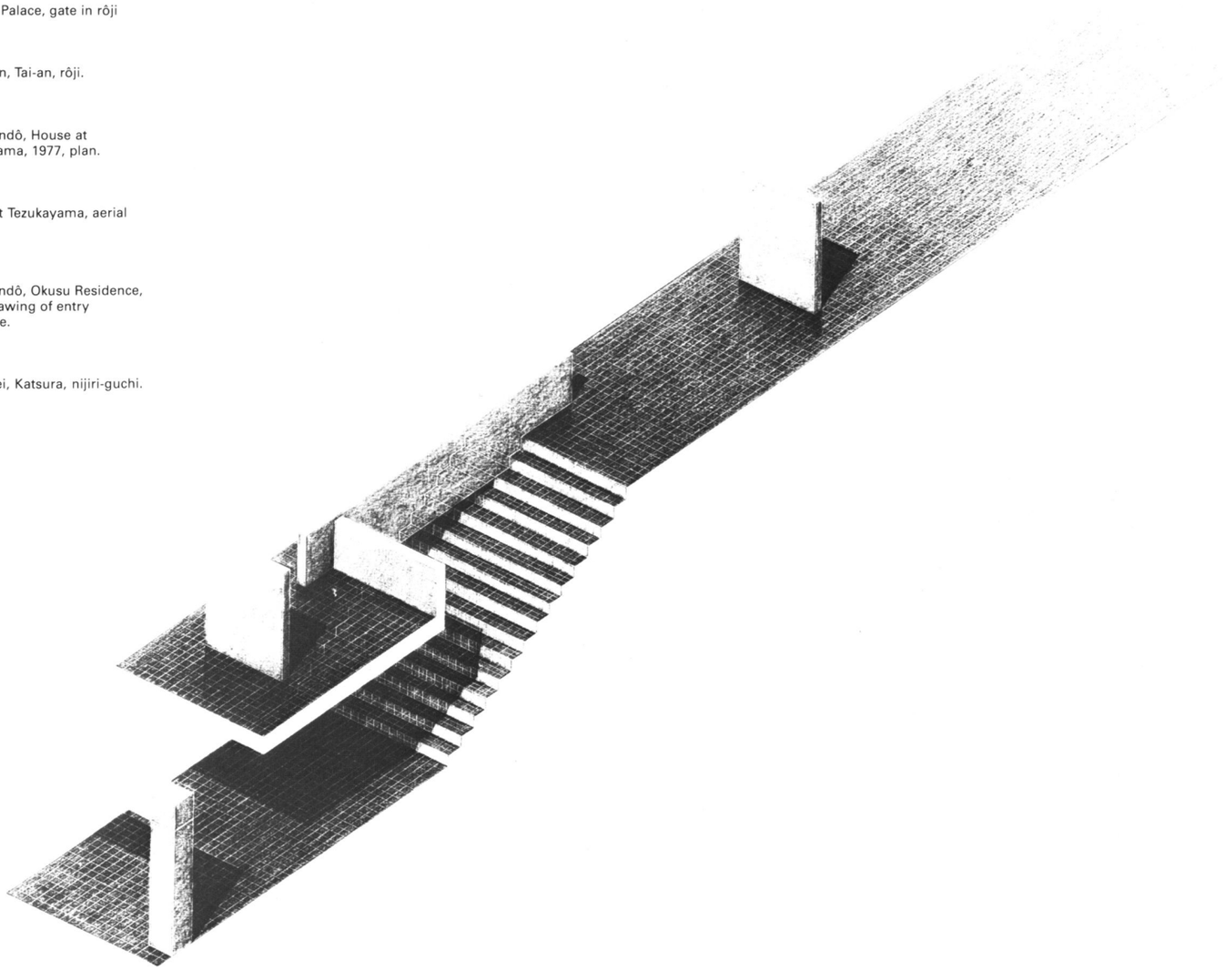
18
Myôki-an, Tai-an, rôji.

19
Tadao Andô, House at Tezukayama, 1977, plan.

20
House at Tezukayama, aerial view.

21
Tadao Andô, Okusu Residence, 1978, drawing of entry sequence.

22
Shokintei, Katsura, nijiri-guchi.



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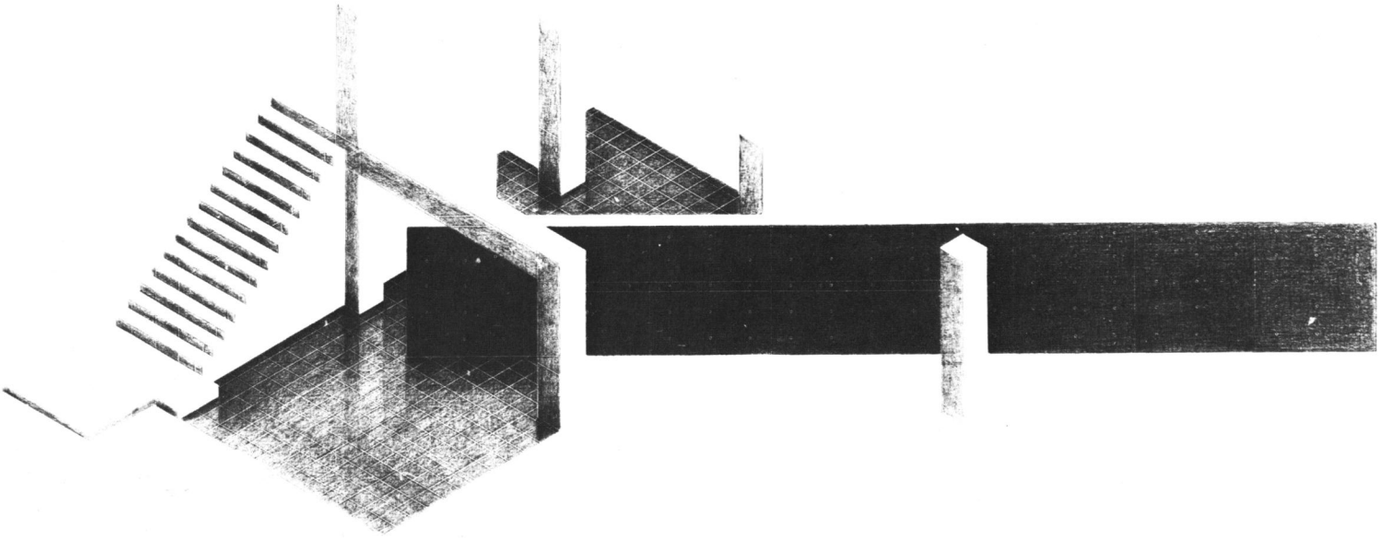
of circuitous approach is characteristic of Andô's buildings. For instance, the residence called the House at Tezukayama (1977), consists of two wings, with the entrance in the inner one (figure 19). This means that the visitor must enter through the front gate, pass the wing on the road side of the house, and then mount a gently sloping staircase to reach the front door. As he climbs the steps, the inclined lawn of the garden is always visible on his left (figure 20). The device at the Okusu residence (1978) is somewhat different. After passing through a high gate frame–reminiscent of the *torii* gates in front of Shinto shrines–the visitor must pass through another gate and then mount a staircase, flanked by concrete walls but open to the sky, to the front door, which is on the level of the second story. Here he must go around another obstructing wall before finally reaching the entrance (figure 21).

The *rôji* garden varies the spatial experience between the entrance gate and the tea ceremony room and stimulates anticipation of new things lying ahead. To achieve these aims it employs a number of different features to complicate that space: gates, stepping stones, ritual water basins, small garden plots, waiting pavilions, and so on. Having passed through the *rôji*, the visitor must crouch to enter the tea ceremony room through a small, low door called the *nijiriguchi*, which is about 79 centimeters high and 72 centimeters wide–a fairly tight squeeze for an adult (figure 22). The psychological effect of crouching through this low doorway is to make the small, dimly lit space inside seem much deeper and more complex. The carefully placed windows controlling the natural light in the low-ceilinged room and the difficulty of entering it, intensify the impression of enclosure.



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In tea ceremony architecture and in the devices–architectural and other–used in the spaces around it, a certain hint of the labyrinth pervades the atmosphere.

Andô's architecture is characterized by a similar mood of the maze (figure 23). Though his plans and compositions are usually simple and lucid, movement lines within them develop in a complicated way. One of his major concerns is discovering the degree of complexity possible in simple plans.

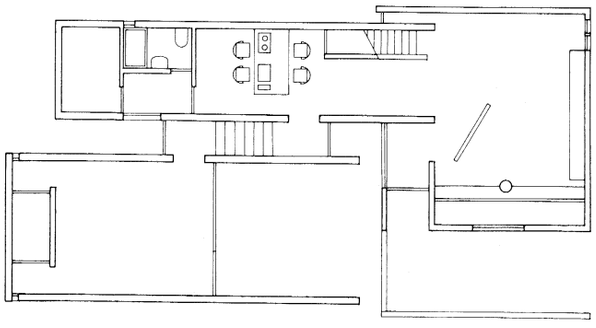
At the House at Tezukayama, the master bedroom is located in the block adjacent to the road. To reach it, one must cross the living room from the entrance hall; descend through a narrow, dark corridor, and then turn left. In short, one must make a complete circuit around the courtyard garden. At the Okusu residence, the path is further complicated by the addition of staircases (figure 24). The entrance to this house is on the second floor level. From there, one turns ninety degrees to descend an internal staircase. Then one passes along a corridor–the courtyard garden is visible on one side–and mounts another staircase to reach the master bedroom. Several right-angle turns are included in the Banshô residence, where a labyrinthlike quality has been strengthened by a recent addition (figure 25). At the Koshino residence, a staircase leads downward from the entrance to a spacious living room (figure 26). From this space, one turns 180 degrees and descends along a dark, narrow corridor, at the end of which one must turn again to reach the wing housing the private quarters, all opening on another corridor with one wall pierced by narrow slit windows admitting light into the dimness and enriching the spatial experience. In all of these houses, there is a series of

23
House at Tezukayama, drawing of entry sequence.

24
Okusu Residence, interior.

25
Tadao Andô, Banshô Residence, 1976, first floor plan (after extension).

26
Koshino Residence, plan.



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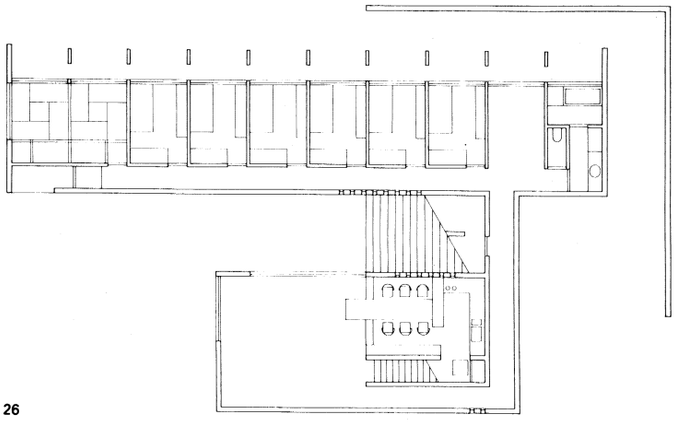

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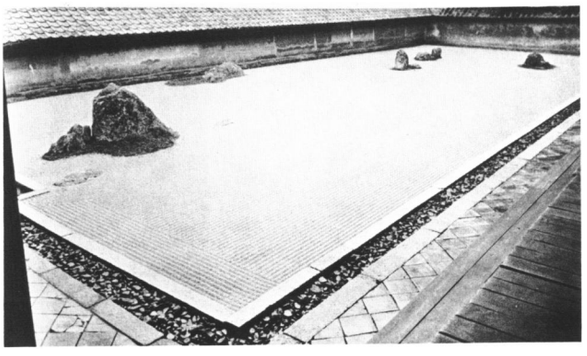

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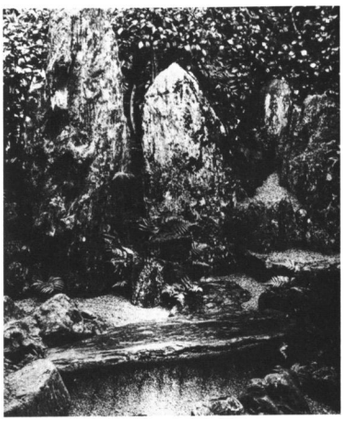

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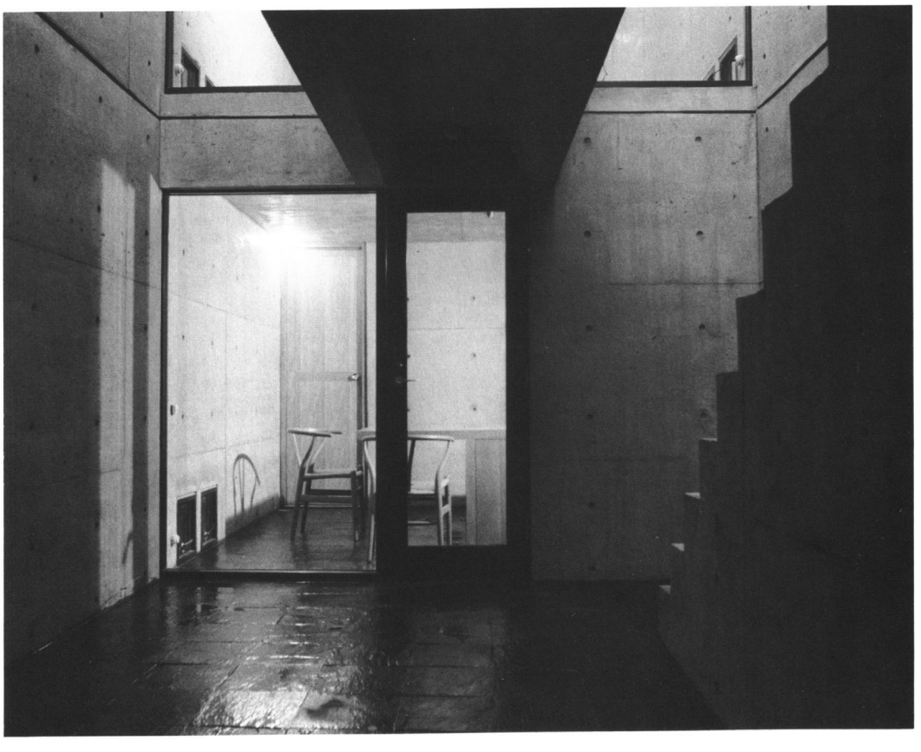

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spaces in which light and shade are contrasted in dynamic sequences to inject complexity and depth into fundamentally static plans with highly surprising results.

In daily life and in many fields of traditional culture–including *ikebana* and the *Noh* drama–the Japanese people are fond of calm, but it must be a calm charged with the tension of dynamic action. Architecture for the tea ceremony is based on an aesthetic of action inherent in the static state; and the architecture of Sen no Rikyû, where static elements are arranged to create active tension, is the ultimate expression of this aesthetic.

Transcending the expression of mere action, and subtly revealing the active inherent in the static–a fundamental goal for all Japanese art–are aims shared by Rikyû and Andô.

Inclusion of the World of Nature

Though set in an urban environment, tea ceremony architecture strives for the mood of a mountain retreat. It shuts out the exterior world but introduces nature, in symbolic form. The symbolic representation of nature is a major current in all Japanese art, as is readily seen in such outstanding examples as the garden of the temple Ryôan-ji, where stones and white sand are used to depict islands and the sea (figure 27). Other gardens of this style–called *kare-san-sui*–are found in Zen temples in various parts of the nation (figure 28). Their symbolic effect is heightened by their lack of moisture. In a climate like that of Japan, where humidity is generally high, they might be described as dryness in wetness.

The same mood of a dry element placed in a generally moist atmosphere pervades the courtyard gardens that are always a part of Andô's residential designs (figure 29). In them, without directly introducing nature by planting trees, Andô symbolically includes invisible natural elements: light, wind, and sound. The

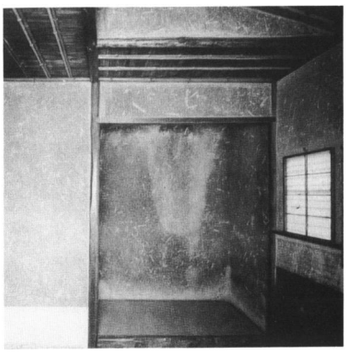
27
Ryôan-ji, Kyôto, stone garden.

28
Daitoku-ji, Daisen-in, east court, dry garden.

29
Tadao Andô, Row House at Sumiyoshi, courtyard.

30
Myôki-an, Tai-an, interior.

31
Koshino Residence, interior.



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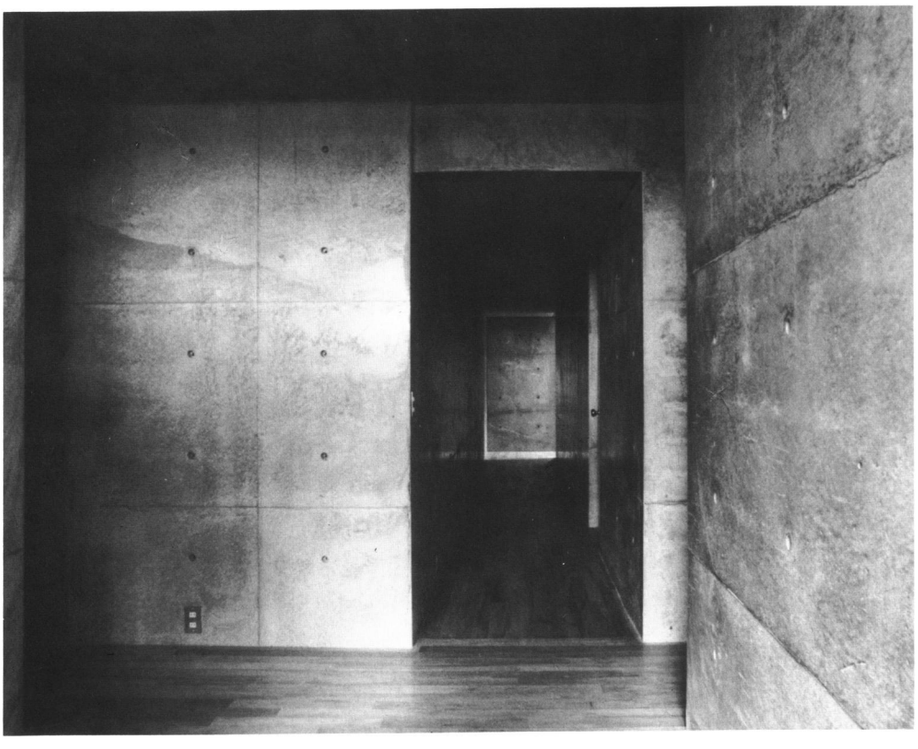

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courtyards, open to the exterior only from the top, are generally composed of dry elements such as concrete walls and flooring, which is sometimes covered in stone. Into this space, light, sound, wind, and rain fall to caress, illuminate and moisten the dry materials and in this way give the people living in the house an association with nature. All of the rooms of the house open onto this courtyard, from which they derive their only natural lighting and ventilation, since the entire building is usually closed on the periphery.

Materials

Taking the humble houses of the common people as its model, tea house architecture often employs unfinished logs, simply split bamboo, and walls made of clay with an admixture of chopped straw (figure 30). Coarse materials were deliberately used for the sake of creating an aesthetically pure, ideal world of sobriety, calm and refined rusticity. For example, miscanthus-thatch roofing in tea ceremony pavilions is selected, not out of economic or functional considerations, but solely for aesthetic effect. Designers of tea ceremony architecture carefully selected only those materials conducive to production of a microcosm compatible with the aesthetics of *wabi*.

Andô is most deeply concerned with creating his own ideal kind of space and, like the designers of tea ceremony buildings, carefully chooses the materials his ideal requires. In the case of the modern urban environment, the most natural of all materials is concrete. For this reason, Andô devotes maximum care to the best possible treatment of unfinished concrete in buildings in which he hopes to symbolize nature, and leaves only an echo of space as abstract architecture (figure 31). In light of the conditions prevailing in Japanese cities today, Andô's preference for unfinished concrete can be interpreted as the spirit of the *wabi* aesthetic expressed in modern terms.

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Design Principles

I should now like to turn to an examination of the principles controlling the manipulation, placement, and relationships of the physical things Andô uses to express his design intensions. The two most salient principles in his work are simplicity, and geometrical compositions (with a fondness for asymmetry). By means of these principles, and in accordance with the design intentions examined in the preceding section, Andô selects, places, and relates physical things to create overall spatial compositions.

Simplicity
The desire for simplicity is related to the tenets of Zen Buddhism, with which tea ceremony masters such as Rikyû maintained close spiritual connections. The exclusion of all surplus things, a fundamental Zen attitude, pervades all good tea ceremony architecture.

As I have pointed out, designers of such architecture like to use natural materials, to have them look as natural as possible, and to employ muted–almost monochrome–color schemes. Andô also severely limits the range of interior colors. His buildings are almost entirely unfinished concrete with the exception of floors and furnishings, which are of natural materials, and window sashes, which, though steel, are always painted gray, never bright self-assertive colors (figure 32). This approach, used both by designers of tea ceremony buildings and by Andô, is determined by a concern for the materials themselves and for spatial composition.

In addition, Andô is a direct heir of tea ceremony disdain for ostentatious decoration. When the tea ceremony architecture was in the process of evolution, monochrome ink paintings imported from China became popular in Japan and exerted great aesthetic influence (figure 33). Their use in tea ceremony rooms and buildings gave added impetus to the preference for severely limited colors and to the reduction of interior ornament to no

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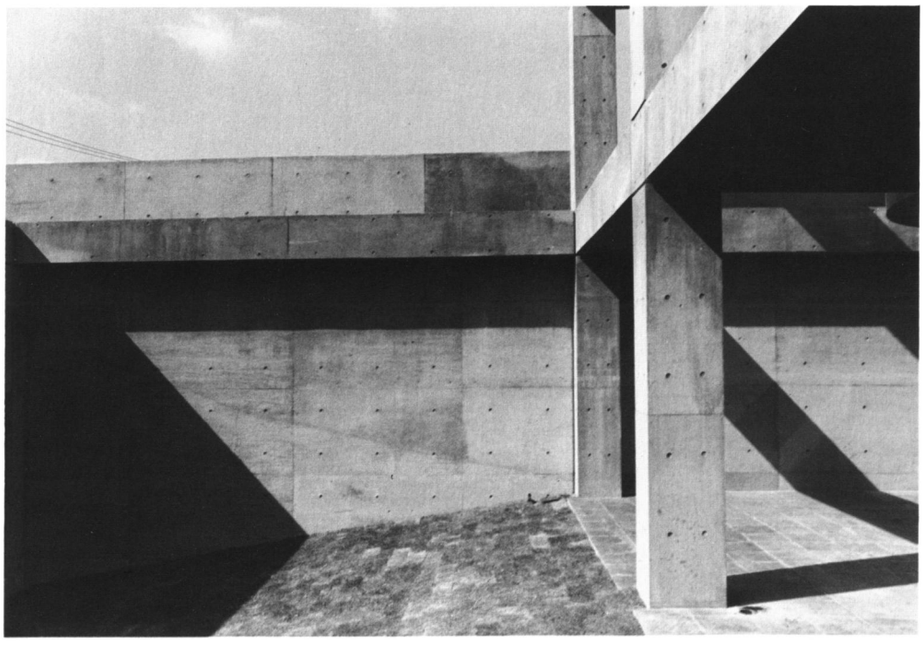

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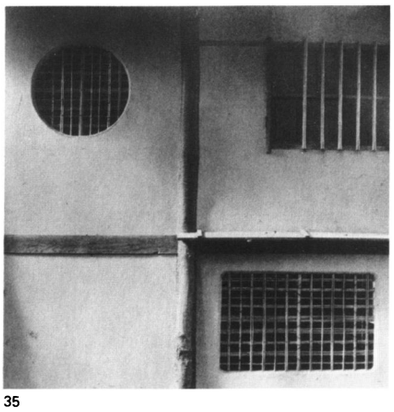

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32
Koshino Residence, living room interior.

33
Sô-ami, Shôshô-Makkei-zu.

34
House at Tezukayama, courtyard.

35
Kôdai-ji, Shigure-tei, east wall, exterior.

more than a vase containing a very small number of simple flowers.

Since it prizes the value of abbreviation, Zen philosophy tends to prefer a perfectly empty space to a space that is perfectly complete. The same preference is to be seen in both tea ceremony architecture and in Andô's work. For example, not only are Andô's courtyard gardens empty, but their walls seem to have been deliberately stripped of expression (figure 34). He strives to create space by means of invisible, apparently nonexistent things. In brief, his kind of space can be called a void, but, ironically, a void in which all things are inherent. The idea underlying such a space is common to much oriental philosophy.

Geometrical Compositions

Rikyû aimed for regular forms and balanced proportions but included an element of distortion in his designs (figure 35). Similarly, Andô employs almost exclusively straight lines and geometric forms. When curves occur in his work, they are in the form of circles or parts of circles (figure 36). His designs stress floor plan pattern, in which balance between symmetry and asymmetry is important.

Though the Tai-an tea ceremony room, which I discussed earlier, is only two tatami mats in area, Rikyû, like many other tea masters, considered the standard room to be four and one half tatami mats. Such a room is perfectly symmetrical and square, but Rikyû broke the symmetry by using tokonoma alcoves, windows, and ceiling elements (figure 37). In other words, he first adopted the static symmetry of the square as a basic, then introduced dynamism by breaking the symmetry. His spaces express the tension inherent in the relation between symmetry and asymmetry. It is worth noting in this connection that a predeliction for asymmetry may be one of the most profound Japanese psychological characteristics (figure 38).

At a glance, Andô's buildings, especially his early ones, seem highly symmetrical (figure 39). This is partly because of his

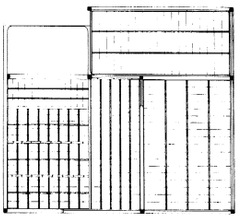
36
Koshino Residence, aerial view.

37
Myôki-an, Tai-an, ceiling.

38
Ura-Sen-ke, Konnichi-an, interior.

39
Sôseikan, plan.

40
Koshino Residence, shaded plan.



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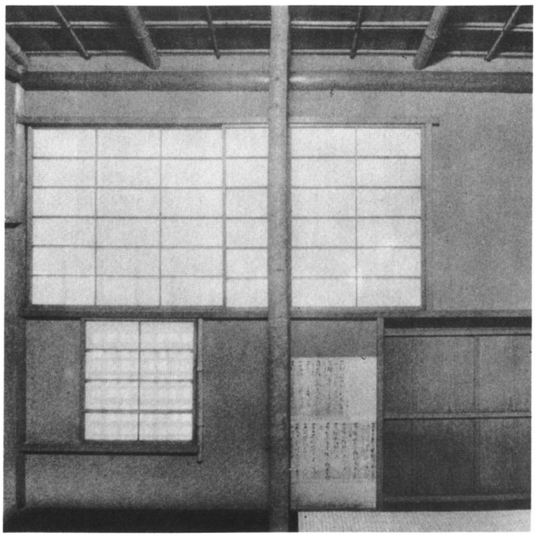

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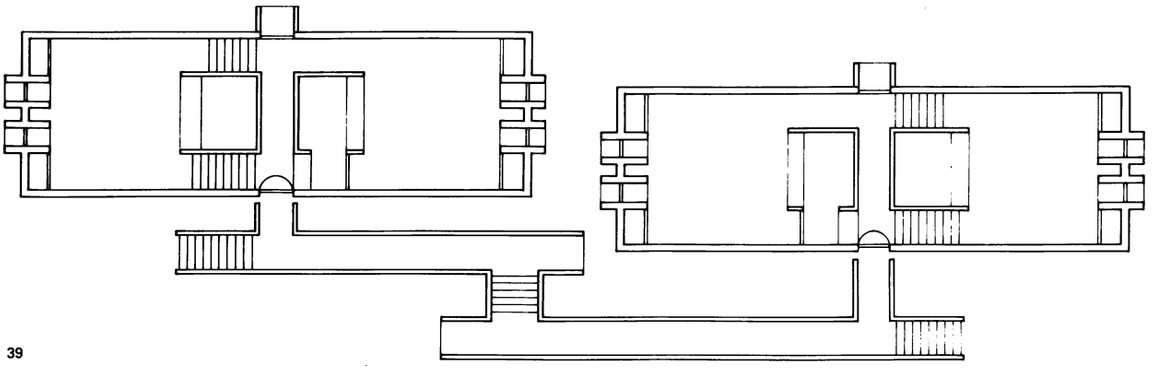

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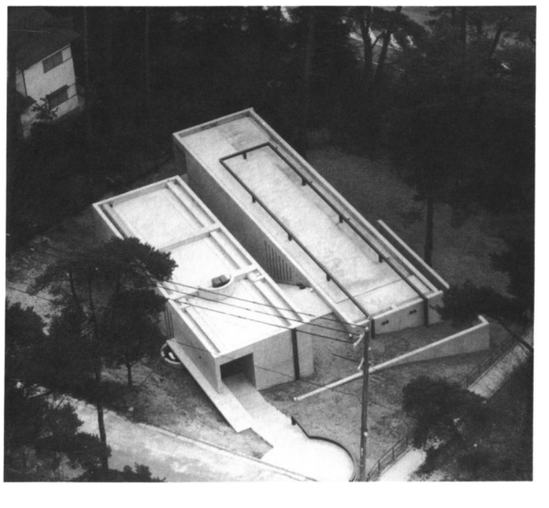

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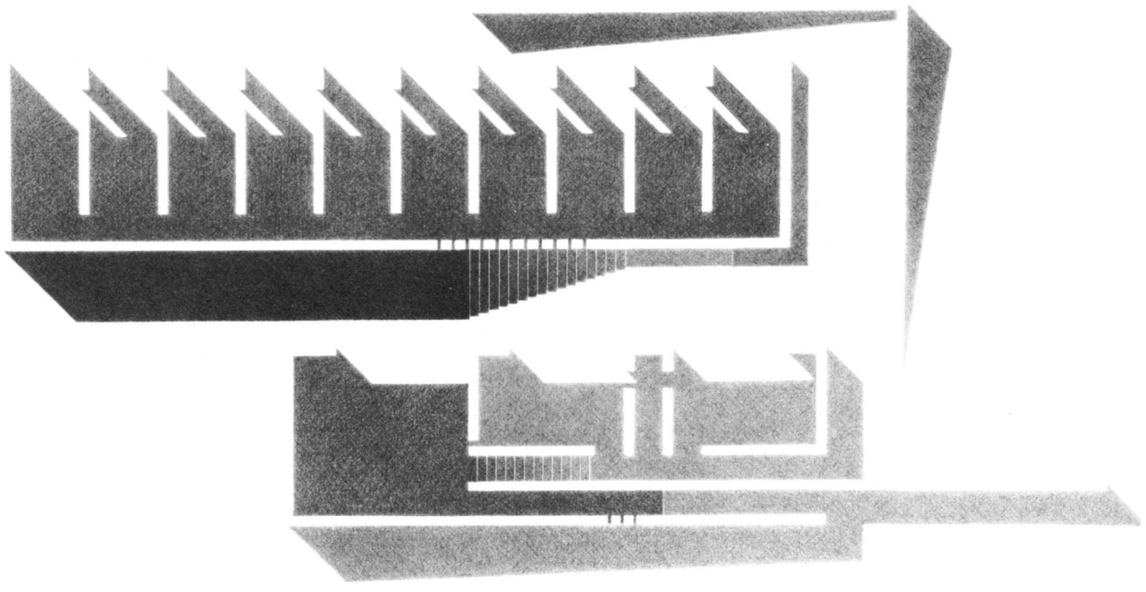

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fascination with the number "2" and relations between pairs of things. A perfect relation evokes symmetry, and a basic image in his design is that of two things turned toward each other. When two things face each other, the intercession of a third is unnecessary to the creation of a world. This is why Andô designs houses that are open on the inside (where pairs of things face each other) and closed to the outside (on which the same pairs of things turn their backs). In architecture composed of pairs of things in relation to each other, it is scarcely surprising that the use of symmetry should seem essential. But, instead of insisting on symmetry, Andô creates a subtle distortion by means of lines of human motion, light or sight. Symmetry is the premise governing the total composition. But, within the whole, asymmetry in individual parts infuses the dynamic into the static totality.

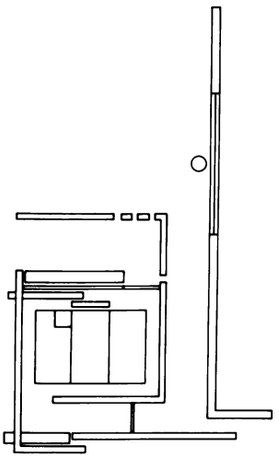
A more marked trend in the direction of asymmetry is apparent in some of Andô's recent works. For instance, the overriding intention in the Koshino residence is composition on the basis of balanced asymmetry, as is apparent from the plan, the wall surfaces, and the skylight placement (figure 40). The purpose behind this kind of plan seems to be a pursuit of spatial tension created by stability within the instability of asymmetry. Nonetheless, even when working in this vein, Andô persists in arranging pairs of things to face each other.

Spirit

Behind the methods and intentions employed by Rikyû was a spirit of reaction against the authority of his time, against the military ruler of the nation, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and against the opulence and extravagance of the culture of the age (the so-called Momoyama culture). This spirit of rejection evoked the culture of unostentatious refinement described as *wabi*. In rejecting the gilt and glory of decoration of the Momoyama period, the spirit of *wabi* sought beauty in coarse, plain materials.

41
Tea Ceremony Room, Sôseikan, interior.

42
Tea Ceremony Room, Sôseikan, plan.



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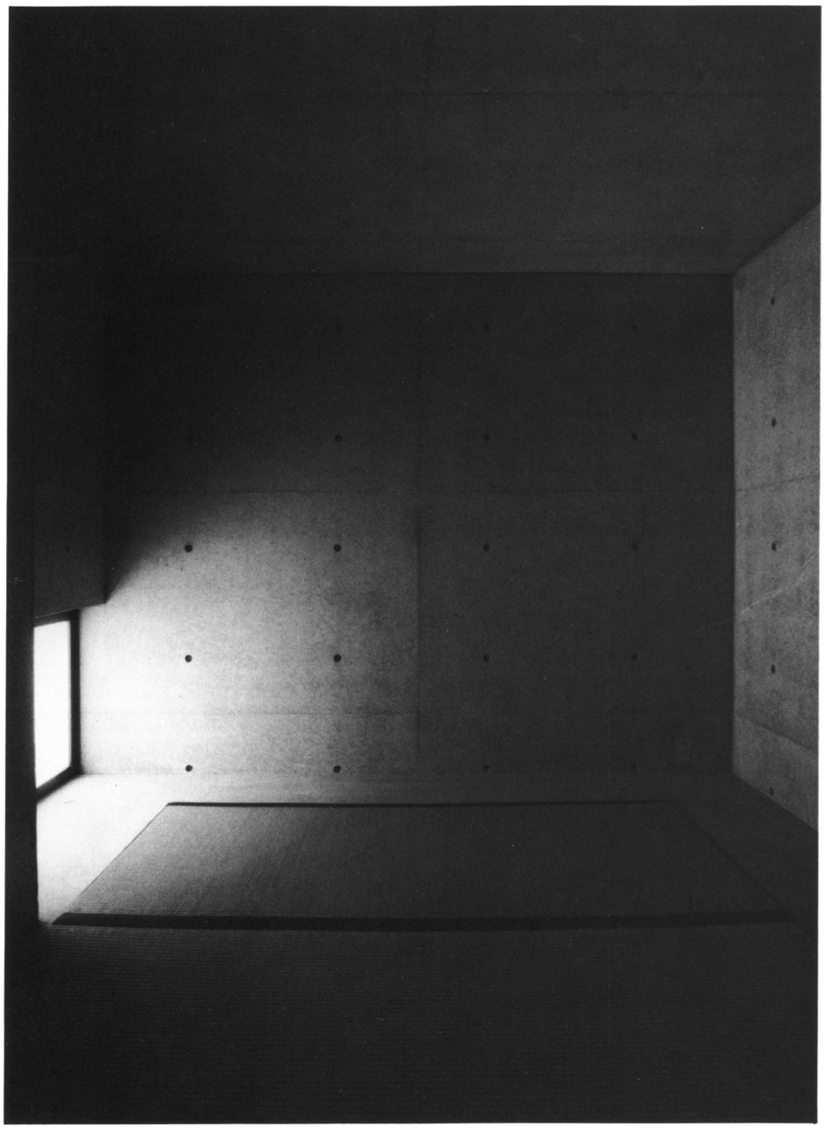

41

Andô too is dissatisfied with the culture of his time and with what goes under the name "modern living." He speaks out in favor of a simple way of life and against the trends prevailing in the consumer society. His void spaces are a criticism of the insipidness of the overly materialistic modern way of life. Rikyû detested the insipid as lacking tension. Because Andô too is unable to tolerate the insipid, he produces houses with hard, stone cold surfaces that resound on being tapped and that result in spaces taut with tension. The chill of Andô's concrete void spaces is symbolically similar to the ideal world Rikyû wanted to create in tea ceremony architecture.

The tea ceremony room Andô designed as an addition to the Yamaguchi residence (called the Sôseikan) represents very accurately tea ceremony architecture according to Andô's taste for composition and materials (figure 41). The room has unfinished concrete walls, floor, and ceiling, and is covered only partly with three tatami mats. The room is a compendium of all the Andô idioms I have discussed up to this point: spatial enclosure, carefully selected lighting effects, labyrinthine movement lines, a sense of dryness, simple materials, and a clear plan based on the strictest geometrical forms. Furthermore, the plan is symmetrical along a well established axis, but the positioning of the windows and other elements of the design subtly modifies the symmetry (figure 42).

It is by no means coincidental that Tadao Andô is the man who produced what is no doubt the first tea ceremony room in concrete erected in Japan. The room is a physical manifestation of Andô's spiritual fellowship with tea ceremony architecture in general and especially with that of Sen no Rikyû. As if it were a resurrection of Rikyû's world of *wabi*, the room is filled with the tension of the dynamic contained within the static. It exemplifies the act of inheriting a tradition on its spiritual plane.