

Building on a Green Legacy

Sustainable architecture in Tokyo is more than just respect for nature.

Before Tokyo became Japan's capital in 1868, the city was known as Edo. One of the world's largest cities at one million people, Edo was also home to 1,000 mansions for feudal lords who planted spectacular gardens featuring cherry trees, pine trees and flowers. Indeed, the garden city of Edo also brimmed with waterways and parks. When Scottish botanist Robert Fortune visited in the early 1860s, he called Edo "the most beautiful city in the world."

Nearly 150 years later, Tokyo's population has expanded to 13.8 million but the Edo tradition of living in harmony with nature continues. Tokyo

homes often have miniature gardens overflowing with plants, flowers and perhaps a bonsai tree or two. The same philosophy can be found in the capital's grandest commercial complexes.

Tokyo Midtown Hibiya is a 35-story office and shopping complex that opened in spring 2018. Its most striking feature is its "dancing" concave glass exterior, meant to evoke the elegant balls once held at Hibiya's Rokumeikan, a celebrated Josiah Conder structure where Western and Japanese celebrities mingled in the late 19th century. But Tokyo Midtown Hibiya was also designed to blend in with both the natural environment and the cinema and theater district where it's located. Part of the complex's 2,000 square meters of green space is the Park View Garden, an open terrace on the sixth floor that overlooks historic 16-hectare Hibiya Park next door; viewing the park from the garden is like looking at an infinity pool of vast greenery.

"Tokyo Midtown Hibiya is designed to be a new center for culture, art and greenery, but we wanted to use preexisting features as much as possible," says Tsutomu Mizuno, a project planner with owner Mitsui Fudosan's Hibiya Urban Planning and Development Department. "That's why the preexisting Godzilla statue plaza outside, as well as the graceful curves of the stone facade of the Sanshin Building, which stood on the spot, were incorporated into the overall plan."

As Tokyo Midtown Hibiya welcomes a new generation of culture and nature lovers to Hibiya, another new large-scale project in the central part of the capital will demonstrate the importance of sustainable architecture. Scheduled to open in spring 2020, Tokyo World Gate will revitalize the Toranomon area with a 38-story complex mixing office, commercial, residential and hotel spaces. The tower is a designated national strategic urban planning project themed on linking Tokyo and Japan to the rest of the world. But it's also deeply invested in the history of Toranomon and the natural environment of Minato Ward.

A pedestrian green corridor on the complex surrounded by 5,000 square meters of green space will incorporate a 10-meter elevation change in the



Tokyo World Gate opening in spring 2020 will have a 3,000-square-meter pedestrian green corridor including a stream.



From certain angles, Park View Gardens and the nearby Hibiya Park form one seamless green expanse.

land and include a stream. Dubbed Fukishiro Forest after the existing Fukishiro Inari Shinto shrine, the area will feature open grassy areas, ponds, terrace seating and restaurants; wildlife such as frogs and birds will restore some of the district's biodiversity. A local camphor tree, 20 meters tall and over 100 years old, was painstakingly uprooted, cleaned and transplanted to maintain the site's natural legacy.

"Minato Ward has plenty of nature even though it's downtown," says Yoshihiko Masunaga, director of Real Estate Development Headquarters at developer Mori Trust. "Sometimes this is from the remains of gardens cultivated in the daimyo estates of Edo."

Sustainable architecture, however, isn't just about greenery. It's also about reducing environmental footprints while being resilient in the face of natural disasters. Both Tokyo Midtown Hibiya and Tokyo World Gate incorporate energy-saving measures such as LED lighting, cogeneration facilities and water recycling to save on natural resources. They're also built with seismic isolation systems to withstand the strongest of earthquakes and can serve as emergency shelters for thousands of people in times of disaster.

So next time you walk by one of the capital's newest skyscrapers, remember that these castles in the sky are the heirs of the gardens of daimyo. It's one of many ways in which 17th century Edo remains a living, breathing city in 21st century Tokyo.