

Petition

President Masaki Ikeda,
Hotel Okura Tokyo Co., Ltd.

July 9, 2015

Petition for the preservation of the main structure of the Hotel Okura Tokyo:

Dear President Masaki Ikeda, and To Whom It May Concern:

Docomomo is an international non-profit organization devoted to the documentation and conservation of the buildings, sites and neighborhoods of the modern movement. It was established in 1989 and currently boasts nearly 70 national and/or regional chapters with more than 3000 members in Europe, America, Asia, Oceania and Africa. Docomomo International and Docomomo Japan are committed to help preserve the legacy of the important modern architectural works in the twentieth century as those works would grant us a rich endowment of cultural heritage in the twenty-first century.

Docomomo has learned with alarming concern that the original 11-story main structure of the Hotel Okura Tokyo is presently planned for destruction for a newly replacing pair of 42-story and 17-story skyscraper glass towers. Docomomo Japan has always regarded the Hotel Okura Tokyo's original main wing to be part of the most representative and important hotel buildings based firmly upon the notion of the Modern movement in architecture during the post-WWII period in Japan.

As shown below, the Hotel Okura Tokyo's original main wing is not only a remarkable historic building that embodies the 'Japanese modernist design and concept' but also a figurative landmark architecture, standing adjacently to the US Embassy in a gracious neighborhood of the Toranomon district in central Tokyo, that sets the fundamental tone for the surrounding area.

The Hotel Okura Tokyo has also been a choice place to stay for many worldly famous politicians, heads of states, business executives, artists and other celebrities since its opening in 1962. As such that it provides a first-class hospitality, service and time in a distinctively Japanese but at the same time convincingly modern spatial ambience. Thus, it would qualify proudly as part of the 'Cultural Heritage/Asset of Japan' to the world.

In recognition of its exceptional architectural quality, here, we, Docomomo Japan would like to reiterate the great architectural and cultural heritage of your hotel's original main building and once again to deliver this petition for its preservation:

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Expressed distinctions for the Hotel Okura Tokyo's main wing:

While there are many specimens of modern architecture in the world that exemplify the ideas incorporating the Functionalist, Rationalist and/or International Style concepts, yet, one finds, only occasionally, few buildings that possess 'a uniquely original architectural form and/or presence of their own.' Accordingly, the original main building of Hotel Okura Tokyo fits exactly that description, *i.e.*, it stands as a building with 'a uniquely original architectural form and/or presence of its own.'

Unlike seen in many of those typical contemporary super-high-rise skyscraper buildings with the obvious vertical stress, the Hotel Okura Tokyo's main wing is designed with an expansive horizontal emphasis that creates a *laisser-faire* exterior appearance. Its horizontality is implemented by the layers of concrete eaves which collectively evoke a remote sense of connection to a scene of the houses of traditional Japanese townscape. Although a certain characteristic Japanese motif is referenced and incorporated rather directly, its design manifests an explicit modernist architectural quality by way of maintaining, edge-to-edge, fully flat concrete eaves in the front layer with evenly spaced columns and windows in the supporting layer.

Enter the Hotel Okura Tokyo's main wing, its symbolic main grand lobby space has attracted people over the years with its exquisite fusion of the Japanese aesthetics and Modernist design concepts. While an assortment of the traditional Japanese arts and crafts themes and compositional methods were liberally utilized within the context of overall Modernist design constraint for delivering a 'clarity of presentation of the Japanese aesthetics to any people world-wide regardless of their backgrounds,' as well as for installing a 'graceful character or dignity.' As such, in order to achieve such goals, in the process of implementation, the actual applications were carefully kept in balance with restraint so as to avoid being too ornate or ostentatious.

The space of the main lobby is comprised of very high ceilings, a capaciously laid out plan and a well-adjusted lighting level that is not too dark nor bright with the balanced mixture of natural and artificial lights. Spatially soothing, one would get a sense of being in the center of Tokyo slowly dissipating as a feeling of calm serenity and comfort would begin to enwrap and finally settle in — and so enjoy an entirely different sort of architectural experience altogether.

Thus, the main lobby space, while sustaining an undoubtedly Modernist based 'international' spatial quality, at the same time, offers, convincingly, distinctive Japanese characteristics — of both a particular 'Japanese hospitality of *omtenashi*' and a 'mastery of Japanese culture' to all those who visit the hotel.

The Hotel Okura Tokyo's main wing (along with its main lobby space), therefore, attests to how an indigenous aesthetics and culture may be fused successively with the Modernist conception of being truly 'International.' In that sense, the Hotel Okura Tokyo lays down one such normative and figurative design model that may be encouraged to be passed on to the future generations.

The Hotel Okura Tokyo, as you would be very much aware, was designed with a high ideal and aspiration by vanguard architects Yoshiro Taniguchi and Hideo Kosaka along with a joint design team of several other able architects and engineers, and created with the indispensable masterful skills and integral contributions furnished by the assembled first-class artists, artisans and craftsmen. Recognizing that it has been more than 53 years since the initial inauguration of its hotel operation, that is also to signify that that much time has elapsed since the building was handed over from the architects to the user/client. We are fully aware of the fact that the hotel buildings and facilities would require various timely adjustments and upgrades to satisfy the new demands for services suitable for today's quests, moreover, to meet the enhanced international level of standards, heightened competitions and earthquake resistant measures. We reckon that some minor renovations for such improvements had been actually made to the hotel. However, in spite of these circumstances, the Hotel Okura Tokyo's main wing has maintained its general exterior appearance, and likewise, the main lobby space, to which Yoshiro Taniguchi had poured his heart and soul, even though there were some minor interior changes to its furniture and its arrangement, yet on the whole, it well retains today the overall atmosphere of the original spatial ambience. It may be restated that the main wing of this hotel and its main lobby would always afford the usual place wherein timeless superb services would concoct a luxurious flow of time to soothe the people today as before.

Hence, we salute with our deepest respect the successive generations of its managements and its staff employees for their continuing tireless efforts to preserve the commendable quality of the Hotel Okura Tokyo. Through the continuous use the buildings mature and attain historical and cultural value. Accordingly, the Hotel Okura Tokyo's main wing and its main lobby, too, have become to scintillate as your collective assets that express the manifold ideals and aspirations of those who built the hotel. Therefore, we, Docomomo Japan firmly believe that those needed adjustments can be made without a categorical and irrevocable destruction of the existing merit-worthy main building of the hotel and its main lobby, of which there are numerous distinguished fans around the world.

We would like to emphasize that the Hotel Okura Tokyo's main wing and its main lobby collectively represent as an exceptional and significant architectural, cultural and historic masterpiece not to be found elsewhere, and, therefore our treasure. Docomomo Japan would like to ask you once again to consider the preservation and utilization of your hotel's main wing and its main lobby. Docomomo Japan would also tender you any assistance for the preservation and utilization as best as we can.

Sincerely,

Hiroshi Matsukuma
President,
Docomomo Japan

