Japanese architecture structures created on the islands that constitute Japan. Evidence of prehistoric architecture in Japan has survived in the form of models of terracotta houses buried in tombs and by remains of pit houses of the Jomon, the Neolithic people of Japan.

Religious Architecture

The more highly developed religious architecture of China came to Japan with the introduction of Buddhism in the 6th cent. Late in the 7th cent. the great monastery of Horyu-ji, near Nara, was near completion. The gateway, temple, and pagoda remained practically untouched until the 20th cent., when they were faithfully restored. These buildings illustrate the first epoch of Japanese architecture (6th–8th cent.), which was characterized by gravity, frankness of construction, and simple, vital compositions, sparsely ornamented.

Wood has always been the favorite material, and wooden construction was brought to a structural and artistic culmination as complete as any of the great styles of masonry architecture. Interior wood columns receive the loads, while the thin exterior walls are of woodwork and plaster. As in Greek and Chinese architecture, little use is made of diagonal members, and the framing is almost exclusively a system of uprights and horizontals. Vitality and grace are contributed by the refined curvatures in the column outlines, in the shapes of rafters and brackets, and especially in the great overhanging roofs.

Throughout the 8th cent. the Japanese continued to emulate the architects of China. The gigantic monastery of Todai-ji was begun in 745. A great hall was built to house the gigantic statue of Buddha (daibutsu), in front of which stood twin pagodas, each seven stories high. A distinctly Japanese style of architecture was developed in the late Heian period (898–1185). The famous Phoenix Hall at Uji, near Kyoto, originally a nobleman's villa, was converted (c.1050) into a temple. It represents the apogee of Japanese design. Beautifully situated near a lotus lake, it has a new sense of airiness, with its open porch and lofty central roof.

The emergence of Zen Buddhism coincided with a renewed interest in Chinese architecture during the 13th cent. The plan of the Japanese temple adhered to the symmetrical simplicity of Chinese design. The hall of worship contained a spacious chancel with a flat ceiling, usually painted with the Zen theme of dragons in clouds. By the mid-14th cent. Buddhist architecture tended toward eclecticism and an emphasis on rich sculptural adornment.

Through the centuries Buddhist temples have varied little in general arrangement. In front of the main building, or honden, stands an imposing gateway. Accessory structures include the five-storied square pagoda (often omitted), the drum tower, and the holy font protected by a shed. The Shinto temple, whose pre-Buddhist type is perpetuated, is a small and extremely simple structure, roofed with bark thatch and devoid of color adornment. Greatest importance was attached to the landscape setting, a forested and picturesque hillside being the favored location.

Domestic Architecture

The regard for a natural environment is also consistently reflected in secular building. In the Heian period

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complex building schemes, known as *shinden-zukuri*, were devised for the court nobles. A number of elegant rectangular houses were joined by long corridors that surrounded a landscaped garden and pond. During the Kamakura period (late 12th–14th cent.), the *shinden-zukuri* was modified for the samurai class, and clusters of separate buildings were united under one roof. During this period the standard for domestic architecture was set and has been maintained to the present day.

The principal style of Japanese dwelling of the upper class is unexcelled for its refinement and simplicity. Interior posts form a supporting skeleton for the roof. The exterior walls usually consist of movable panels that slide in grooves. Wood panels (used at night or in rainy weather) alternate with screens of mounted rice paper (used in warm weather). The interior of the house is flexibly subdivided by screens (*shoji*) into a series of airy spaces. Important rooms are provided with a tokonoma, an alcove for the display of a flower arrangement and a few carefully chosen objects of art. Often a separate space is set aside for the tea ceremony, either incorporated within the house or constructed as a pavilion in the garden.

**Castles and Palaces**

An important development of the late 16th cent. arose as a result of feudal warfare. Fortified castles, of which one still exists at Himeji, were based on the European donjon and were erected on high bases formed of enormous stone blocks. In the Edo period (1615–1867) two particularly beautiful palaces were erected in and near Kyoto, both constructed on an asymmetrical and flexible plan. The Nijo palace is noted for its sumptuousness in terms of carved wood, black lacquer, gold decorations, and screen paintings. The Katsura palace is remarkable for its simplicity and elegance and its merging of outdoor and indoor spaces. Here Japanese taste is epitomized in the subtlety and delicacy of the landscaping, with an ingenious arrangement of rocks, pebbles, sand, plants, and water.

**The Modern Era**

The opening of Japan to the West in 1868 led to the adaptation of the European architectural tradition. After World War I the Japanese began to make their own original contributions to the development of the International style in modern architecture. Japanese architects incorporated Western technical innovations into buildings combining traditional and modern styles during the period following World War II. At first strongly influenced by Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and, to a lesser degree, by Frank Lloyd Wright, by the mid-1960s major Japanese architects developed highly individual and imaginative visions that had worldwide following. Among the principal Japanese architects to gain international acclaim since 1950 are Kenzo Tange, Sutemi Horiguchi, Kunio Maekawa, Togo Murano, Yoshiro Taniguchi, Noriaki Kurokawa, and Arata Isozaki.

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