Housing Ideals
Independent research with the Harvey Geiger Travel Fellowship

In challenging the myth of Pruitt Igoe and failed social housing in America, I travelled to Stockholm, Helsinki and Japan in search of modernist housing estates and New Towns that have thrived from the mid-twentieth century, and some, even to this day.

Depicted here are works of architecture from Sweden, Finland and Japan that represent varied paradigms for housing. From the Swedish Million Program, where authorities attempted to build over a million units in under a decade, to 1940s utopian garden cities, the research conducted shows that modernist housing has not only survived, but thrived in the right social and cultural environment.

All photographs are by the author, produced as a photo essay on housing ideals.
Puu-Käpylä, Helsinki, Finland. One of the earliest examples of Garden Cities in Finland.

Årsta, Stockholm, Sweden. A satellite town designed and built in the 1940s by Erik and Tore Ahlsen. It features a variety of programs integrated into a garden city layout.

Telefonplan, Stockholm, Sweden. Originally conceived as a modern factory and residential complex for the telephone company LM Ericsson in 1964, the site has since been expanded for use by the art school Konstfack, several design offices and public housing.

Takashimadaira, Tokyo, Japan. Spread over 1,200 square meters, Takashimadaira danchi is one of the largest surviving danchi estates in Tokyo. A new collaboration between the semipublic Urban Renaissance Agency (UR) and MUJI will see renewed use of once-coveted New Town residential units.

Tapioila, Espoo, Finland. One of several variations of row houses in Tapioila, one of the largest garden cities in Finland.

Södra Ängby, Stockholm, Sweden. Södra Ängby is an example of adapted garden city ideals, and perhaps one of the last surviving products of the 1930s Stockholm Exhibition.

Henrikadalsberget, Stockholm, Sweden. Built in the 1960s after drawings by Erik and Tore Ahlsen. The Henrikadalsberget estate is part of the later portion of the Million Program, an ambitious project of the Swedish government to build a million units of housing in under a decade.

Södra Ängby, Stockholm, Sweden. Södra Ängby is an example of adapted garden city ideals, and perhaps one of the last surviving products of the 1930s Stockholm Exhibition.

Contemporary development near Årsta, Stockholm, Sweden. While much has certainly changed in the past decades, some architectural motifs persist, such as the series of individual balconies, now celebrated as colorful features on the building’s facade.

Telofonplan, Stockholm, Sweden. Originally conceived as a modern factory and residential complex for the telephone company LM Ericsson in 1964, the site has since been expanded for use by the art school Konstfack, several design offices and public housing.

Årsta, Stockholm, Sweden. A satellite town designed and built in the 1940s by Erik and Tore Ahlsen. It features a variety of programs integrated into a garden city layout.

Shibazono, Tokyo, Japan. Once touted as the most dangerous housing estate in Japan, Shibazono danchi is now home to a new wave of immigrant workers. The area’s cultural diversity is evident by dedicated Korean and Chinese services, and a slew of Halal-certified eateries.

Nagakin Capsule Tower, Tokyo, Japan. Although the Nagakin Tower is often depicted by architects as the height of Metabolist achievement, the idea never caught on in Tokyo. Now, the tower is left in dire disrepair, and is allegedly slated for demolition in late 2017.

Bess Showroom, Japan. A mass-produced geodesic dome house? Bess is one of several producers of mass modular houses in Japan, but is particularly well known for capturing the vogue of Heavy Duty and a return to country living.

House Vision 2, Tokyo, Japan. One of several housing prototypes presented at the annual House Vision exhibition. This particular concept pushes the Situationists’ concept of city psychogeography to the extreme by envisioning not houses, but utility walls scattered around the city where groceries and other essentials can be deposited.
It is said that at the westernmost point of the largest city on earth, there is a fence that stands against the foot of a hill. Beyond that fence sits a shrine, right at the start of a forest that expands to form the horizon. Looking back within this fragile boundary, one sees an immensity of a different kind. For as far as the eastern bay, there lies a dense metropolis of skyscrapers and apartment towers surrounded by a suburbia of countless detached houses. Whether you are walking amongst salaried workers through unnamed streets or traversing through compressed subway tunnels, it is challenging to find an individual’s space or place in Tokyo.

In Warabi, some 40 minutes from downtown Tokyo, an unfurled mass of concrete structures stand in defiance of an otherwise monotonous suburb. Built in 1978, Shibazono Danchi (danchi may be literally translated as ‘group-land’) stretches across 20-acres. Fifteen-storey residential blocks — some 2500 households — zig-zag to shield rare greenspace from the aggressive cityscape of Japan’s capital. Conversations are overheard in Mandarin Chinese and Korean grocery stores stand across from chain convenience stores and a row of Halal catering services operate from across the street. Today, in a city where less than 3% of the population is comprised of registered foreign residents, Shibazono is a heterotopia, a break from a homogenous Japanese milieu that makes space for growing Chinese, Korean and, to a smaller extent, South Asian populations. However, that has not always been the case for danchi.

During the Japanese Economic Miracle of the 1960s to 1980s, seemingly endless economic growth created a burgeoning middle class, and along with it, a need for varied, high-quality homes. While the Japanese Housing Corporation (now Urban Renaissance Agency, or UR) had been experimenting with New Towns since the mid 1950s, the danchi model was implemented in the early 1960s, delivering mass housing with modern amenities to an entire post-war generation of Japanese urbanites. Boasting a variety of housing grades, from 1K (Room with adjoined kitchen) to 3LDK (three rooms, dining, kitchen), danchi became part of a ‘housing ladder’ that served as an indicator of social mobility. The danchi projected were sufficiently elastic to be able to accommodate the aspirations of newly wealthy populations, whether that be the Japanese of the 1960s, or the new immigrants of the 1990s. An upcoming collaboration between Muji and UR to renovate Takashimadaira Danchi for young urbanites even offers a tantalizing glimpse into the future of Japanese mass housing. For now, while the danchi has long departed from the ‘Japanese dream’, it has instead become a vital part of that of new immigrants, and as Japan looks to immigration reform in the near future, this role is set to change once more.

Housing ideals typically project highly specific visions of society, but as populations experience social, economic and even demographic shifts, their relevance is modulated towards different groups of people. What started as a solution to housing shortages in the United Kingdom after the Second World War, and imported into Japan as such, eventually became the embodiment of a Japanese modernity. The typology and the image of modern living that danchi projected were sufficiently elastic to be able to accommodate the aspirations of newly wealthy populations, whether that be the ‘Japanese of the 1960s, or the new immigrants of the 1990s. Chinese migration to Japan grew in the run-up to 1989. As Japan entered its ‘lost decades’ of the 1990s and 2000s, this migration abruptly exploded. Occurring primarily through student networks, Chinese nationals began moving to Tokyo first to study, and then to work, through the 1990s. As each moved up their career path in Japan, they brought over their relatives, and person by person, family by family, this move eventually transitioned into a significant migration pattern at the turn of the century. Most of the migrants were middle to upper class, skilled and from larger cities in China, were willing to work the jobs outside of rigid Japanese employment hierarchies and traditional business conglomerates. Due to formal, and informal, restrictions on properties available for rent to foreigners, a large number of these new Chinese immigrants ended up living in danchi. Its low rent and communal qualities were a good fit for an entire community not yet accustomed to Japanese language and society. Shibazono Danchi exists as an example of one of these communities that has now firmly taken root in Tokyo.
New Towns for Nigeria
Archival research and long-form writing project for Portal 9
Critic: Todd Reisz
Co-authored by Thaddeus Lee, Jacqueline Hall and Cecily Ng
Archival Researcher: Thaddeus Lee

This project follows the involvement of foreign experts in two major modernization projects in post-independence Nigeria: the construction of Kainji Dam in the 1960s and the creation of Abuja over a decade later as the new capital city of Nigeria.

Adopting the beat of journalists, much of our team’s writing was spurred on by unexpected research findings and chance encounters with historical figures. Primary research with Maxwell Fry’s and Jane Drew’s archives at the RIBA informed our critique of the long-lasting influence of the Architectural Association’s Department of Tropical Studies on modern development in Nigeria. Declassified files at the National Archives revealed to us the intense jostling of Western powers over economic opportunities in post-colonial landscapes.

The product is a long-form piece of compelling anecdotes, startlingly relevant historical insights and an “archive document” that reproduces archival material for a rich, parallel visual argument.
Between 1964 and 1968, 480 square miles of land by the Niger River was flooded in central west Nigeria by the construction of the Kainji Dam and reservoir. Specially designed ships bore 230,000 tons of cement from Norway that would be used to build the dam. Twelve 80 megawatt Kaplan turbines, supplied and set into the massive dam by English Electric, generated hydroelectric power that fed into a 120-ton transformer – the only machine of its kind in the world by 1968. Eighty-nine engineers and contractors from Britain, the Netherlands, Canada and Italy supervised the planning and construction of the dam. At the peak of building activity, 20,000 people were working simultaneously towards a common goal: to establish “a foundation stone for the modernization of Nigeria.”

Building an image of statehood for a newly independent Nigeria was another impetus for this ambitious plan that promised electricity, improved fishing, irrigation and river transportation. While the dam did foster self-reliance, the project prolonged the relationship between Britain and Nigeria even after Britain granted Nigeria independence in 1960. The Niger Dams Project itself was started in 1951 by the British and its completion represented a remaining vestige of colonial rule. While the Niger Dams Authority, a government group that oversaw the design and construction of the project, was, on paper, composed of local Nigerian leaders, it was led by Canadian engineer Jasper Vosper and the director, Dr. Otto Köenigsberger, later in the evening, 24 were from beyond the UK, having come to London from countries such as India and Iraq, and even as far as Indonesia.

This jocular occasion would not have been possible without the decades of foundational work by Fry and Drew. After all, it is from Fry that Dr. Köenigsberger inherited the helm of the Tropical Studies program. From as far back as 1946, Fry and Drew were vocal that architectural practice in tropical countries required a fundamentally new methodology. At an annual general meeting for “Planning and Housing” at the AA, they deliver a paper on their work in the tropics:

“It is a country where everything is personal,” Fry declares of “Africa.”

“Instead of filling out a form, if you want to find out anything… you say to somebody, ‘how do I find out about this?’”

“Oh, you go to Puppy Wilson; you know him,” someone might answer.

“So you go to Puppy Wilson and say: ‘Look, Puppy, I want to know about so-and-so,’ and he says: ‘There are no records and never have been; you must go to so-and-so and he will tell you.’”

With this anecdote, Fry and Drew prescribe not just an understanding of environmental conditions, but a personal interaction with people who have local knowledge of a project. In their years of experience in Africa, Fry with the Royal Engineers during World War II and Drew in her numerous travels across the continent, the pair garnered a reputation for being Britain’s de facto experts on building in the colonial tropics. This pedagogical and professional drive not only sowed the seed for the inauguration of the AA’s Department of Tropical Studies in 1955, but led the duo through multiple projects in Africa and even to the Indian Punjab capital of Chandigarh, a collaborative project with Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret.
**What is Juutaku?**

Senior Independent Project
Advisors: Sunil Baid (Yale School of Architecture), Professor William Kelly (Sumitomo Professor of Japanese Studies, Department of Anthropology, Yale University)

**What is Juutaku?**: Revisiting the emergence of the modern Japanese house takes the form of an anthology of essays.

Three essays on Katsura Villa, Japanese danchi estates and juutaku and the architectural object form the bulk of this work, interspersed with incisive historiographical critiques and more leisurely musings about an array of Japanese houses.

**Abstract**

Few architectural subjects have met the same persistent popularity as that of the Japanese residence or juutaku, both within Japan and without. From the works of Bruno Taut and Frank Lloyd Wright, to contemporary publications on variations of the topic “sumai no sekkei” (the design of houses), this fascination is sustained by a constant feedback between the Japanese people’s own attention to their dwellings and an external interest in more exceptional examples of Japanese architecture. The title of this project is a reflection on the former, playing off Japanese rhetoric titling in the form of “-te nan darou ka?” or “What is [a particular topic]?”. Much of this discourse, however, is dominated by an aesthetic narrative that conflates aesthetics with ethnography, and in the words of social anthropologist Dr. Inge Daniels, “thrive[s] on the relentless fascination with Japan as the quintessential, exotic ‘other.’” This project makes the argument that if architecture seeks to translate and interpret other cultures, it should not do so within the paradigm of experimental science, in search of “fundamentals” or “essential elements”, but instead, adopt an ethnographic approach in studying aesthetic functions in a particular environment with all its slippages, contradictions and complexities.

This thesis is formed by two main parts. It begins with an exploration of the analytical paradigms present in seminal works on Japanese aesthetics, such as Okakura Kakuzō’s ‘Book of Tea’ (1906) and Junichiro Tanizaki’s ‘In Praise of Shadows’ (1933), with the goal of identifying cultural and historical frameworks that function to canonize a “Japanese architecture.” Against this baseline of established viewpoints, this study will proceed to explore selected instances of the Japanese home that deviate from its popular conception in an attempt to introduce nuance and ethnographic detail to existing discourse. Taking the form of photographic essays and ethnographic sketches, this second portion of the project will involve historical works by Frank Lloyd Wright and Kunio Maekawa, as well as examples of mass produced single family houses from companies such as Daiwa House and Muji.

In the contemporary climate of an architecture attempting to assert the social and political relevance of aesthetics, this project serves as a kind of historical and ethnographic counterpoint, arguing that a prevailing aesthetic trend in architecture remains tethered to a set of topographical and regional considerations that deserve the architect’s equal attention.
“The ideals of Teaism ... the extreme simplicity and chasteness of its scheme of decoration, appears to foreigners almost barren.”

Tanizaki, In Praise of Shadows (1933)

Okakura, Book of Tea (1906)

“... the critical question has been raised as to which elements of Japan’s culture are essentially Japanese in character and which are not.”

Taut, Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture (1936)

“Shrine architecture, which reached completion in the Ise Shrine, is the prototype of pure Japanese architecture. The latter has survived to the present day despite its exposure to successive waves of influence from the highly developed civilization of China.”

Tange, Ise: Prototype of Japanese Architecture (1964)
Maekawa House, Tokyo, Japan. Built by Kunio Maekawa in 1942, the house is a mix of Japanese and Western influences, featuring shoji screens adapted for framed windows and a full Frankfurt kitchen.

Yodokki Guest House, Ashiya, Japan. The last surviving Frank Lloyd Wright residence in Japan. Where does Wright’s signature style start and its strong Japanese influence end? Is this house a juutaku?

Tower House, Tokyo, Japan. Designed by Takamatsu Azuma for a 20 sq m plot of land, the Tower House, also known as the Azuma Residence.

Garage, Kyoto, Japan. A curious observation of a garage perfectly scaled to one of Japan’s ubiquitous “bread” vans!

Katsura Villa, Kyoto, Japan. Existing as both physical architecture and discursive site, Prince Toshihito’s Katsura Villa is often hailed as the archetypal Japanese house.

Mie Prefectural Office, Uchiyama, Japan. Western conservation practices are not commonplace in Japan, and the best place to find conserved Meiji and Edo buildings are actually in the theme park-like Meiji-mura and Edo Open-Air architectural museums. The Mie Prefectural Office was used as a residence by Mie officials and featured Western-styled public rooms, but traditional Japanese residences. This building was transplanted from Mie to the museum in Aichi Prefecture!

Konchi-in, Kyoto, Japan. A partially restored zen temple building in the Konchi-in sub-temple complex. While stereotypes of Japanese aesthetics might dictate that Zen involves white, black and natural finishes, polychromatic schemes were actually fairly common in Zen temples.

Diorama of Shinkotoba Bus Settlement, Osaka Museum of Housing and Living, Osaka, Japan. From a darker moment of Japan’s history, bus villages were made from charcoal buses in post-war Japan and clustered into village-like compounds.

Daiwa House Museum, Nara, Japan. From a visit to the Daiwa House factory in Nara, Japan. These images show one of Daiwa House’s first products, a modular steel pipe structure for outdoor storage and light shelter.

ABC Showroom, Osaka, Japan. House showrooms like this are a common sight around Japan, where various companies build full, and often functioning, houses to showcase their product offerings. With the relatively high rate of residential construction in Japan, a large proportion of houses are prefabricated, or make use of proprietary module-based construction systems.

Yoshino Cedar House, Go Hasegawa for AirBnB. A concept house for an AirBnB-enabled work-share house in rural Japan, featuring ample use of Japanese sugi cedar.

Tekijuku, Osaka, Japan. A rare example of an in-place conservation of an Osaka school complex. This was the house of Ogata Koan, a doctor and scholar of Dutch studies. It is a prime example of how conservation techniques are being developed for historical Japanese structures.

What is juutaku?
Part of an anthology of essays

What is modern? - Meiji Slippages

Japanese carpenters were said to have built the Mie Prefectural Office in 1879 by copying hand-me-down details from early Western architects in Japan and by imitating known architectural precedents. Designed to be the public face of Governor Sadatada Iwamura’s office, it was the place where he would receive officials and dignitaries, but not the venue where he would host his guests. There would have been more typical Japanese villas for that purpose. Painted stark white and flaunting a two-story veranda, the Mie Prefectural Office is reminiscent of colonial offices from beyond Japan. Yet, atop its wooden structure sits a Japanese hip-and-gable roof, executed in ceramic tile with copper and gold ornaments. Inside, more details invite curiosity. Lattice work is designed and sculpted to resemble trimming and fine-grained wooden doors are painted over with coarser patterns. In the multi-purpose Aya-no-ma, decorative wallpaper is applied to the ceiling, but still, familiar wooden grid shows through. The paper is a light iridescent gold, on which float cloud motifs unlike that of byobu. These small details keep me transfixed for quite some time.

The Mie Prefectural Office is subtle compared to the ostentatious tendencies of the gicyofu. Rendered in polychrome, with a vast palette of motifs, ranging from kara-hafu Chinese gables to painted brick patterns, the pseudo-Western style, as it is called by Stewart, defies expectations of what might be defined as Japanese architecture. An exploration of gicyofu’s eclectic nature leads Stewart to speculate on an equally adventurous list of sources: all plausible but not definitive. In Seju Tatsushi’s Kaichi School in Matsumoto, Nagano, Stewart sees echoes of the ornamental flourishes of the late Tokugawa Nikko temples, while observing that its choice of motifs is eerily similar to that of contemporaneous architecture in Hong Kong. The polychromatic imitation of materials bears striking resemblance to the rendering of Western-style architecture in nishiki-e woodblock prints, which in turn, were inspired copies of optique pictures introduced to Japan by early Dutch traders. These images often featured one-point perspectives of famous European cities, such as Amsterdam or London, and were viewed through a mirrored device known as an optique. The Japanese versions of these prints, however, often defaulted to blue and red hues in representing different architectural materials. It is this polychromic tendency that Stewart sees in gicyofu. Adopted mostly with commercial or public buildings, it is no wonder that gicyofu also came to be known as kamban, or signboard architecture.

The Meiji Period (1868 – 1912) is often identified as the start of modern Japan and characterized by the influx of foreign trade and Western influences. Its architecture is most often associated with the brick buildings of Ginza, Tokyo or the bridges, offices and cultural institutions scattered across Osaka. Meiji architecture, however, did not quite reach the Japanese home. With the exception of the villas of a handful of rich officials and merchants, what is today known as Meiji architecture existed very much for the public realm of Japan. It is such the case that in 1877, when American academic Edward Morse conducts an ambitious survey of Japanese homes, traces of Meiji or even Western-inspired architecture is nowhere in sight. With regards to the aesthetics of architecture, at least, the Japanese home remained unchanged for some time. In dress and in speech, however, some Japanese families began to adopt Western practices, undoubtedly in response to the sudden exposure of Japan to foreign trade. It is the same disjunction that we might observe in Ōakura Kazuo’s advice to his son to not wear Japanese dress before foreigners unless his English was up to par.

Dismissing Meiji architecture as possessing a veneer of Western influence, however, is to deny the complex cultural interactions at play in its creation. Historian Marius Jansen makes note of the self-conscious agency of the Meiji Japanese in determining the course of architecture in this new era. Left to their own devices, he argues, foreign architects would have “implanted their own ideas of an exotic Orient” in Meiji buildings, and it was actually up to the Japanese to insist otherwise. As Jansen writes, “The Japanese wanted to have their Westernization be honest.” The Meiji government would also have a hand in this, with committees often turning down foreign plans for buildings on the grounds that they were too “oriental.” This curation of aesthetic vogue also has historical precedence in Japan, such as with the rehashing of Muromachi era (1336 – 1573) Chinese influences in the rebuilding of Buddhist temples in the early Tokugawa period (1603 – 1667). While many of these would have been perpetuated by Chinese abbots in Japan, it is in this atmosphere that Jansen frames the emergence of the eclectic architecture of the Nikko temples. Are we to argue that this cosmopolitan architecture is not, also, Japanese?

In 1877, standing in the tea room of a Japanese merchant, Edward Morse’s curiosity is piqued by distinctive Chinese influences on design and furnishing. Along with a sketch of some of these features on the room’s ceiling, he offers this thought:

Whether [the owner] had got his ideas from books, or had evolved them from his inner consciousness, I do not know; certain it is, that although he had worked into its structure a number of features actually brought from China, I must say that in my limited observations in that country I saw nothing approaching such an interior or building.

Perhaps, Morse is missing the point here, for just as he was building up a narrative of Japanese homes, this Japanese person was re-telling an aesthetic narrative of China. What did these motifs mean to this Japanese man? Had he gone to China? If not, how did he come to imagine this culture West of Japan? How I wish Morse had asked those questions.
立 is a homonym of "Lee" and in Japanese, it is a homonym for "to build", in the architectural sense. It is a multi-lingual pun, but also a simple character with profound meaning. To stand, to set up, to establish, to lay down, to draw up.