



## Essence of Japan within The Okura Tokyo as the Atelier of Beauty Vol. 3 Lattice Craft

Series offering a glimpse of how our treasures are being passed on or the September 12 opening

*Kumiko* lattice craft requires craftsmanship that exceeds the precision of machines; gaps of less than the thickness of a single sheet of paper are not acceptable. The craft that requires accuracy at a level of thousandths of a millimeter truly displays the skill of the woodworker. The Okura Tokyo, which is scheduled to open in September this year, will feature a reproduction of the Okura Lobby that has been loved by many as an embodiment of Hotel Okura Tokyo. In Okura Prestige Tower, the high-rise tower of the two buildings comprising Hotel Okura Tokyo, a number of Okura designs can be seen in the lobby. One of these is the hemp-leaf *kumiko* lattices placed over *shoji* (paper-covered partitions), a creation spanning a width of 25 m at a height of 6.5 m, providing a defining element for the space.

### ■ *Kumiko*

*Kumiko* latticework is a method of assembling fine, slender pieces of wooden materials by hand to create decorative lattices, without using any nails, fasteners or adhesives. It is a part of traditional Japanese culture, and has been practiced since the Asuka era (592 to 710 A.D.).

Originally, *kumiko* lattices were combinations of rhombus shapes, and there are more than 200 recognized patterns. The hemp-leaf pattern used in the Okura Lobby is an auspicious design that has been appreciated in Japan since ancient times. It is a four-way, continuous pattern created by combining isosceles triangles. Although it is quite simple, it is an extremely clever design.

In Japan, there are traditional units of measurement; *sun* (3.03 cm), *bu* (0.303 cm) and *mou* (0.0303 cm), where one *mou* is said to indicate the thickness of one hair. These reveal quite a different sense of precision when compared to the traditional units used in the West. These units fell out of general use after the war, but it can be said that this sense of fineness and precision remains in the hearts of Japanese craftsmen.

### ■ Okura Lobby

When the original Main Building was opened in 1962, the reception desk counter and elevators were placed off to the side in order to create a lobby with a quiet atmosphere. The space lined with the eponymous “Okura lanterns,” called the Okura Lobby, was designed at a slightly lower elevation than the entrance lobby area. Priority was placed on features to heighten the serene atmosphere by separating the space from other areas.



Entrance Lobby



Okura Lobby

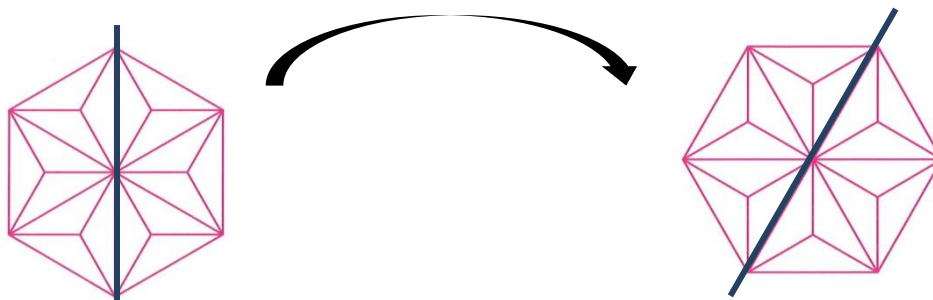
Facing the front, the large *shoji* screens beneath the hemp-leaf lattices filter the sunlight, creating a welcoming ambiance in the midst of the glamour.

## ■ Secrets of the Okura Lobby

### Angles

In a typical *kumiko* lattice, the basic triplet element, called “*mitsu kude*”\*, is oriented vertically, but the patterns used in the Okura Lobby are arranged horizontally. It is believed that this was done intentionally to take advantage of the external light. It is similar to the concept of the eaves in Japanese architecture, which are designed so that the sunlight does not enter a room directly, but instead is reflected up from the ground. The *kumiko* lattice plays such a role in illuminating the space. At the same time, this design does not clash with the image of the surroundings, lined with thick, square pillars under a vaulted ceiling, and consisting of straight lines, accenting the qualities of the wood.

\* *mitsu kude*: A basic grid element composed of horizontal lines and diagonal rhombuses, used as the base unit for the lattice design.



Rotating the *mitsu kude* base elements creates new angles

### Textures

For the reproduction in the lobby of The Okura Prestige Tower, close examination of the original lattices from the Main Building revealed that each of the hemp leaves in the design was assembled separately, with the veins of the leaf set 3 mm lower than the outline. This slight difference in the height between the basic *mitsu kude* elements and the lattices inserted into them created a three-dimensional effect. This is unusual work in the world of *kumiko* craft. It is assumed that this was a calculated effect for the Okura Lobby, because the lattices were installed at a higher position than normal. A surprising technique, rediscovered after nearly 60 years.

#### ■ Faithful Reproduction of the Okura Lobby

The reproduction of the hemp-leaf design lattices for The Okura Tokyo required two years of assembly work, using materials from Japanese cypress trees that were more than 200 years old from Okayama prefecture in Japan. All the work to build the designs was performed by hand, while considering the condition of the naturally-dried wood. The 10 panels with a width of 1.735 m and a height of 3.7 m will be installed on top of *shoji* partitions, in the same way as in the former Okura Lobby.



**Sadakenbi Co., Ltd.** <http://www.sadakenbi.com>

Founded in 1975. Started as a producer of wooden architectural fittings, and currently offering wood work products including *Maniwa kumiko*, residential system furniture, furnishings for public facilities, as well as retail facility design and office design. Works are exhibited every year at national exhibits, demonstrating a spirit of challenge to create unique objects, like the wooden supercar “Maniwa.” Company President, Toskinobu Sada is also the Chairman of the Zenkoku Tategu Kumiai Rengokai, a national association of wooden joinery craftsmen.

#### Inquiries from the media

Hotel Okura Tokyo Co., Ltd. Public Relations: Matsumoto/ Oguri  
2-10-4 Toranomon, Minato-ku, Tokyo 105-0001 TEL : +81-3-3224-6731 (direct)  
E-mail: [pr@tokyo.hotelokura.co.jp](mailto:pr@tokyo.hotelokura.co.jp)