



Bamboo wall and railing in the ping-pong room.

KENGO KUMA

in conversation with Prof. Darko Radović, Marco Capitanio, Satoshi Sano 23/07/2016, Gaienmae, Tokyo

KK

My first encounter with Taut happened through a small product, a wooden box, which was produced by Taut and his patron Mr. Inoue in 1935. My father had bought it in Ginza when he was in his late 20s, in the *Taut*/Inoue shop called "Miratias". He was not an architect but he really liked that beautiful design. My father was very proud of owning it, and he often showed me that wooden box, saying: "This was done by the famous designer Bruno Taut!". When I was a boy Taut had no meaning to me, but slowly I came to understand his importance and how interesting his designs were; I still keep the wooden box in my office. Its beauty lies in simplicity and materiality working together because, usually, simplicity and minimalism are opposite to materiality. When one tries to achieve simplicity, materiality often disappears. In Taut, though, the materiality of wood coexists with simplicity, it is a kind of miracle. As such, I am still under the influence of his philosophy and product design.

MC

When writing in his diaries about the ongoing project of Hyuga Villa, Taut noted that he was working on proportions (appropriateness), *Stimmung* and materiality. How do you approach these topics in your projects?

KK

For me materiality is the heart of space. Whenever we start a design we choose one material, thinking: "This space should be done with this material". The design process basically consists in simplifying the material. Every detail strives towards simplicity, which is not an easy process; it takes a long time, because with certain simplifications materiality is lost. We simplify in a way that maintains the warmth and softness of materiality. It is a very delicate process and it is hard work to achieve that.

DR

What I reckon in Taut's output is the importance of intuition, which comes from the site itself but also from the designer's own intuition.

KK

The intuition coming from the site was probably the most important one for Taut. His architecture is not easy to understand through photographs. But, if one visits his buildings, one can feel the harmony between space and place. Probably, because he got an intuition from the place, he could create a combination between sense of place and sense of space.

MC

In this regard, Taut became increasingly interested in local architectural expressions, in contrast to Le Corbusier or Mies. After leaving Japan, during his time in Istanbul, Taut completed an *Architekturlehre*, his lessons of architecture: local architecture around the world is praised for different reasons, contributing to architectural evolution based on regional fault lines, a "theory of architectural relativity". Do you share the same view?

KK

Taut tried to go beyond globalization by means of material, something that probably originated from his early experiences with the Steel Pavilion and Glass Pavilion. He could pick up the essence of materials. This approach is very different from other Modernists such as Le Corbusier, who started a design with the shape and proportions of a building. Taut had accused Le Corbusier of being a formalist, since form was his first priority. For Taut form is of secondary importance, while material is key. Le Corbusier believed that form and proportion could fit to any place. On the other hand, Taut's attitude was a sort of resistance to globalization; in fact, it is much more difficult to adapt material to any place, rather than adapting form. These two standpoints are opposites in regard to globalization.

DR

This would rather be a sort of "compromising" globalization: it has to compromise with the site, with materials, with the issue of "the local". From this point of view, climate and materials are of special interest.

KK

In Japan Taut found many interesting materials. Probably his favorite one was bamboo: he used it in a peculiar way in the interiors of Hyuga Villa. Bamboo had been selected for traditional Japanese buildings, for instance for the *tokobashira* (corner wooden pillar of the *tokonoma*, Ed.), but not very often. Taut employed it in a unique way: he covered one wall with bamboo. In regard to the overall interior design, to Japanese architects of the period the colors of Hyuga Villa were shocking. They thought: "Why did such a great master use such strange colors?" But, if you experience the space firsthand, you find a special harmony with the strong natural elements of the site, which triggered the choice of strong colors.

DR

This prompts me to speculate about his role as a foreigner. Such a peculiar use of bamboo, a wrong use, if you like, is something that only a creative foreigner could do.

KK

This is the advantage of being a foreigner. One can stand out from the tradition and this is very beneficial to a designer. I think that the designer should not belong too strongly to a specific cultural milieu; independence and freedom should constitute his or her character.

MC

Taut looked at nature as a way to avoid styles, highlighting the role of imagination. He studied the natural world "to find out the rules of nature" that could be applied to a "new architecture". Is there a specific way in which you start designing a project, your "design strategy"?

KK

I like Taut's comment about Katsura Villa (Katsura Rikyū, imperial villa in the western outskirts of Kyoto, built in the early 17th century, Ed.): if



Ping-pong room featuring paulownia ceiling planks.

Katsura Villa

was separated from its garden, it would just be a cheap barrack. I have the same opinion: the most important aspect of Katsura Villa is the relationship between nature and the building, the garden and the interior. The beautifully-designed engawa (wooden strip of flooring immediately before windows and storm shutters, Ed.), the in-between spaces are the heart of the Villa.

I start from the relationship with the environment too. I begin a design by making a model as big as possible, not only of the site, but of the local topographical characteristics as well, such as mountains. We start the conversation in front of such models, which can give many hints about the design. Probably Taut thought about his projects as a relationship with nature too, and Katsura Villa is a great reference. In regard to Hyuga Villa, the design itself was not so unique, but the experience of it is very different from other Japanese or modernist buildings. He created a specific relationship with the Pacific Ocean, with the cliff and the roof-garden.

MC

How has your relationship with Japanese traditional architecture evolved over time?

KK

Japanese architecture was not part of my identity from the beginning. "Japaneseness" has always been outside of myself. Probably this impression came from the period in which I was born. After WWII, the value of Japanese tradition was totally erased. We all lost the love for tradition and most of us even hated it, a tragic situation for Japan. Most of our education was based on the separation from tradition. My teachers told me that western culture was very advanced, rational, scientific, whereas Japanese culture was not scientific at all, naive, rough. The cities we were born and lived in were the product of a cultural revolution occurring after WWII, concrete buildings were the norm. In my case, the problem was how to reevaluate and learn Japanese tradition, something which I managed to do step by step, very slowly. But, being severed from its influence was not bad. I myself was a foreigner in regard to it, and a certain distance allowed many hints and intuitions to arise. If I were fully involved in Japanese design, I would not have been able to create anything new.

DR

I remember an anecdote. Some years ago, faced with a presentation by a foreign researcher, Kuma-san made a comment about mythologizing Japanese culture, which is something that many foreigners are prone to do.

KK

If we carefully examine Japanese tradition, it has itself a history of hybridization. One example is offered by the architecture of Isaya Yoshida (1898-1974), who was considered to be the best designer in classic style after WWII. His work, though, was not authentic at all, it was a mixture between western Modernism and Japanese style. The best Japanese designer after WWII was himself a hybrid. In the case of Sen no Rikyū (1522-1591), in a way the founder of teahouse culture, some historians have pointed out that his production was a mixture of western, Chinese and Japanese ideas. That is to say that there is no authentic Japanese style, it is always a process of change and hybridization. From this point of view, Taut's work is part of such evolution.

DR

Taut has made some bold statements, declaring that the temples and shrines of Nikko (built in the 17th century, in lavish and colorful manner, during the Tokugawa Shogunate, Ed.) were a degenerated outcome in the evolution of Japanese architecture, which, according to him, reached an apex in Katsura Villa.

KK

He was very careful, he loved Japan very much but he did not accept every Japanese design. He selected only what was valuable; I love this attitude.

MC

The title of our exhibition is "West of Japan / East of Europe". Where do you see yourself and your architecture?

KK

I was born in Japan, no doubt about this (laughs)! I studied in a Jesuit school, though, and my teachers came from Europe and America, a mixture between West and East; after studying in Tokyo, I then went to New York. I have always been moving, but my case is not exceptional: in our time, everybody's life is about moving. Moving is the motor of creation, and everybody can create something within the movement of life.

DR

There is a mystery though. Anybody, when seeing your architecture, would say that there is definitely something Japanese about it. The same could be said for SANAA, in a totally different way.

KK

I guess that this has something to do with the way our brain is structured, something which is deeply connected to language. Japanese is unique: we use *kanji* (Chinese characters) and *kana* (syllabic alphabet) together. It works differently from Chinese or Korean. The language itself is a hybrid system, easy to adapt to different environments, it is flexible. I think this is one of the bases of "Japaneseness".

DR

Roland Barthes, another great foreigner who engaged with Japan, said that *haiku* poetry is an ancestral code making use of modern materials, or topics. In this sense, what Taut loved about Japan was what he used to like in the West. He went to Katsura Villa and discovered the beauty of modernist postulates, reckoning that the Villa was exactly what his modernist architecture wanted to do: reductionism and simplicity with the sensuality of materiality.

KK

Material and human body have a special conversation, which is non-verbal communication. This is the point of design.

REFLECTIONS ON TAUT'S ENCOUNTER WITH JAPAN
Darko Radović

The work of Bruno Taut is diverse and multifaceted. My interest in Taut started long ago, by discovering his call for use of nature as a source of inspiration in architectural design. That sounded appealing to a young architect embarking on the path of ecologically responsible built environments, while not wanting to abandon the underlying social awareness of an increasingly questioned modernism. Later on, I explored Taut's efforts to think and to make space across scales and, most recently, his ability to notice, identify and create spatial quality across immense cultural differences. That Taut, Taut the observer, Taut in the East, became particularly relevant for me, as I myself became a nomad, living and exploring cultures, cities and architecture distant from those in which my values and worldview have originated. In this essay, I will touch upon some of the questions arising from Taut's experience of living and working in Japan, the country which also became my place of choice and fascination.

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As an architect, Bruno Taut wrote a number of manifestos and produced several interesting projects. He tried to work across scales, from the largest of urban schemes to finest architectural details and objects. In his urbanistic attempts, Bruno Taut remained an architect. Immersed in the unease of post World War I Germany, where various confusions of Heller and other minor social thinkers. By taking overt intellectualism and ideology away from him, Japan helped release his own intuition. While (to a certain degree) remaining a formalist, in Japan his material execution reached a remarkable fusion of functionalism and craftsmanship. To me, Bruno Taut is primarily an architect with a keen eye and judicious taste, blessed by fine, thinking hand. His intuitivist years opened him to the instinctual, rather than the factual study. In Japan, his own foreignness forced him to let the instincts guide that talented hand. That is precisely where the best of his achievements, in both thinking and making architecture, originates. As Taut's admirer Kengo Kuma puts it, "strolling through a garden (at Kyoto's Katsura Detached Palace) in a far Eastern country he had come to almost by chance, Taut unexpectedly encountered a beautiful form of connection between consciousness and matter" (Pulvers 2014). In Japan he started recording, both textually and spatially, what his intuition hinted at essential. He observed and honestly reported what he saw, with

Western living room with wine-red silk finishing, modern tokonoma and ceiling lamp. The steps have different profiles and treatment.



BAMBOO (竹)

"The bamboo, with its straight thin stem, its graceful branches and finely pointed leaves, is the true crest of Japan, although they say that its origin is in China. [...] Bamboo is really, not a wood at all. It is certainly not a tree in the botanical sense of the word, but a grass, which shoots up to the size of a tree in the course of one year. [...] The sprouts shoot up so quickly that one can watch them rise from day to day. They grow as much as 3 ft. 3. ins. a day (ca. 1m, Ed.). The outgrown stem has the quality of a hard strong pipe, which is elastic and flexible to a certain point but rather brittle. [...] The bamboo is rarely left for the sake of cultivation to grow up to the age of eighty years, at which time it blooms and bears fruit. Mostly it is cut down soon, often when the stems are still green, if fences and similar things are wanted in this fresh colour, which turns to a pale yellow soon enough. But generally it is lopped after two years have elapsed during the winter season. Although bamboo is not timber, it is extremely useful. It can be easily split. The basket-builders divide it with sharp sword-blades into intensely fine, long and flexible bands, nearly into threads. But nailing does not suit its nature except perhaps with wooden or bamboo pegs. [...] The bamboo generally is very tightly bound with bast ropes. [...] But the various ways in which fences are made are pure art. Some are built of upright bamboo stems bound by ropes and cords, some are made in a kind of wickerwork in many different designs, while others are of twisted rods and brushwood or of finely braided bamboo twigs." (Taut 1937:210-3)

"These mats have a subtle quality of naturalness, a something that is neither soft, nor yet elastic, much less hard. They supply the essential functions fulfilled by furniture the world over, and actually replace chairs and arm-chairs, sofas and bedsteads, and to a large extent even tables. [...] But what about the dust?" (Taut 1937:11)

"[I]n traditional farm-houses (notably at Shirakawa) [...] the largest bedroom of the house even to-day in some cases has no mats at all but just a well-kept wooden floor on which the bedding is spread at night. Thus the mats must have come later. [...] For my own part I had quite accustomed myself to lying on the floor, taking it to be much more wholesome than sleeping in bed. My wife seemed to have been right as to her doubts about the dust on the mats, which lies on top and enters into the wickerwork in spite of its tight plaiting. But there was another drawback to the practice. Small insects began to disturb us." (Taut 1937:64-5)

CYPRESS (檜)

"The hinoki, though strong, is of a soft calm beauty without an emphasized vein but it gives a lovely fragrance to the house, shrine or temple, keeping this precious perfume far more than two years. This timber is the most costly, for which reason it cannot be used in bulk." (Taut 1937:199)

Japanese room featuring red-lacquered cypress posts and beams, tatami mats, green (uguisu)-plastered walls and cedar ceilings.



admiration and Volk, in a cynical turn, less than a decade later, one failed artist indeed ascended to power in Germany. The tastelessly oversized dome crowned his own vision of the capital, and - Taut became an anchorless nomad.) At architectural and urban design scales, Taut's attempts at the alternative modernism remain an important contribution to the history of European architecture.

But, in Japan, Taut proved to be an astute observer, capable to see beyond the surfaces and to make sharp judgments. Destined to operate in smaller scales, he started to skillfully explore materiality and sensuality. With limited understanding of the culture in which he had found himself, he had to rely on intuition. In my opinion, that is where Taut reached his best.

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If I had to chose one term to describe Taut in Japan, that would be - intuition. In Germany he was the follower of intuitionist philosophies of Heller and other minor social thinkers. By taking overt intellectualism and ideology away from him, Japan helped release his own intuition. While (to a certain degree) remaining a formalist, in Japan his material execution reached a remarkable fusion of functionalism and craftsmanship.

To me, Bruno Taut is primarily an architect with a keen eye and judicious taste, blessed by fine, thinking hand. His intuitivist years opened him to the instinctual, rather than the factual study. In Japan, his own foreignness forced him to let the instincts guide that talented hand. That is precisely where the best of his achievements, in both thinking and making architecture, originates. As Taut's admirer Kengo Kuma puts it, "strolling through a garden (at Kyoto's Katsura Detached Palace) in a far Eastern country he had come to almost by chance, Taut unexpectedly encountered a beautiful form of connection between consciousness and matter" (Pulvers 2014). In Japan he started recording, both textually and spatially, what his intuition hinted at essential. He observed and honestly reported what he saw, with

admiration and thought of the Other, "only crossing thresholds and entering" might be possible (Jullien 2015).

The only way to deal with dangers of superficiality is in opening the channels of communication with the host culture. What, indeed, may be superficial, then starts to open the possibilities of truly novel and fresh insights. Taut's prolific work in and about Japan has opened such channels of communication with its own milieu, and that is where his major contributions to cross cultural comprehension started to emerge. As Speidel reminds, one indeed "may wonder how a foreign architect became such an authority on Japanese culture, and one may ask in which aspect he had been an authority since he was, as I said, neither a Japanologist nor an art historian. During the last fifty years there have been countless discussions about and evaluations of Taut's apodictic views on Japan in Japan itself. Taut became, during and after the War, someone like a mythical figure and at the least an important part of Japanese culture" (Speidel 2011).

The fate of a foreigner includes risks of superficiality. When exploring cultures and thought of the Other, "only crossing thresholds and entering" might be possible (Jullien 2015).

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View from Japanese room towards ping-pong room, looking through western dining room. Cypress ranma is coupled with black-lacquered fusuma.



CEDAR (杉)

"The round cedar-trees are particularly beautiful. Their bark is peeled off and leaves a fine wavy and even surface without knots. This surface is particularly suitable for posts and purlines under the roof of verandas. These trees are specially cultivated by lopping off all branches every year but for a small bushy crown which is left standing. In the woods of the valley near Kyoto one might take these lopped cedars for a special kind of tree. Although the aristocrat of the forests is the Japanese cypress (hinoki), the cedar might be called an image of the people. It is just common but nevertheless hard and strong, even beautiful too in some of its species, like the red cedar or the old well-seasoned cedar with its deep gray tone and its strongly lined vein specially cultivated to the delicate beauty of a round trunk." (Taut 1937:199)

TOKONOMA, alcove (床間)

Alcove for artwork display, e.g. hanging scrolls (kakemono), flower compositions etc., usually one tatami in size (ca. 90 x 180cm). The tokonoma is marked at one corner by a wooden pillar (tokobashira), more or less peculiar in shape and quality, depending on the style of the room; moreover, it is often times raised somewhat from the tatami floor-level and defined by a wooden beam placed slightly higher than all other beams (nageshi), which set the height of the sliding doors.

"The tokonoma in itself is an ingenious achievement of Japan. It affords the most natural and effective medium for the use and the enjoyment of works of art inside the house; it is an achievement of international validity. An imitation of it in every other sphere of culture would automatically change every living-room in the whole world into a clean thing freed from contingencies. It would [...] restore architectural harmony [...]" (Taut 1937:179)

Upper-level bedroom with built-in cabinets.



One could compare Bruno Taut's fascination with the architecture of Katsura Villa with Roland Barthes' attitude to haiku. "What comes to me from a very foreign (very strange) language whose basic principles elude me", Barthes wrote, "still manages to touch me, interest me, enchant me" (Barthes 2014). As a long-time total foreigner in Japan, I think that I understand exactly what Barthes meant with those words. He wrote how "the haiku is human, absolutely human", and an architectural aficionado can tell the same for the finest of spatial projections of Japanese culture and society (Radović 2008). The univalued Barthes expressed the essence of that subtle quality in a seemingly simple, pseudo-formulaic equation: ancestral code + modern materials. In the best of his works in Japan, Bruno Taut's intuition brought him very close to that elusive code, while his instincts helped him to simultaneously stay modern. Hyuga Villa is one of such works.

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AABOUT

Marco Capitanio

This seventh issue of Urbophilía (都市愛), the newsletter of co+labo radović, accompanies the exhibition "West of Japan / East of Europe", devoted to the only existing project that Bruno Taut realized during his three-year stay in Japan, Hyuga Villa (日向別荘) in Atami, built in 1936. His project embodies a deeply personal reflection on Japanese architecture, mediated through Taut's European sensibility. The result represents a unique example of cross-cultural breeding, which, at the time of its completion, stood at odds with mainstream Modernism in Europe on the one hand, and with the local architectural language on the other. The complete, detailed plans of Hyuga Villa have been redrawn and are presented for the first time to the public, paired with large-format photographs by the American architectural photographer Dave Clough. By juxtaposing drawings of plans and sections, and pictures, we hope to immerse the visitor in the realm of Taut's main architectural preoccupation: pondering about the concept of appropriateness (*Proportion*), manifested in all aspects of a building, especially in its materiality and atmosphere.

In April 1935 Taut was asked by businessman Hyuga Rihiei to design the interiors for a concrete structure built under his house on a steep cliff along the Pacific coast. Because of the sloping site, the concrete foundation had the purpose of affording a flat surface for a garden in front of the upper building. Taut's task was thus to redesign the basement as a recreational space, to be enjoyed especially during the hot summer months. It was Mr. Hyuga's explicit desire to have Japanese-style as well as western-type rooms, a wish that unleashed Taut's imagination and creativity. The space was partitioned into three main sections: ping-pong room, living- with dining-room, and Japanese room including a bedroom and a veranda. Furniture and lamps were designed by Taut too, partly borrowed by the items he had been producing together with his patron Mr. Inoue, sold in their shop called "Miratias" in Ginza. The project was prepared in 4 months and developed with the assistance of Yoshida Tetsuo's office, while construction was completed in 13 months. The research on Hyuga Villa offered us the opportunity to concentrate on two main topics, which we believe maintain their relevance even in the present days: on the one hand the idea of appropriateness in architecture, which Taut named *Proportion*, and the relationship between the East and the West on the other.

APPROPRIATENESS/PROPORTION

After leaving Japan in October 1936, during his stay in Istanbul, where he suddenly died in December 1938, Taut finalized a compendium of architecture lessons, the *Architektiklehrer*, in which he examined selected buildings around the world and offered his thoughts about the essence and role of the profession. In one paragraph he boldly defined architecture as the art of „proportions“. The term, though, is to be conceived as the skill to bring all aspects of a project into harmony, so that materials, construction and function achieve a sense of appropriateness which resonates with the site and context, most importantly with local climate. Appropriateness, or proportion, is not only related to form, but includes, besides measurable and objective specifications, more subjective aspects, both from the point of view of the designer and of the user. In fact, the view to the Pacific Ocean and the hot/humid climate of Atami were crucial in determining Taut's design, enabling us to draw parallels with the contemporary debate about sustainability, contested between quantitative and qualitative standpoints. The careful choice of materials, their detailing and positioning testify a desire to reach the appropriate *Stimmung* through a haptic spatial experience, stimulating bodily perceptions that transcend mere visual aspects. From this point of view, Taut's architectural approach, starting from concrete and local concerns, could be defined as aristotelian, in contrast to the corbusian, platonic *forma mentis*, aspiring to an idealized model.

EAST/WEST

The second major theme of the exhibit has to do with cross-cultural breeding. Hyuga Villa's design, being a hybrid between Japanese and European aesthetics and sensibilities is also emblematic in regard to Taut's own experience as a foreigner operating in a different culture and, in a broader sense, of the relationship between the East and the West, a theme that was borrowed for the title of our exhibition. As Taut himself wrote, "In every country the sun rises and sets at which point of the earth one draws the Date Line is pure arbitrariness. Every country is east and has its east. [...] A Japanese can only come to a spiritual Europe from a spiritual Japan - as a European can only come to a spiritual Japan from a spiritual Europe. And both will enrich themselves along this journey. The result is mutual help that is given willingly and with an open heart, because also the one who gives, receives at the same time. This is not shallow internationalism, no uniformity of the world, not a way to render the Earth boring [...]. As a European I have written [...]. As a European I love Japan's culture and I have, as a European, the wish that it would remain worthy of love." (Taut 2011:191, 193, 195-6)

These two topics are well reflected in the discussion with Kengo Kuma and in the text by Prof. Radović to be found in this publication; from this point of view Hyuga Villa provided plenty of inspiration and hints. As the project was completed in September 1936, the exhibition was conceived as a celebration to its 80th anniversary. Despite the compact format that we believe that this work by Bruno Taut is a summary of architectural questions and experimentations that are still relevant today. Beside the documentary intent, we hope that this research will trigger fruitful debates and serve as a cultural baton to be passed during the journey from the East to the West, and vice-versa.

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AABOUT

The exhibition "West of Japan / East of Europe" is organized by co+labo radović & THE FORMWORK:

co+labo is an architecture and urban design laboratory at Keio University, Tokyo. It is based in the Faculty of Science and Technology, Department of Systems Design Engineering. co+labo was inaugurated in 2009, building upon the strong basis established by Kengo Kuma in the period 1999-2009. The co+labo concept was conceived by Yuk and Darko Radović, in an effort to combine practice (co+) and research (+labo) dimensions of architecture and urbanism. The key is in that red +, which invites diverse cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural associations.

"THE FORMWORK" is an association established by professors and PhD candidates with diverse academic backgrounds (history, architectural design, technology, preservation) working at the IUAV University in Venice and at Milan Politecnico.

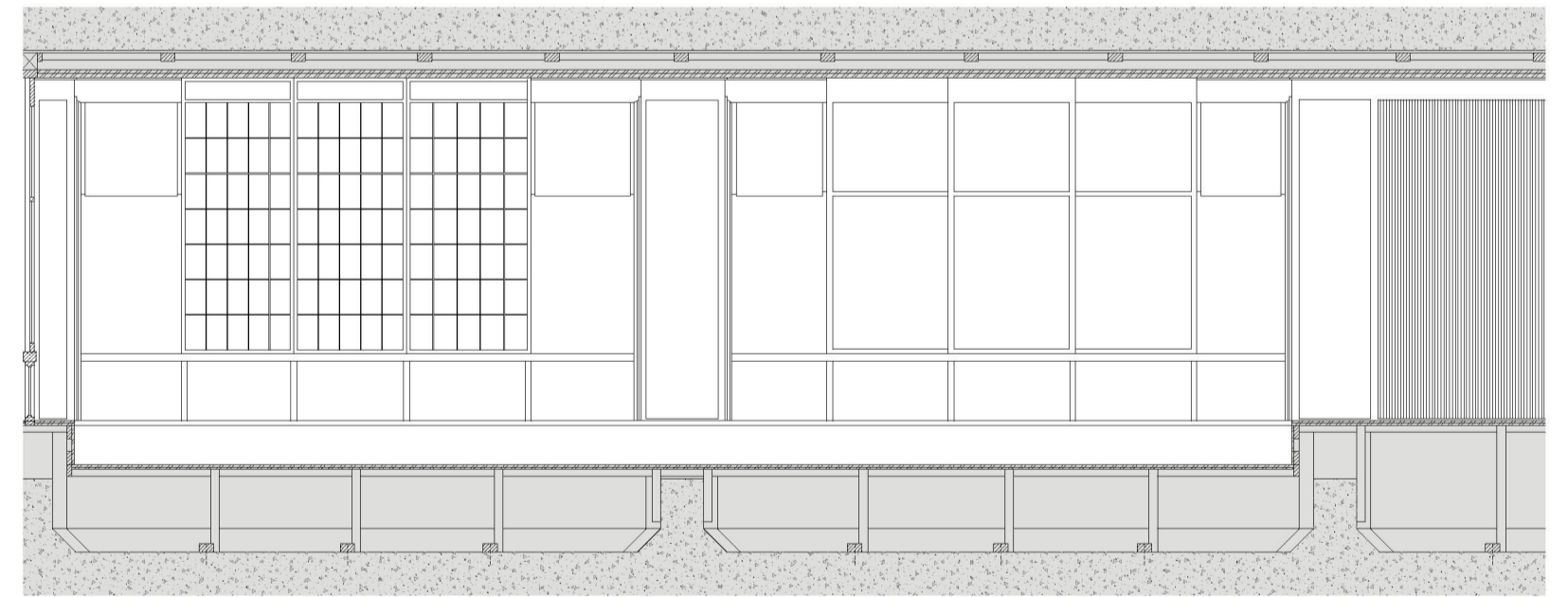
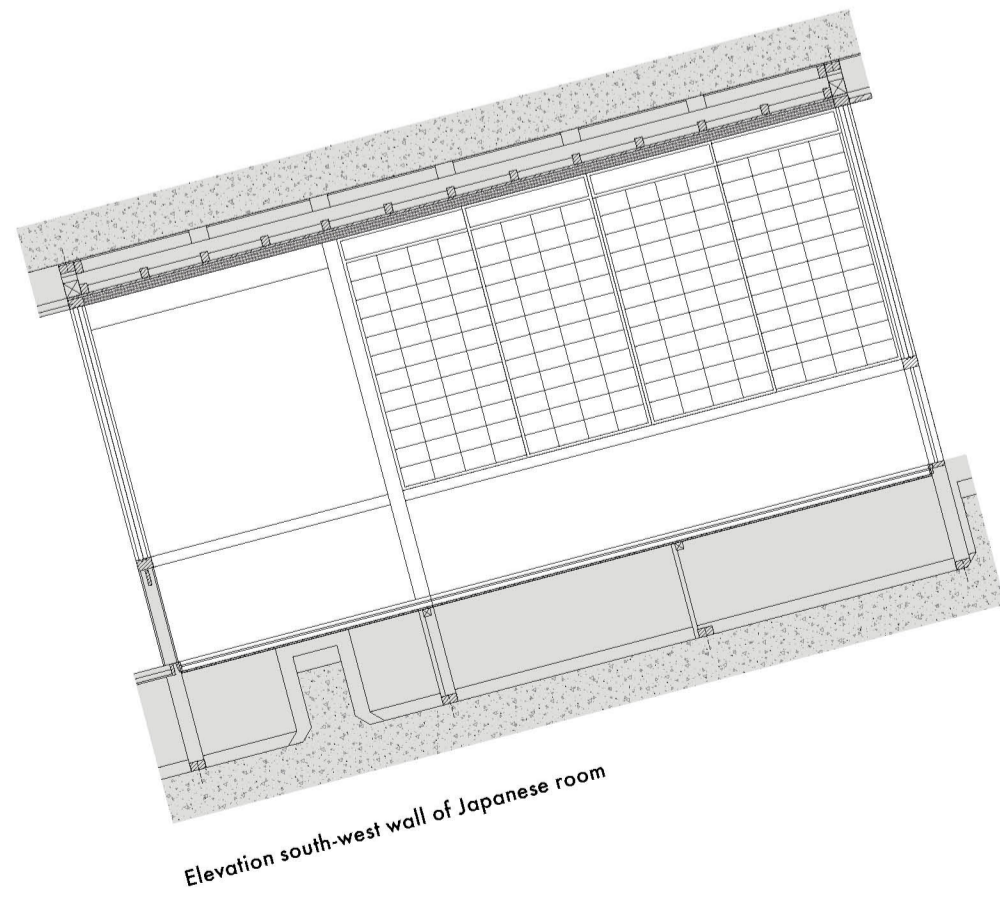
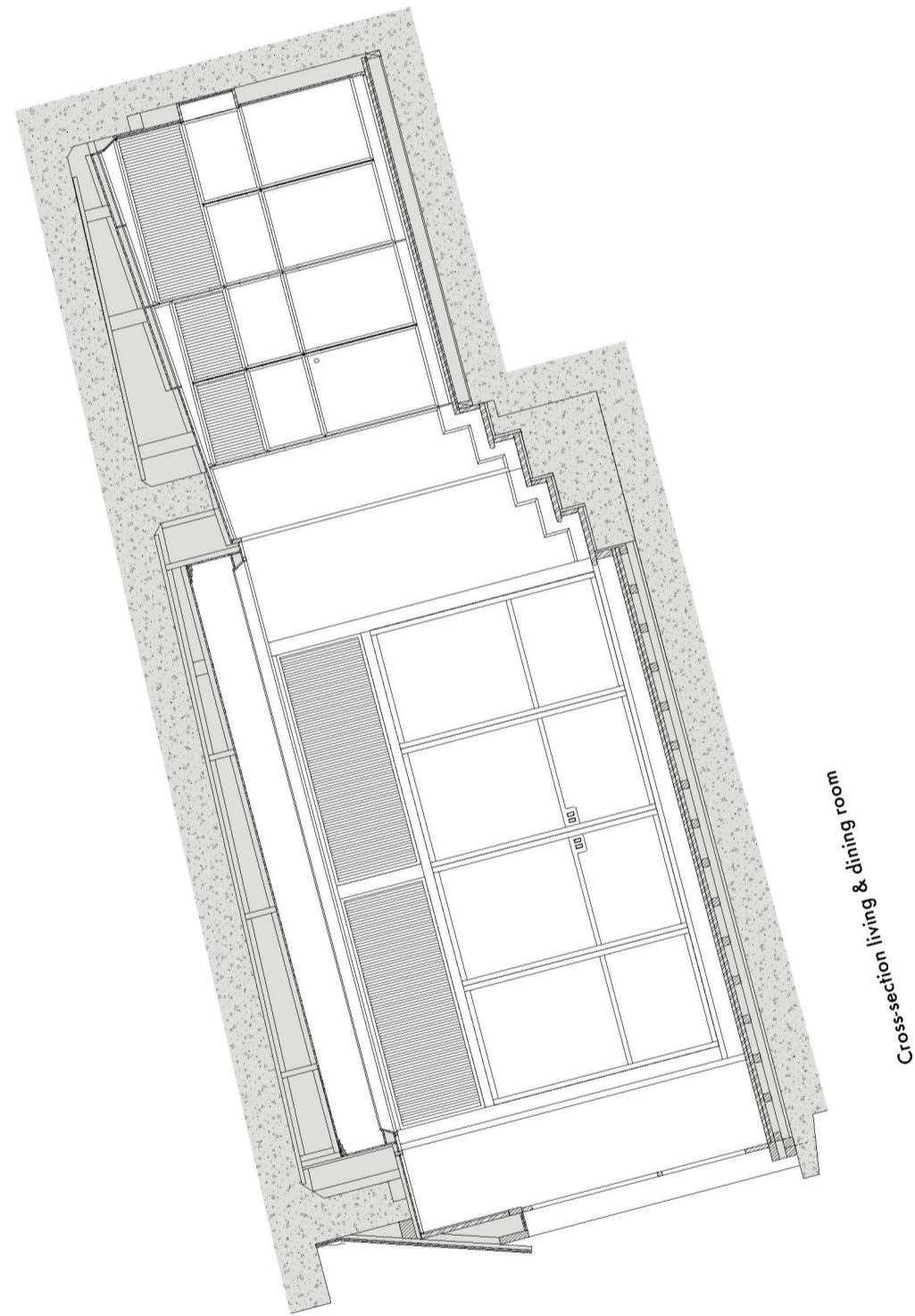
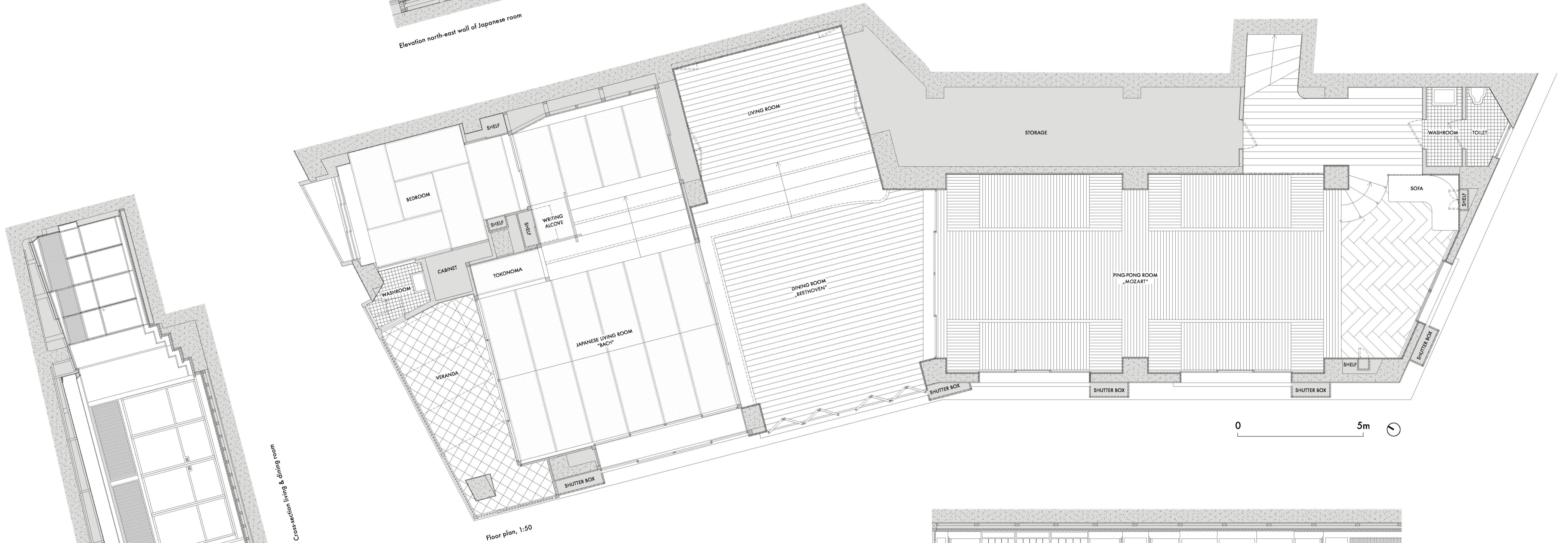
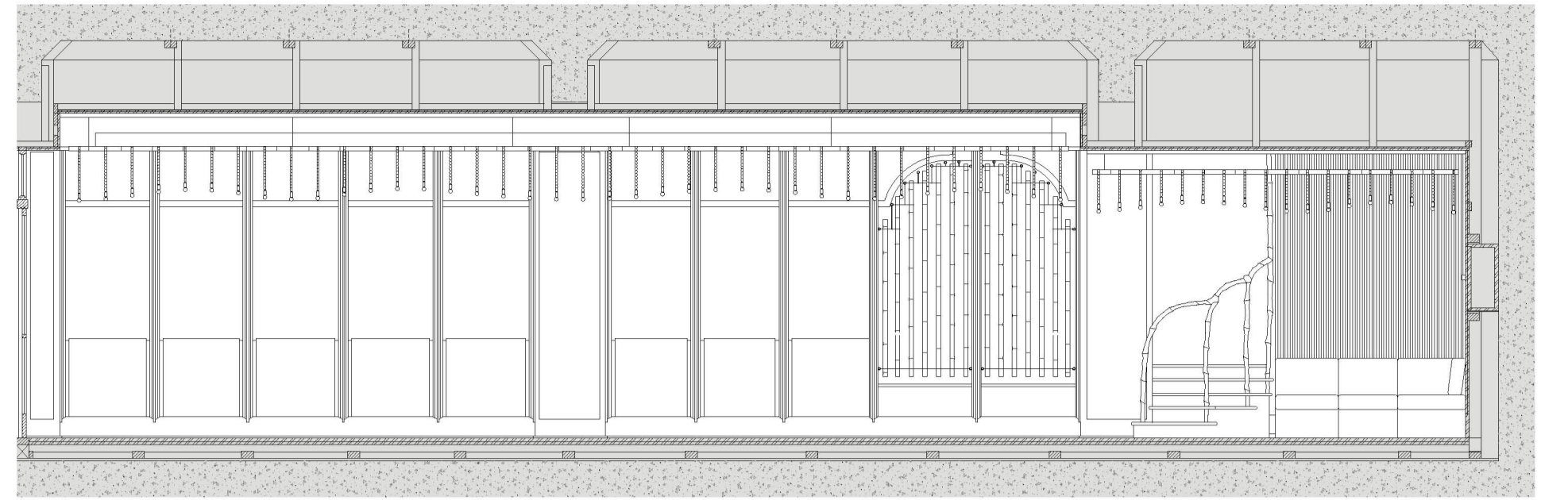
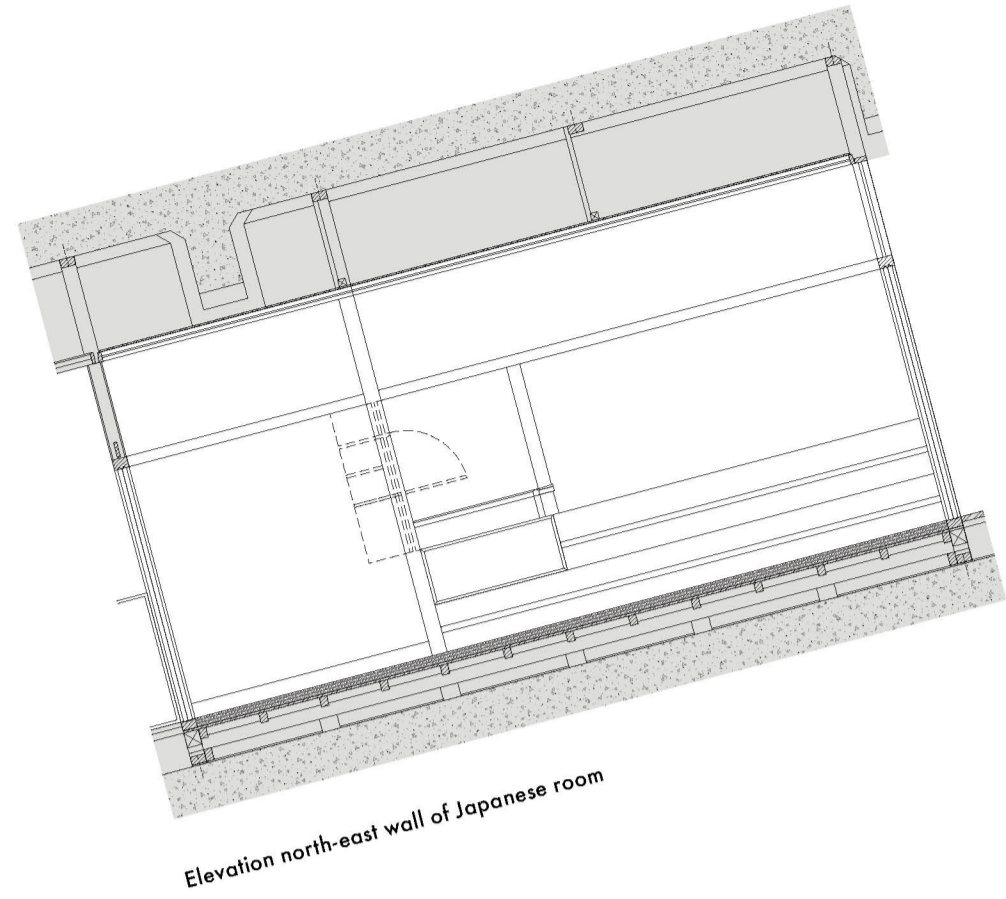
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Hyuga Villa (旧日向別邸)

Architect: Bruno Taut with Yoshida Tetsuro
Client: Hyuga Rihei
Location: 8-37 Kasugacho, Atami
Shizuoka Prefecture 413-0005, Japan

TIMELINE
1934/6: Upper building completed by Watanabe Jin
1935/2: Concrete basement completed by Shimizu Corp.
1935/4: Taut is commissioned with the project
1935/4: First draft plans
1935/5/8: Detailed design at Yoshida Tetsuro's office
1935/8: Beginning of construction
1936/9: End of construction

"And then it will still take a great effort, not only to correct, but also to choose the materials, to check, decide the colors etc. [...] The harmony of proportions [...] is a wonderful thing. I am studying Kobori Enshu* on a pragmatcal level and in detail."
Taut, diary note on May 7, 1935

*1579-1647, master of tea ceremony and all-round artist, known for his garden designs and whom Taut believed to be the author behind Katsura Imperial Villa in Kyoto.

