

Rediscovering Harmony in Forest, Craftsmanship, and Tradition: Reflection on the Minka Summit 2024 (April 19-21, 2024)

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The Minka Summit 2024, held on April 20-21, felt both enlightening and meditative. This summit brought together people who share a deep respect for traditional Japanese homes, the minka. The summit has a range of activities that provide discussions with hands-on experiences. From insightful keynote speeches to immersive workshops, attendees were not just passive observers but active participants in the preservation of minka heritage.

One of the most impactful aspects of the summit, as a forester, was the tour with Hisaya Furuhashi, the 6th generation president of a renowned lumber company. His insights into the types of wood used in minka construction were invaluable. Hisaya explained the deep-rooted connection between his family's business and the minka tradition, noting that for generations, they have been supplying lumber for these homes and previously sold charcoal in Kyoto. The family has adapted over time, from harvesting naturally growing trees to managing controlled plantation forests, especially during and after the war to meet the demand for lumber.

Some of the key learning points that I learned was how the specific characteristics of different types of wood influence their use in minka construction. For instance, hardwoods like walnut were once common in the foundation due to their resistance to rot, but today, more cedar and hinoki (japanese cypress) are used. Hinoki remains highly prized for main columns because of its strength under compression, while pine, particularly red pine, is preferred for beams due to its flexibility.

The traditional methods for harvesting and preparing wood were fascinating as well. In the past, trees were felled after summer, and logs were transported down the Arashiyama River in rafts, a process that could take up to two months. Hisaya emphasized the wisdom passed down through generations, from logging techniques to wood treatments, all aimed at ensuring the durability of the materials used in minka homes. These techniques allowed minka to last for centuries, a testament to the meticulous craftsmanship involved.

Furuhashi also touched upon the challenges posed by modern forestry, particularly the shift toward plantation forests and the need for proper thinning practices to maintain tree health and prevent over competition for nutrients. He highlighted the importance of forest management, noting that without it, even strong trees would struggle to thrive.

The collaborative atmosphere was inspiring, as experts and enthusiasts from different fields came together to exchange knowledge and ideas. The conversations

extended beyond Japan, with international guests contributing their perspectives on how traditional practices can be integrated with modern technology and design.

In the end, this event made me realize the deep, intertwined relationship between forests, tradition, and craftsmanship. The materials that give life to minka come directly from the forests, where centuries-old wisdom and sustainable practices have shaped how wood is chosen, harvested, and prepared. The building of minka itself is a reflection of this heritage, with each step in the process rooted in tradition and guided by a profound respect for nature. The craftsmanship required to bring these homes to life is not just a skill, but a timeless art form that honors both the natural environment and the cultural legacy it sustains. The Minka Summit 2024 was a meaningful convergence of tradition and innovation, reminding us that the past has much to teach about building a more sustainable future.

Some of the Photos during the summit:



Excursion to Kuta



Discussion during the Presentation about Building experience of “sharing” and social common capital



Minka Tour with President Furuhashi with the help of Mr. Azby Brown



Timber logs during the Minka tour at the Lumber Company