

MIID ADF SPECIAL AWARD 2018 - THE GRANARY, KUCHING, SARAWAK

RESEARCH TRIP - TOKYO 2019

REPORT BY AR. TINA LAU KOR TING



Introduction

During the Malaysian Institute of Interior Designers (MIID) Annual Ball & Awards on the 16th November 2018 held in Kuala Lumpur, I won a special award from the Aoyama Design Forum (ADF) and MIID which included a research trip to Tokyo, Japan. This report is a diary of the 9 days I spent in Tokyo, out of which 3 days were spent with representatives from the ADF and Garde International.

Day 1 - Monday 2 March 2019

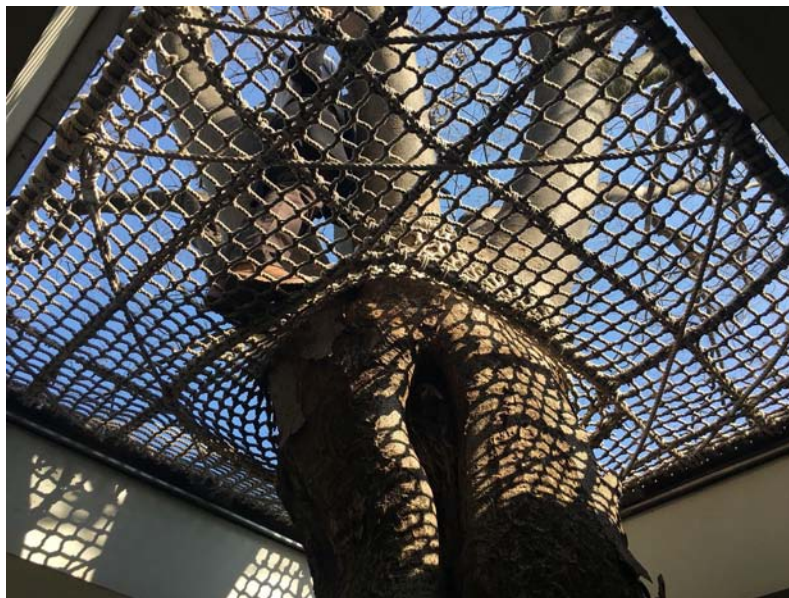
Fuji Kindergarten, Tachikawa

We set off early from the Nippon Seinenkan Hotel in Shinjuku-ku at 7:00am to catch the train to visit the **Fuji Kindergarten** in Tachikawa designed by Tezuka Architects. Even though we had arrived late the night before from Kuala Lumpur, we knew it would be our only chance to visit the kindergarten as it is only open to the public twice in a year. It so happened that the kindergarten was conducting an Open Day that coincided with our trip. After 2 train changes and a 15 minute walk from Tachikawa Station, we arrived at the Fuji Kindergarten at 9:00am and there was already a large crowd forming. Visitors from around the world had come to visit - educators, tourists, curious parents - there was even a small group from Malaysia that had come to visit!



Top – Aerial view of the roof deck where the children can run above the classrooms several times during the day.

The tour started with a video presentation in Japanese, followed by a short speech from the principal. After that we were free to walk around the grounds and the building. The entire building is a ring where all the classrooms look into the central courtyard. There is no play equipment in the courtyard; instead the building resembles one large playground itself. Children can play and run around the roof area above the classrooms, and there are even skylights that bring natural light into the classrooms. There are even some existing trees scattered throughout the classrooms, and they form small courtyards where there are nets for the children to lie on and play around the trees on the roof level. They also provide children with a porthole to peek at their classmates from above or below in the classrooms.



Left – The trees have nets around them for the children to walk over the courtyard and play around the trees.

There is a strong sense that the building and spaces within have been designed purposefully to suit a child's scale. The ceiling height in the classrooms is low for normal standards - the roof height is only 2.1 metres tall. However, one hardly feels any discomfort when they are inside the classrooms. This is because there are large sliding doors that are kept fully open when the weather or season permits, allowing constant interaction and seamless connectivity with the outdoors and natural elements. This close connection between the levels enables the children to access the roof easily as they only have to climb a set of stairs. There is also a slide from the roof deck where the children can slide down from the roof to the ground in the central courtyard.



Left Top & Bottom – The slide that starts at the roof deck where the children can slide down to the central courtyard.



Interestingly enough, there are no walls that divide the classrooms as well. Instead, there are light-weight timber boxes that can be stacked to create shelves for storage or display. Instead of imposing physical boundaries normally found in schools, the building has been designed to form a continuous, uninterrupted flow of space that encourages free play and learning from the environment, not just inside a classroom.



Top – There are no full-height wall divisions between classrooms. Instead, furniture is used to define boundaries and space for different functions.



Top – Courtyards with existing trees are scattered throughout the classrooms, further blurring the boundaries between inside and outside.

The school follows the Montessori Method, an educational approach where children are given the freedom to learn via discovery from their surroundings instead of in a traditional classroom. The principal explained an example - in the central courtyard there are water taps for the children to wash their hands after they play. There are no basins and on the floor there are round timber logs set in the grass to form a hard floor surface. When the children turn on the tap, the water will fall and splatter onto the ground. The children will realise that if they turn the water taps on too strongly, they will have to take a step back as more water will splatter onto them from the floor. They will then learn to adjust the strength of the water that comes out of the taps so that the water doesn't splatter onto them. This simple and inexpensive teaching method helps the children to learn how to use a simple water tap effectively as well as teaching them not to waste water.



Left - Water taps in courtyard teach children how to control and turn on taps manually.

Fuji Kindergarten shows that architecture and design can work hand-in-hand with the school in order to provide a built environment where the children can interact with and learn from as well. It shows how our built environment can have an enormous influence on how we learn, play, work and live. Outstanding design outcomes are not judged only by construction quality or fulfilling budget constraints. Rather, if the result of a well-designed building has a positive effect that benefits the inhabitants of the space, both current and in the future, that alone defines what a successful piece of architecture or design is.



Top Left & Right – Children are free to play in the open courtyard that is central to the design. The classrooms are seamless with the exterior.

Tama Art University Library, Hachioji Campus

The same day we visited the Fuji Kindergarten, we took a train to visit the **Tama Art University** in Hachioji. We were there to visit the Tama Art University Library designed by Toyo Ito & Associates, Architects. The library is not far from the main entrance; however the building's distinct large arched windows on the facade were instantly recognisable from a distance. In front of the library there is a garden with minimal amount of trees, and the ground has a gentle slope that stretches up to the building.



Top – Approaching the Tama Art University Library from the main entrance.

One is immediately drawn to the majestic-looking structure that looks like there are two bridges with arches stacked on top of each other. It is an elegant building with reinforced concrete curved wall surfaces that extrude upwards from the ground. The arched windows that wrap all four sides of the building reflect the sky beautifully in the day and the corners of the building appear thin and razor sharp. From the outside, one can see the concrete arches continuing into the interior space. There is a cafeteria on the ground level when one enters the building as well as a large gallery that serves as a kind of thoroughfare for people crossing the campus. As we walked across the gallery, we began to realise that the floor was sloped as well; a continuation of the seamless flow of space from the front garden into the library. One feels that they are still within the scenery of the garden when they in fact inside the library.



Left – The curved glass and concrete façade with its arched windows reflect the surroundings and sky above.

We weren't allowed to take photographs inside the building; however visitors can make appointments with the library staff to visit. There are many interior pictures of the library on the internet, so we were quite familiar with what it looked like. However, the feeling of being in the actual space was quite breathtaking. As expected, it was extremely quiet, but the silence only added to the ethereal quality of the space. Its' characteristic soaring concrete arches span across different widths - some longer than 10 metres. The arches cross at several points and create intersections that help to softly articulate different zones within the floor plate. Where there is a need for separation, there is never a solid boundary that divides the spaces. Instead, there are metal grilled screens that act as partitions to fill the void below the arches, or book shelves that curve and bend to form dividers that are just tall enough to reach your head. This ensures that there is spatial continuity even when there is a need to define different zones.



Top - The front garden slopes upwards to the main entrance, where one can see the arches continuing inside the building.

With constant natural light filling the interior space, there is minimal use of direct artificial lighting. A minimal material and colour palette is utilised - concrete, white painted steel, glass and charcoal-coloured carpet. The library feels like a silent, sacred space that flows quietly from one realm to another - similar to walking through a forest or cave. The arches create arcade-like spaces where one passes through, discovering their own ways to interact with the meandering books and reading materials found in the library.



Left – The corners of the building appear razor sharp against the sky.

Day 2 - Tuesday 3 March 2019

Nezu Museum, Minamiaoyama

True to the weather forecast, it rained for the entire day from the moment we left our hotel in the morning. We started off our day by dredging in the rain to take the Ginza train line to Omote-Sando station. After a Tonkotsu lunch and a 10 minute walk, we reached the **Nezu Museum**, designed by Kengo Kuma Associates. Once the private residence of the Nezu family, the museum sits on a large compound with a beautiful garden and tea rooms that are open to the public.



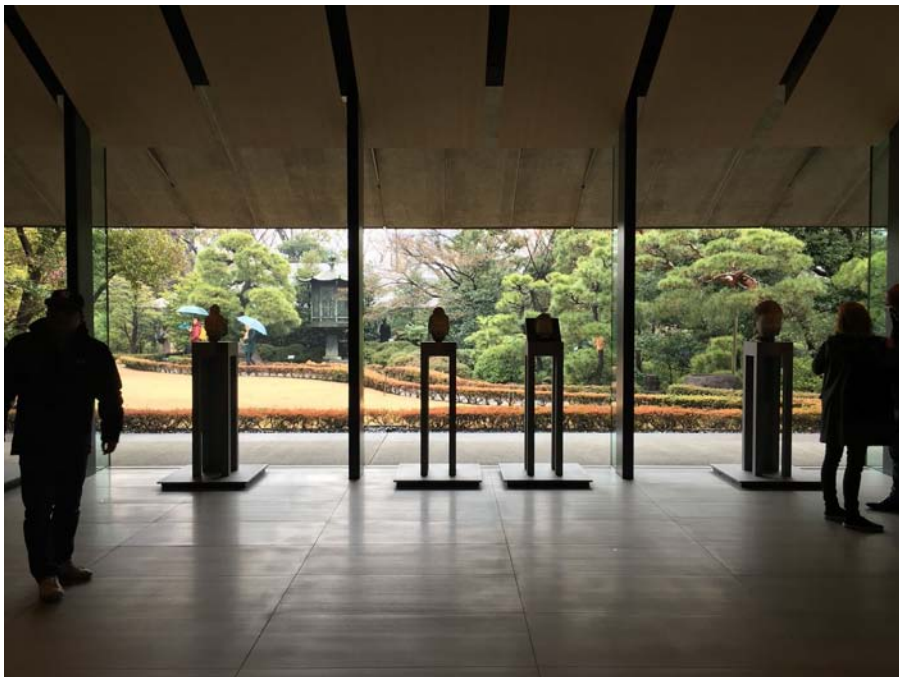
Left - One has to walk past an open corridor to get inside the museum, flanked by a bamboo hedge on one side.

Located somewhere between the fashionable Omotesando Avenue and the woods of Meiji Shrine, the entrance to the museum is behind a bamboo thicket from the street. Once we walked through the threshold, we were presented with a view of a long open corridor underneath the large roof eaves and the bamboo thicket on one side. Although the weather was miserable, it was amazing to see the raindrops fall against the backdrop of bamboo as we walked along the path to the entrance. Walking along this path made us feel that we were taking part in some form of ritual; it was almost as if we were transitioning from the hustle and bustle of the street and becoming enveloped in the calm embrace of nature, with the gentle sound of raindrops on the pebbles following us.



Left - The interior of the museum is kept minimal and streamlined, with a focus on panoramic views to the garden outside.

It is almost as if the path leading to the entrance was preparing us to quieten our hearts - to be in a calm state of mind when entering the museum. We left our umbrellas in cleverly-designed holders outside and stepped into the double-height space shaped by the angular pitch of the roof. Inside, the museum is wrapped in soft Chinese grey stone and lightweight bamboo panels. The Chinese stone extends to the outside, further blurring the distinction between the interior and exterior. The entire wall that faces the garden is glass, and this brings the landscape inside the building and it becomes part of the exhibition. Buddhist statues align the glazed wall and they are softly lit so as to not distract the views of the garden. The galleries that display the works are simple, and each gallery is devoted to a different artistic or craft discipline. Works are displayed in simple glass cabinets, and lighting are kept to the minimum with focus only onto the artifacts on display.



Left - Buddhist statues align the windows with the backdrop of the garden behind.

From the museum, we ventured out to the garden where the cafe is located. As we walked further down it became apparent that the grounds were much larger than we thought. The windy stone paved paths took us downwards and we passed little traditional huts raised on stilts that housed the tea rooms. We came across a small lake against a backdrop of lush greenery and passed by small shrines dedicated to different deities or scholars.

The Nezu Museum and its garden can be seen as a device of unifying the city and the forest. The building itself references the vernacular with its large, gentle sloping roof that is a distinct characteristic of Japanese traditional architecture. There is nothing ostentatious about the museum given its significance; rather it sits humbly within its surroundings, giving a sense of harmony between the building and the garden.



Top Left & Right – Interior of the museum with the dramatic sloped ceiling following the roof pitch.



Left – The glass reflects the underside of the pitched roof and floor – blurring the boundaries between the exterior and interior.



Left – The picturesque museum garden with native plants and greenery.

Day 3 - Tuesday 4 March 2019

Aman Tokyo and Omotesando Hills

Just before we left for Tokyo, we looked up some old contacts to arrange a visit to the **Aman Tokyo**, designed by Kerry Hill Architects. Located in a prestigious financial district in Tokyo, the Aman occupies the top 6 levels of the Otemachi Tower. The hotel shares the building with a prominent financial group, and the ground and lower basement levels consist of food and beverage retail shops that connect to subway lines. The configuration of the building is a hybrid of different typologies and programs; typical of urban buildings in Tokyo to make economic sense of the prime site.



Left – Concierge's Desk at the Ground Floor.

Riding up the small, softly-lit lift to the lobby, this prolonged the sense of compression before we arrived to the thirty-third level into an intimate reception space. As we walked past the reception table, we were released into a huge space that soared at least 6 storeys high. Nothing prepared us for the sheer vastness of the space - it was truly breathtaking as our eyes were drawn upwards to the giant lantern made out of *washi* paper that wrapped the top half of the huge space. This transition from an intimate space to a majestic scale played with our expectations on scale, proportion and light in a theatrical fashion.



Top – The hotel lobby with the soaring lantern that wraps the top half the space.

In the centre of this space there is a traditional stone garden and a water pond with cherry blossoms in bloom. We walked 3 steps up a raised platform to walk around the lobby, similar to that of a verandah that wraps around a house or a courtyard, so that we could walk around the lobby and enjoy the beauty of the gardens. It was only later that I discovered that the architects had created an *egawa* - a verandah-like strip around a house found in traditional Japanese houses. The lounge and restaurant sits on this raised platform, overlooking the lobby on one side and facing the panoramic view of the Imperial Palace Gardens and the rest of the city. The lounge is open to the public, however it has been cleverly arranged so that there are zones for quiet and confidential conversation through screens that help to define and frame the space. Ultimately, it is a space when one can enjoy solitude as well watching people come and go in the lobby - adding to the theatrical feel of the lobby and lounge.



Left – Set on a raised platform to the side of the lobby, the *egawa* enables people to walk around the lobby and admire the stone garden and water pond with the cherry blossom tree.

The hotel rooms and suites are equally as comfortable and elegantly designed inspired by traditional Japanese residential design. At 71 square metres, the rooms are Tokyo's largest entry-level hotel rooms in the city and they overlook the city's skyline or the Imperial Palace Gardens. There is a small foyer when you enter the room, where one has to turn to enter the bedroom which is a small luxury for typical hotel rooms. The material palette is kept simple - wood, washi paper for sliding *shoji* screens and stone. The bathroom is large and has a traditional soaking tub.



Left – The sitting area in one of the typical hotel rooms is based on traditional Japanese residential designs.

I was impressed by the interior design of this hotel - it was a carefully detailed exercise in blending traditional Japanese designs with modern sensibilities. There was nothing ostentatious or pretentious about the spaces - even in the huge lobby with the soaring ceiling height. There seemed to be a purpose for each element, and everything had been thought through in detail - such as the way a visitor or hotel guest would approach or walk around the lobby; what they would see, experience and savour.

In the afternoon, we visited Omotesando, Aoyama where we walked along the famous street known as the Tokyo's Champs-Élysées. There are endless boutiques of large brand names lining the street and it was bustling with people. We came here to visit **Omotesando Hills** in particular, a large shopping and residential complex designed by Tadao Ando Architect & Associates. It occupies a long stretch of Omotesando Avenue, however the facade is quite simple considering that the site it sits on occupies some of the most famous luxury brands in the world. There are two levels of apartments above the retail levels - the only indication that they are residences is the repeated rows of balconies that face the street. The facade is composed of glass and concrete, typical of the materials used by Tadao Ando in his architecture. As the site slopes upwards, the shops on the ground floor follow the slope as well. By the time one has finished walked to one end of the building, one would have in fact reached half a storey above in the building.



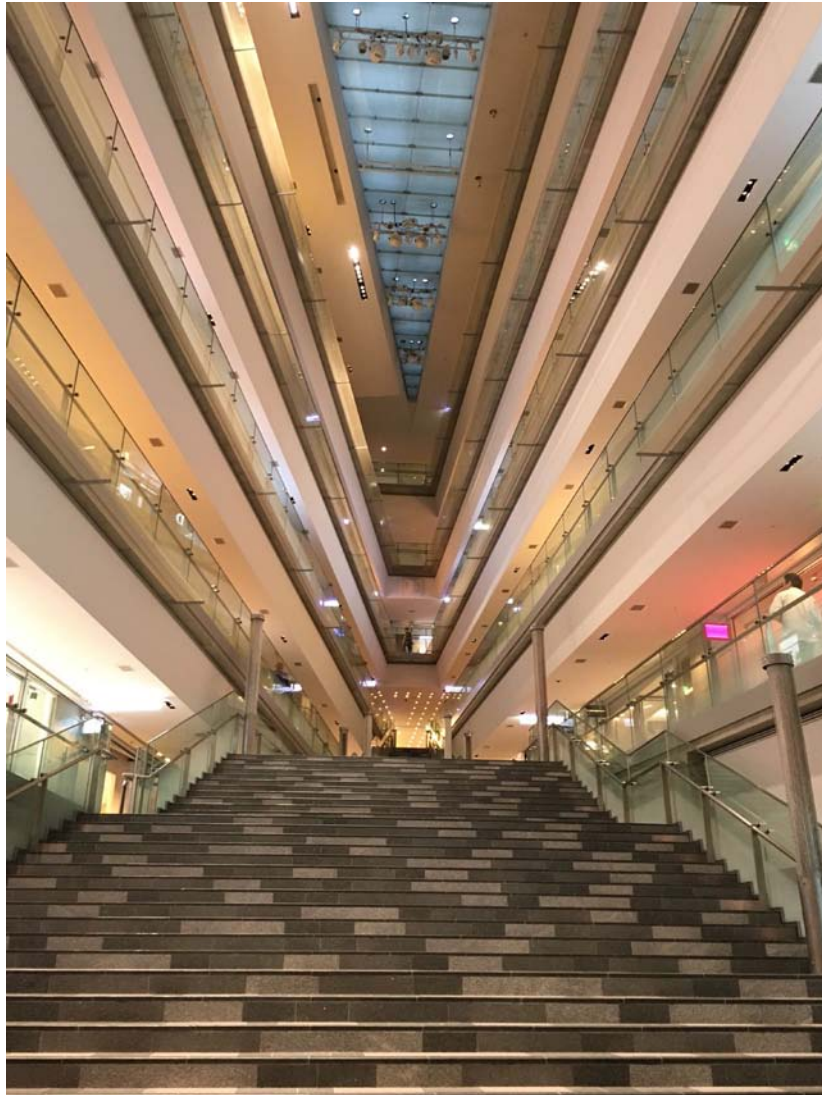
Left - Omotesando Hills designed by Tadao Ando Architect & Associates. The entire interior space is laid out in a spiral arrangement, where one walks on a gentle ramp around the shops.

When we entered the building, it became clear that the building was purposely designed to create an inwards-looking mall. Rather than focusing on the external facade, most of the design attempts had been directed at creating an inner street lined with shops on both sides of the atrium. Natural light falls through the atrium from above, and the shopping centre actually goes several levels below ground. The most impressive thing about the interior space is that it has been laid out in a spiral arrangement - the open corridors that one uses to pass by shops are actually ramps. This is where it connects with the outside by following the natural slope of the street, and one can walk through the entire shopping centre without the use of an escalator (although there are escalators scattered throughout the mall). In the atrium, there is a large grand staircase that fills the void and connects three stories from the lowest level.



Left - A central stairs in the middle of the atrium connects the upper floors to the lower level.

Internally, Omotesando Hills does have a feeling reminiscent of Parisian iron-and-glass covered arcades and attempts to create 'streets' through the winding spiral ramps finished in stone. There are sounds of water and nature over the mall's speakers, and artificial lighting has been kept to the minimum in order not to overpower the natural light streaming through the atrium. However, it doesn't disguise the fact that one is still inside a shopping centre even though the experience is pleasantly different from other typical shopping malls.



Top – The atrium brings in natural light through to the interior of the shopping complex.

Day 4 - Tuesday 5 March 2019

ADF Day 1 - Research Tour of Ginza

This was the first day of the official Aoyama Design Forum tour, and it started in the morning from the Park Hotel Tokyo in Minato where we met Yukiyo Izuta and Isabella Pozo from Garde International. From there, we walked to Tokyo Plaza Ginza where we had lunch at **The Apollo**, a contemporary Greek restaurant hailing from Sydney, Australia. The walk to Tokyo Plaza Ginza was an experience itself - walking over walkways raised high above from the street level, they connect to many of the major office towers and elevated railway stations in this part of the city. They offer panoramic views of the city's skyline and it was a good way of seeing the city as we walked to our destination. We walked past the **Dentsu Building** designed by the renowned French architect Jean Nouvel.



Top Left & Right – Elevated walkways linking major landmarks in the city and the Dentsu Building designed by French architect Jean Nouvel

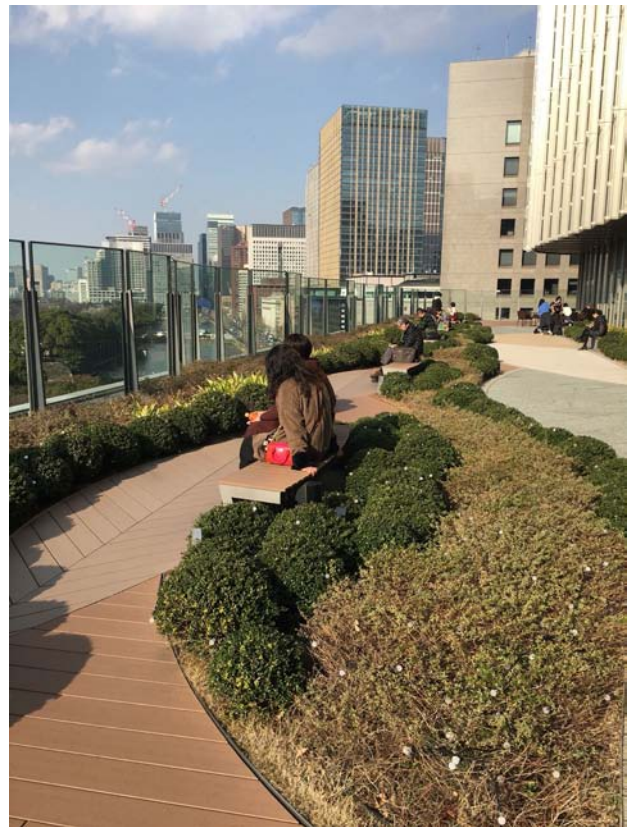
At lunch, we met with two other women designers from Garde International and had interesting conversations with topics ranging from the difference between working cultures in Japan, Malaysia and Australia and balancing a career in architecture with a young family.



Top – Lunch at the Apollo with Yukiyo Izuta (top right) and Isabella Pozo (bottom left) and designers from Garde International.

After lunch, Yukiyo and Isabella brought me around Ginza to visit some of the popular shopping malls. Our first stop was **Tokyo Midtown Hibiya**, a recently completed mixed-use development covering over 190,000 square metres. The site was once occupied by the Showa era Sanshin Building built in 1929, however it was demolished in 2007. There isn't much in the new building to remind us of the Sanshin Building, however there is a wall photo-montage of the old building tucked-away in a corridor on one of the upper levels. The building was built in the art-deco style, with arcades on the lower floors and ornate carvings and grand staircases in the interior. It would have been interesting if there had been more effort to retain some

aspects of the old building and merge it with its' new function, as well as encapsulating a feeling of its glamorous past. There are some elements of art-deco style in the new design, seen on the treatment of the handrail designs. Apart from that there is very little reference to the past and there is nothing unique that distinguishes this shopping mall from another. However, there are some interesting shops inside the shopping centre that is reminiscent of the past - such as the Hibiya Central Market. On the top level of the shopping mall podium, there is an impressive large roof garden with panoramic views of the city and Imperial Palace gardens.



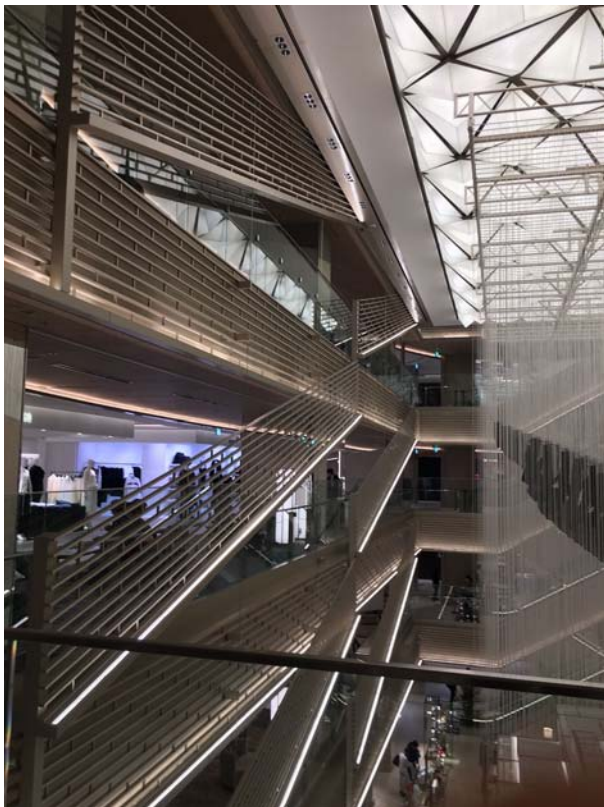
Top Left & Right - The entrance to Tokyo Midtown Hibiya and the Rooftop Garden that is accessible to the public.

As we walked to our next destination, we passed by the **Ginza Sony Garden**, a “changing park” that starts on the ground level and extends five floors underground, including a floor that is directly connected to the Tokyo Metro Ginza Station. On the ground or first floor, there is a garden called *Ao Ginza Tokyo* produced by Seijun Nishihata, known as the “plant hunter” with exotic plants from all over the world.



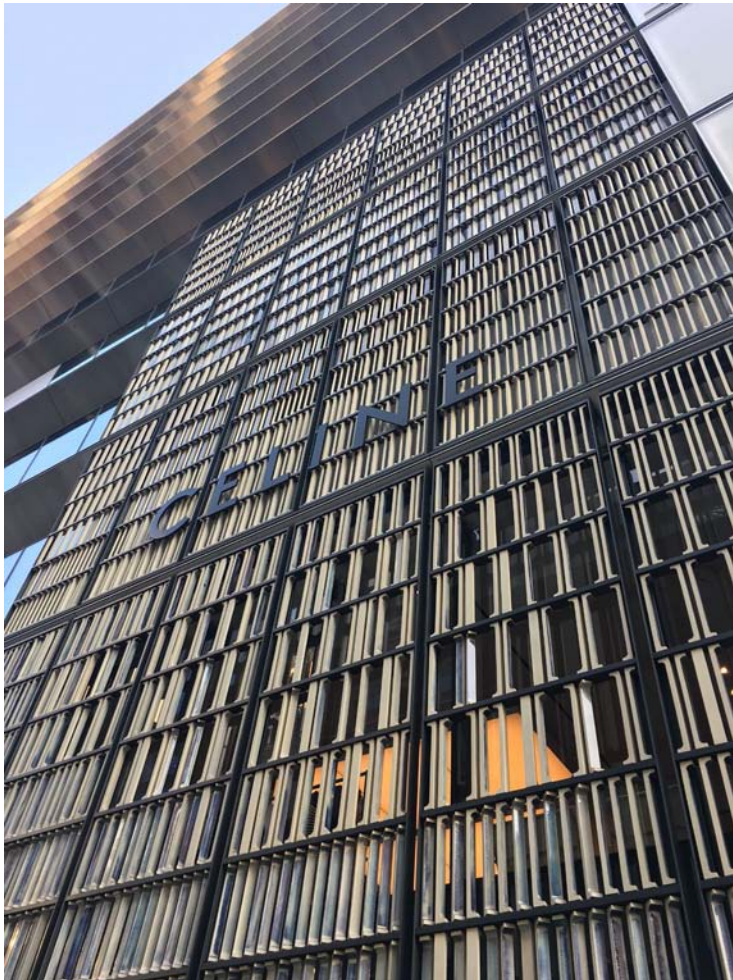
Top – Ginza Sony Garden by the “Plant Hunter” Seijun Nishihata, with unusual, exotic plants and trees from all over the world.

Next we visited **Ginza Six**, the largest luxury shopping complex in the Ginza area. The name Ginza Six reflects the building address which is Ginza 6-chome and is home to over 240 stores. The building was designed by Taniguchi and Associates and the interiors were designed by Gwenael Nicolas of the firm Curiosity. Luxury brand name boutiques occupy the ground level; interestingly the building facade is composed of vertical 'shoplots' with varying shop front heights, some reaching as high as five storeys. Inspired by *noren*, traditional Japanese sunshades, the building's design seeks to blend traditional Japanese traditions with contemporary techniques. Outwardly, the building presents a very modern outlook - the facade is a blend of glass, steel and aluminium. However, there are glimpses of traditional Japanese design inspirations in the interior - such as the lattice screens that wrap and zigzag around the central atrium to an illuminated sculptural ceiling with *asanoha* motifs. The central atrium also displays works of public art - there was an art installation composed of black and white strings floating and suspended in space. There is also a vertical garden designed by Patrick Blanc spanning over 3 storeys tall filled with native greenery and plants, as well as a digital waterfall by teamLab.



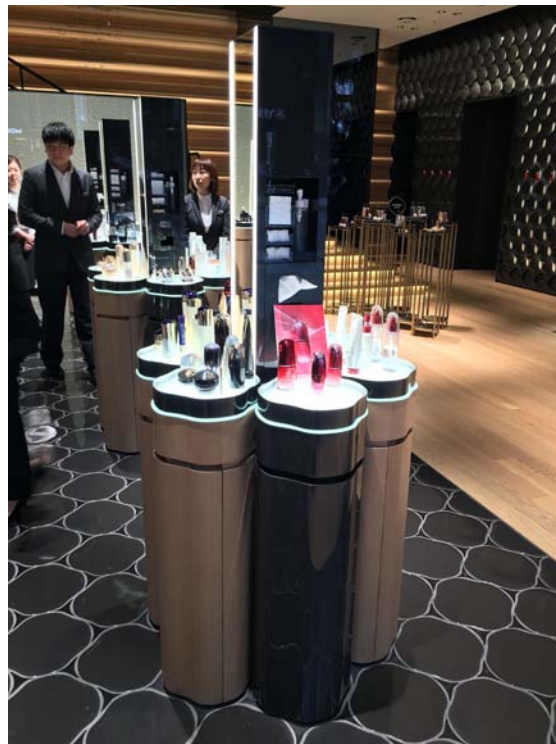
Left - The central atrium in Ginza Six with its lattice screens that zigzag around the space.

One of the most memorable designs from Ginza Six is the **Celine** Tokyo flagship store. The facade is a screen adorned with sculptural, ceramic pieces handmade by local artisans set in steel frames and spans 5 storeys high. Designed by Casper Mueller Kneer Architects, the ceramic pieces are made from untreated white clay and partially glazed. Each of the pieces are rotated in different varied patterns across the facade, and at night they are subtly illuminated and the shop interiors are partially visible from the street. From afar, one cannot tell for certain what the screen is made of. However from up-close, the handmade, bespoke quality of the ceramic pieces can be appreciated only from the pavement level, adding to the element of surprise. By using traditional methods to create such a complex facade for a luxury retail brand - the juxtaposition of materials, techniques and age-old traditions collide seamlessly to form a new design language that is relevant and contemporary to today's needs.



Left – The Celine shop front façade at Ginza Six with its screen composed of handmade ceramic pieces.

Next, we visited two Shiseido buildings located in Ginza - the Shiseido Flagship Store and Shiseido Parlour. The **Shiseido Flagship Store** had recently been renovated by renowned Japanese design studio Nendo. Spanning four floors, the ground and first floor is dedicated to cosmetics and skin care, and the second to fourth floor is home to a hair and makeup salon, cafe and event space. The interior design of the ground floor space incorporates the design motif of the Shiseido brand - the camellia flower that has been its' icon since 1915. Forms of the motif can be found throughout the space - the illuminated makeup counters displaying the cosmetic products, the floor tiles resembling the outline of the camellia flower, and the curved timber wall that follows the stairs to the first floor. It was only later that I discovered that the designers had integrated actual makeup into the construction of the interiors. Inspired by the similarities of interior renovation and applying make-up, the store's interior actually uses Shiseido products. Eyeshadow was layered onto the walls with makeup brushes to give a marble-like finish, and nail polish was added to the paint used for the ceiling artwork, giving a soft shimmer that plays with the light. These hidden yet appropriate touches to the design and construction is fitting for the brand and conveys a sense of identity and uniqueness to the store.



Left – The Shiseido camellia flower motif is translated into the interior design elements such as the floor tiles, display plinths and wall treatments.

Next, we visited the **Swatch Headquarters Building** designed by Shigeru Ban, and the **Ginza Itoya Flagship Store**, Japan's most famous stationary store that was established over 100 years ago. Overall, the research area tour of Ginza was an interesting experience that highlighted how far the design scene in Japan had come in terms of reinterpreting traditional design elements to modern sensibilities and function, especially in the world of high-end luxury retail. However, I felt that it was the smaller, more intimate details that were more memorable as compared to the mammoth-like scales of the buildings. Details such as the ceramic sculptural tiles handmade by local artisans for the Celine store facade at Ginza Six, and Shiseido makeup applied to the interior finishes of the Shiseido flagship store - the design of the buildings have been derived from the essence of the brand they are designing for. The result is a unique design solution that is familiar yet breathes new life into tradition.

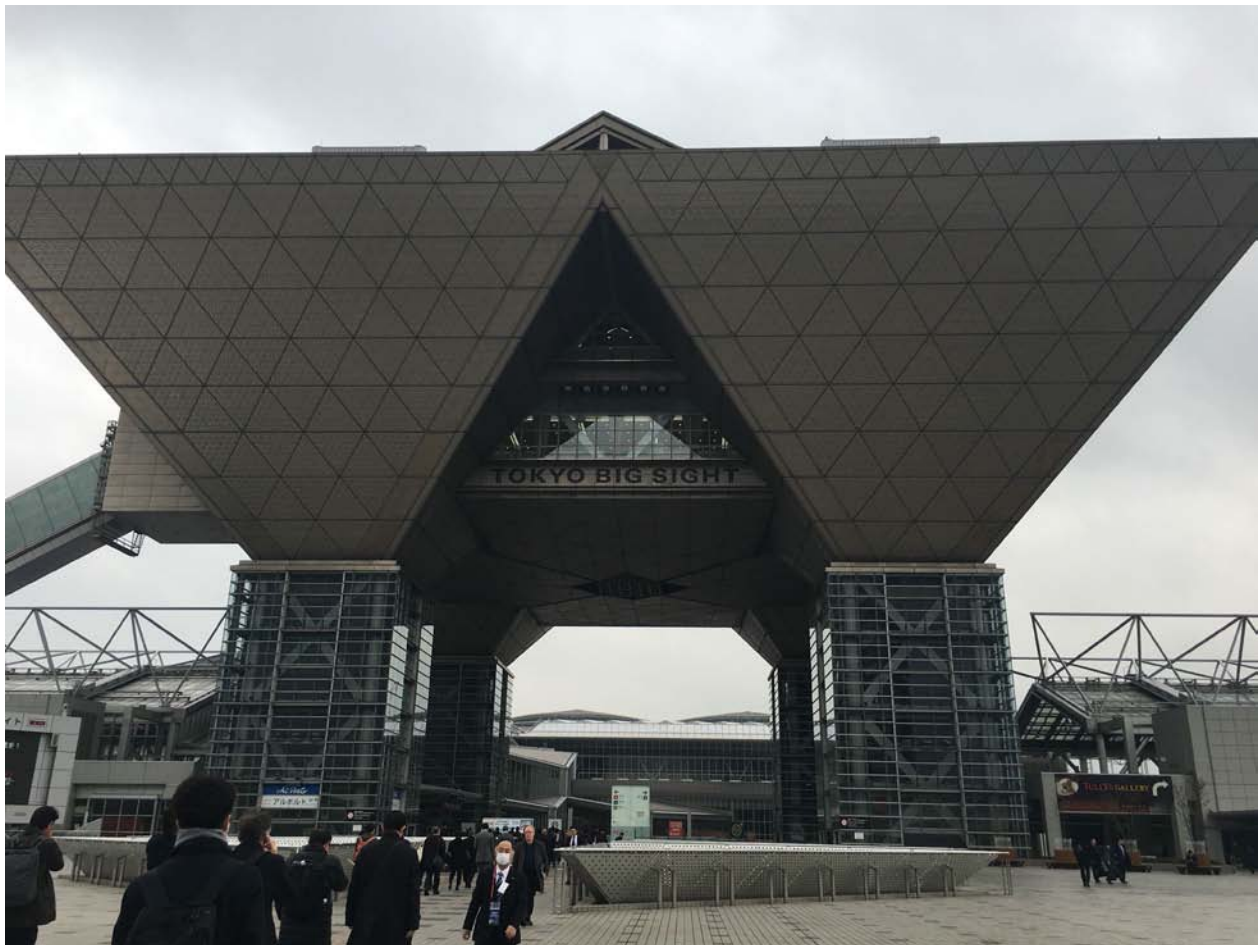


Top Left & Right – The Ginza Itoya Flagship Store with its extensive use of natural wood in its interior.

Day 5 - Tuesday 6 March 2019

ADF Day 2 – JAPAN SHOP Exhibition & Visit to Garde International Office

We met at the hotel at 9:30am to head to the **JAPAN SHOP Exhibition** at Tokyo Big Sight, the largest convention centre in Japan located at the Tokyo Bay Waterfront. There was a monorail train station five minutes away from the hotel that would have taken us directly to the convention centre, however Yukiyo had received a notice through her mobile phone train app that there were some technical difficulties with the train. I was impressed by this feature in the app as it was efficient and could direct us to other train routes and stations to get to our destination.



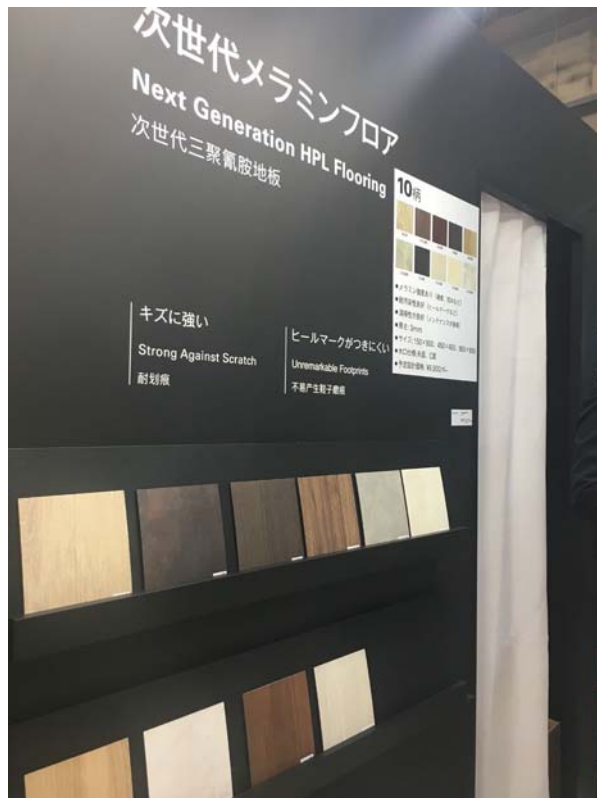
Top – Tokyo Big Sight; Japan's largest convention centre.

We arrived at Tokyo Big Sight where the JAPAN SHOP exhibition was held. The exhibition was held from 3rd to 8th March in 2019 and showcases products and services relating to commercial space design and display, as well as a wide array of materials, finishes and products for store or retail designs. There are several other concurrent exhibitions held in conjunction with the JAPAN SHOP - there is a section on Architecture & Construction Materials, Lighting, Security Systems, Retail and Future Office Systems. It is an extremely comprehensive exhibition featuring many different types and ranges of products not only for the building industry, but for business operators as well. Most of the products are from Japan, however there were some products from China as well.



Left – Japan Shop exhibition is one of Japan’s largest exhibitions for anything related to the building industry

We visited the AICA Laminates booth, one of Japan's most famous companies specialising in laminate surface sheets and panels. Two of the highlights from the exhibition was visiting a booth that displayed handmade glazed tiles from the Giza prefecture, as well as KITOIRO - a company that produces pine wood boards for decorative wall and floor applications in many colours and patterns.



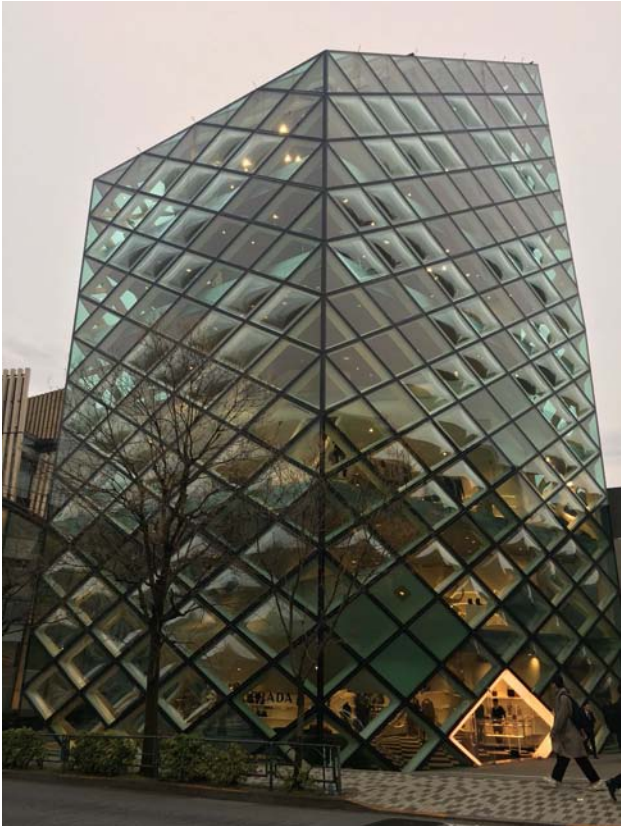
Top Left & Right – AICA Laminates booth and KITOIRO booth.

After a morning at the JAPAN SHOP, we headed back on the monorail train which passed by the Tokyo Bay waterfront. Yukiyo and Isabella took me to visit the **GARDE International Office** which is located in a low-rise office building in the Aoyama district along Omotesando Avenue. It is right next to Herzog & de Meuron's Prada Store as well as the Miu Miu store, also designed by the same architects. GARDE is an international branding and interior design company based in Tokyo with offices in Hong Kong, Milan, Paris, New York, Los Angeles, Singapore and most recently, Kuala Lumpur. Their works are spread over a diverse range of consultancy services

and sectors that include high-end luxury retail, residential, hospitality and entertainment facilities. I met the Founder of ADF and CEO of Garde International, Mr Motoki Okada, as well as several of the Board Members of Garde International. We had a brief conversation about the places we had visited in Tokyo, as well as our project The Granary which we won two awards at the recent MIID Reka Awards 2018, including the ADF Special Award. After a short tour of the office, which is spread over two floors, I continued to walk around Omotesando Avenue and visited the brand name shops that lined the street.



Left – Photo taken at the Garde International Office.



Right – Prada Store designed by Herzog & de Meuron at Omotesando.

When we were walking to the GARDE International office, we walked past the **Dolce & Gabbana store** designed by Gwenael Nicolas of the firm Curiosity, the same designer of the Ginza Six interiors. It is a dramatic-looking building with tall vertical panes of frameless glass stretching across the facade against a backdrop of white Calacatta marble. At night, the window panes are brightly illuminated and they are the only visible elements of the facade. Inside, the shop is equally as dramatic if not more. It uses 400 spotlights across the ceiling to create dramatic contrasts between pale and dark surfaces to create spotlights on displayed garments and accessories. The lighting design creates pools of bright light and shadows are intentionally formed to highlight and frame the items on display. The walls are painted matt black as the flatness of the colour reflects the white light when hit by the spotlights. The lights turn on and off and move around the space at a slow, regular rhythm. Areas disappear and appear constantly, so that when you are trying on something, a wall display may suddenly come to life in front of you. The entire landscape of the shop interiors is covered in a black and white graphical blanket that gives off a very theatrical effect, thereby influencing the mood of the customers by creating moments of surprise and wonder.



Top – The Dolce & Gabbana store in Omotesando designed by Tokyo-based design firm Curiosity.

Day 6 - Wednesday 7 March 2019

ADF Day 3 – Toraya Flagship Store & ADF Interview

The last day of the ADF started off in the morning with a visit to the **Toraya Flagship Store** in Akasaka, which had recently been renovated by Japanese architect Hiroshi Naito. Founded in Kyoto in the early 16th century, Toraya is known for making traditional Japanese confections known as *wagashi*. The original building that stood on the same site had been Toraya's headquarters in Tokyo since 1964, and after 50 years the company decided to rebuild the store from ground up. I would imagine that this would have been a bold move for a company so steeped in tradition to completely refashion its headquarters to steer its way into the future.



Left – Toraya Flagship Store in Akasaka, where the original headquarters used to stand.

The building strikes an elegant form as we walked towards it from the street - with its glass and wood exterior crowned with a black lacquer roof made using a traditional plastering technique called *shikkui*. At the top of the roof the Toraya's *tora* 虎 (tiger) logo is emblazoned in a bold white - in stark contrast with the black roof that fans around the building, following the same curved gesture of the glass and wood facade that wraps around the street. The four storey building sits intimately between two taller office buildings, but the slope of the pitched roof rises upwards to make the building appear taller than it is. From across the street, the building is a beautiful vision - the glass facade is merely a see-through veil for the rich wood interiors that exudes warmth and casts a subtle glow that creates an inviting mood for anyone walking past the building.



Left - The Toraya sign and logo is clearly displayed at the front of the entrance.

There is a small entrance foyer as you enter the building with white *noren* curtain panels above the timber-framed glass automatic sliding doors. Once we stepped inside, the warm tones of hinoki cypress wood used abundantly in the space welcomed us. The scent of the wood filled our senses gently as we walked up the central staircase to the second floor where the main shop area is located. The stairs wrap and follow the curve of the glass facade, and we admired the fine craftsmanship of the double timber handrails at different heights supported by slim metal rods with layers of vertical timber strips.



Left – The floating timber stairs follow the curve of the façade.

On the top floor, there is an open 'tea room' or cafe where one can enjoy tea with the Japanese confectionaries. One can either dine in the open space, or in the dining booths for more privacy. The sloped ceiling follows the gradient of the pitched roof as it fans around dramatically above the space, supported by slim steel frames that taper at the ends. Natural light streams through the glass windows, creating a bright and warm atmosphere inside where minimal artificial lighting is used. Spotlights are used predominantly for highlighting the confections on display in the retail area on the second floor.



Top Left & Right – The timber sloped ceiling and the Toraya logo on a black lacquer wall surface.

The building is a testament to the success of the Toraya brand, embodying its values by blending traditional and modern architecture to create a distinct and unique design that is contemporary, but at the same time familiar to those who experience it. It is also an example where conservation of building tradition doesn't mean that it has to replicate what was there before. Although the new Toraya store is a completely new structure, it has successfully paid tribute to its past by referencing and retaining elements and ideas that are central to the Toraya brand.



Left – The Toraya Flagship Store in Akasaka is a beautiful blend of modern and traditional Japanese designs.

After the Toraya Store, we took a quick detour to the **Tokyo Station** in Marunouchi, where we visited the Gallery where there was an exhibition on the renowned Finnish architect Alvar Aalto. The station is an interesting mix of old and new styles, and the tower inside the gallery is especially interesting with its old brick walls still intact.



Left - The old brickwork walls at the Tokyo Station.

After lunch with Mr Yoshiyuki Okada, director of ADF, we proceeded back to the Park Hotel where Yukiyo and Isabella conducted a short interview with me. We discussed a wide range of topics - namely our project The Granary and the process it took to re-adapt the existing warehouse structure for a new purpose. I described how we approach a new project - that lately we have been exploring concepts that re-interpret past stories or memories inherent to the site or design brief. How we aim to create a design language that engages the end user in unexpected ways in order to create memorable and unique designs. We also spoke at length about renovation projects in Malaysia that seek to recycle and rejuvenate existing structures - how that they are becoming quite common in Malaysia. We also compare that to projects in Japan, where renovating old buildings are challenging due to a myriad of factors. I was also asked to describe my impression of Japanese designs, and what I thought were intriguing. After spending a few days in Tokyo and visiting the places we did, I admire the thoughtfulness of Japanese designers in their work - how the projects where the designers seek to blend traditional ideas with modern elements are quite often the most memorable and unique.

In conclusion, I would like to thank everyone who was involved in organising this trip, especially ADF for providing such a wonderful opportunity for designers and architects to further improve and expand their horizons. I would like to thank the CEO and founder of ADF and the Board of Directors for their generosity, Mr Yoshiyuki Okada for providing the opportunity, and especially to Yukiyo Izuta and Isabella Pozo for their time in taking me around and taking great care of us during our stay.



Top – Interview with Yukiyo Izuta and Isabella Pozo from Garde International