

GIFU KITAGATA APARTMENTS

PROJECT DATA:

The Gifu Kitagata Apartment Building was completed in 2001 with intention to provide affordable housing while maximizing living conditions. The building was constructed in two phases and offers a variety of apartment types.

Architect: Kazuyo Sejima and Associates
Project type: Public Housing
Construction time: 1994-1998 (phase 1)
1998-2001 (phase 2)
Total floor area: 9461 m² (101837 ft²)
4706 m² phase 1
4755 m² phase 2
Unit Count: 107 dwellings. 30 apartment types (49-80m²)
Estimated budget: \$25,000,000

HOME QUALITIES:

Each dwelling unit is made up of a terrace, dining kitchen, bedroom, and a Japanese-style tatami room, which are all linked by a narrow sunroom. About a third of the units are maisonettes with internal stairways and roughly half have double heighted spaces. The variations of the individual rooms provide a variety of unit types where various sections emerge for the possibility for different lifestyles for various family types. The range of different unit types has been combined to generate a complex elevation where it becomes difficult to recognize where one unit starts or ends, providing more privacy because the inhabitants are not easily linked visually to their dwelling unit. The terraces are hybrid spaces where the boundary between public and private is blurred. They were planned with the intention of introducing as much exterior space as possible into the living areas and can serve as a children's playroom, laundry room, or even a dining terrace for holidays.

SUSTAINABILITY:

Gifu is known to receive the most sunshine per year in all of Japan. Plenty of daylight is flooded throughout the apartments as the building is predominantly oriented East-West. Each of the sunrooms and bathrooms are lined up along the side that receives the most sunlight to regulate the rooms from overheating. The long and narrow volume facilitates cross ventilation during the hot and humid summer months.

CONTEXT + COMMUNITY:

Gifu city is only 30 km north of Nagoya and 300 km west of Tokyo. The site is about a 15-minute drive from the city center and is served by excellent public transportation to and from Tokyo and Osaka.

In 1994, Arata Isozaki received the commission from the government of Gifu prefecture to oversee the planning of a new housing estate near the region's capital in an area mostly surrounded by low-rise residential neighborhoods. The proposed master plan established four long 10-story slab shaped buildings occupying most of the perimeter of the plot, leaving a large public space in the center which included community and surface level parking facilities for the four buildings. Using this plan as a framework, Martha Swartz was asked to give form to the public open space, and Elizabeth Diller, Akiko Takahashi, Catherine Hawley and Kazuyo Sejima were each commissioned one of the buildings.

The center open space designed by Martha Schwartz and makes reference to the site's rice paddies that existed before the development of the site by sculpting the landscape for a series of sunken garden "rooms." The open space offers a variety of opportunities for passive enjoyment or active play including water features, children's play, and public art. The willow court is a sunken flooded area with willow trees and wetland vegetation made accessible by a wooded boardwalk. Other garden rooms include the four seasons garden, stone garden, cherry forecourt, iris canal, dance floor, children's playground, sports court, water rill and bamboo garden.

ORGANIZATION:

In order to control the massiveness of the housing block, the whole volume is reduced into a thin slab, randomly perforated by 107 voids (terraces), which allow for glimpses through the building. The ground level is open space with pilotis used as bicycle parking to provide access from all directions. The residential units occupy the second through tenth floors. The bedrooms tend to stack in pairs as they also contain bathroom facilities for efficient plumbing. The double heighted spaces are usually tied to a dining kitchen. All the rooms such as the dining kitchen, Japanese-style living room and terrace have their own entrance providing a minimum of 3 access points per apartment and up to five entrances that connect to the exterior. The sunrooms line up along the south facade of the building and the access stairways cascade along the north facade of the volume.

MATERIALS + ASSEMBLIES:

The building was constructed using a reinforced concrete structure and steel additions were assembled on. Some notable materials used are galvanized steel plates for the stairways, expanded steel screens, homogenous vinyl tile, western hemlock oil paint, manggasinoro wood, and tatami mats.

