



Japanese Accents in Western Interiors

Peggy Landers Rao, Jean Mahoney

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Shopping for Japanese antiques and folkcraft presents intriguing, yet mystifying choices. Kotatsu, futon covers, furoshiki, ran ma, unusual pieces of porcelain...so many things uniquely Japanese. The categories are broad and the choices, inviting. Gradually, the collector mentally sorts things out, learns the purpose and potential of various objects, and makes selections appropriate for the Western home. Peggy Rao and Jean Mahoney telescope the learning process by showing how some foreign residents in Tokyo have incorporated 77 different kinds of antiques and folkcraft into their Western homes. Each instance is inventive, since every photograph shows a Japanese object used in a different role from its original function. A hibachi becomes a display chest, narrow yukata fabric becomes an ingenious window decoration, a bamboo screen conceals a TV. Some acquisitions are inexpensive solutions to decorating problems. Some reflect the expertise of the professional designers whose own homes are included in the photographs. Some are total transformations, inspired by various Japanese art forms. Toshiaki Sakuma's artistic photographs, taken in 45 different homes, capture the beauty of this West-East merger in interior design. Many of the items photographed have disappeared from everyday life in Japan. Some are puzzles even to the Japanese under the age of 50. The accompanying text reveals the background of all the objects shown, and suggests why they might be worth acquiring from an artistic point of view. The book becomes not only a shopping guide, but also an introductory overview to the Japanese culture for visitors, residents and anyone, anywhere, interested in Japanese treasures. Turning the pages, the reader finds aesthetic ways to turn kimono into wall hangings, nine different uses for an obi besides wearing one, a good reason to look through piles of work garments at open markets, and the answer to why there are so many wooden fish on long poles in antique stores. Certain craft processes are explained, along with the symbolism of such recurring design motifs as the pine, plum and bamboo. The authors also provide an up-to-date list of shopping sources for antiques and folkcraft in Japan, the United States and Canada.

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