



Preserving Japan's Traditional Buildings

Careful relocation
Thoughtful reconstruction
Continuing life overseas

Kominka Collective • Toda Komuten • Kominka Preservation Works



Giving Endangered Kominka (Minka), Kura, Temples, Shrines, and Other Traditional Structures a Continuing Life

Across Japan, traditional buildings of remarkable cultural, architectural, and craft value are being lost as communities change, properties are redeveloped, and buildings become difficult to maintain. These include kominka farmhouses and townhouses, kura storehouses, temples, shrines, gates, bell towers, and other structures shaped by generations of knowledge and skilled craftsmanship.

Preservation in place is always the preferred path. When a significant building is scheduled for demolition and cannot remain in its original location, careful relocation can offer another form of preservation - allowing the structure, its materials, and the knowledge embodied within it to continue in a new setting.

Kominka Collective, Toda Komuten, and Kominka Preservation Works work together to connect endangered structures with new stewards and guide appropriate projects from Japan through reconstruction overseas, in collaboration with traditional craftspeople in Japan and architects, engineers, timber framers, carpenters, and other professionals in the destination country.





New Possibilities for Traditional Structures in Public, Cultural, and Private Settings

Faithful Reconstruction in Public and Cultural Settings

Complete traditional structures can be carefully documented, relocated, and faithfully reconstructed in Japanese gardens, museums, cultural institutions, educational settings, and other public spaces. These projects preserve not only the physical building, but also the traditional materials, craftsmanship, and knowledge embodied within it.

Creative Reuse and Reimagined Design for Private Spaces

For homes, guesthouses, retreats, studios, and other private settings, a complete structure, roof frame, or selected architectural components can provide the basis for a more creative and individually designed reconstruction. Traditional timbers and elements may be reconfigured and combined with new materials to create a building suited to its new setting and purpose.

Japanese Character, Contemporary Comfort

Each project is designed in collaboration with the overseas architect, engineer, and construction team to meet local building codes, structural requirements, and contemporary expectations for comfort and use. At the same time, careful attention is given to preserving the proportions, materials, craftsmanship, and distinctive Japanese aesthetic of the original structure.

Reclaimed Materials and Distinctive Architectural Elements

A wide range of reclaimed timbers, roof frames, doors, shoji, ranma, roof tiles, stone elements, fittings, furnishings, and other traditional materials is also available. These can be incorporated into new buildings, existing structures, renovations, interiors, garden buildings, and other architectural projects.



Kominka: Shaped by Purpose, Place, and Climate

Kominka differ widely across Japan, reflecting their original use, regional ways of life, locally available materials, and the surrounding climate. Their size, layout, roof structure, construction, and architectural details vary from one region, and sometimes from one community to another.



Reimagined Kominka: Creativity, Adaptation, Innovation, and New Possibilities

Below, a minka from Niigata forms the first floor and a minka from Aichi the second.



Below, two small structures we connected to create a single, larger home.



Beyond Minka: Relocating Other Traditional Buildings

The structures shown here include temples, gates, bell towers, and shrines being prepared for relocation, as well as others for which appropriate new settings are being sought. Careful relocation allows their architecture, materials, craftsmanship, and cultural significance to continue.





The Japan-Based Team Behind Each Project

Every project begins with specialist knowledge and coordination in Japan, working closely with the client and the professional and construction teams responsible for the destination site.

Kominka Collective, the nonprofit organization, introduces endangered structures, responds to initial inquiries, connects people and organizations, and supports the preservation, documentation, educational, and cultural dimensions of the work.

Toda Komuten provides traditional building, architectural, carpentry, and technical expertise. It supports design development and structure selection, prepares the structure in Japan, and provides the technical information and guidance required for reconstruction overseas.

Kominka Preservation Works carries out practical project development, coordination, and international logistics. It brings together the client, Toda Komuten, craftspeople in Japan, regional partners, and the overseas team, coordinating the project through reconstruction and completion.

Traditional Craftspeople in Japan contribute specialist knowledge and skills according to the needs of each structure. The project may involve temple and shrine carpenters, thatchers, roof-tile specialists, plasterers, joiners, stonemasons, metalworkers, and other craftspeople who support preparation for reconstruction.





International Collaboration: Connecting Japan-Based Expertise with Local Project Teams

Every overseas project is developed according to its location, intended use, local regulations, and the particular structure or components involved.

Kominka Preservation Works and Toda Komuten work with architects, engineers, builders, timber framers, craftspeople, and other professionals in the destination country, bringing together the appropriate team for each project. Kominka Preservation Works coordinates communication and delivery, while Toda Komuten provides the traditional building and technical guidance needed from Japan.

Regional Partners

- ◆ Where established regional partners are involved, including Kominka UK and Kominka North America, they may provide local coordination and project support. In other countries, Kominka Preservation Works works directly with the client and the locally assembled professional and construction team.

Flexible Project Leadership

- ◆ In the United Kingdom, Kominka UK coordinates local delivery and assembles the appropriate UK team. In North America, Kominka Preservation Works and Kominka North America determine the project lead according to the individual project and may work alongside one another. In other countries, the project structure is developed to suit the local context and the professionals involved.

Maintaining the Connection to Japan

- ◆ The aim is to maintain clear communication between the Japan team and the local team and to carry the knowledge required for the traditional structure through into the completed overseas project.



The Project Process



1	Brief, Estimate, and Agreement	Define the site, intended use, approximate size, design direction, budget range, and overseas professional team; prepare an initial estimate; and confirm the project scope and agreements.
2	Structure selection	Select a suitable complete structure, roof frame, and/or group of traditional components from those preserved in storage or identified for rescue, and develop the design concept.
3	Design and Preparation	Develop the design; document, number, and dismantle the structure when required; and clean, assess, repair, replace, trial assemble, and pack the structure and components.
4	Packing and international shipping	Coordinate packing records, freight, export procedures, customs documentation, delivery, and storage planning.
5	Reconstruction and installation	Complete local approvals and construction; raise the frame; provide technical guidance, on-site support, and specialist instruction through completion.





Initial Planning, Design, and Structure Selection

Initial brief and feasibility

We discuss the destination, intended use, approximate size, design direction, budget range, and timetable. The overseas team begins checking site conditions, planning requirements, and applicable building codes.

Design concept and structure selection

Toda Komuten works with the client, Kominka Preservation Works, and the overseas architect or designer to determine how a complete kominka, another traditional structure, or selected components can be incorporated into the new project.

The Japan team provides information about the traditional structure. The overseas architect and engineer develop the complete building design for the destination site and local regulations.





Documentation and Preparation in Japan

Toda Komuten oversees the physical and technical work on the traditional structure in Japan, with Kominka Preservation Works coordinating the people, information, schedule, and project requirements around that work.

- ◆ Detailed recording and documentation of the structure
- ◆ Numbering and cataloguing of timbers and components
- ◆ Careful dismantling by Toda Komuten and the specialist Japan team
- ◆ Cleaning, assessment, and repairs
- ◆ Replacement of damaged or missing pieces where required
- ◆ Trial assembly or preassembly when appropriate
- ◆ Selection and preparation of optional materials and fittings
- ◆ Packing and documentation for export

Traditional Craftspeople in Japan

Depending on the structure and the work required, Toda Komuten brings together temple carpenters, thatchers, roof-tile specialists, plasterers, stonemasons, metalworkers, joinery specialists, and other traditional craftspeople.



1



In the workshop in Japan

2



At the destination overseas

Export and International Shipping

Kominka Preservation Works coordinates the international movement of the structure and components, working with freight forwarders, Toda Komuten, the client, the importer, and the receiving team.

- ◆ Final packing lists and component records
- ◆ Container planning and inland transport in Japan
- ◆ Coordination of inspections and any fumigation, heat treatment, pest-control treatment, or other biosecurity measures required by the destination country
- ◆ Freight forwarding and vessel arrangements
- ◆ Export procedures and required documentation
- ◆ Cargo insurance, shipment tracking, and communication during transit
- ◆ Communication with the importer and customs professionals overseas
- ◆ Port handling, customs clearance, inland delivery, and storage planning at the destination

Scheduling

Shipping and construction dates need a certain amount of flexibility. Export clearance, vessel schedules, port handling, customs, inland delivery, and safe storage can affect the timetable.





Reconstruction Overseas and Completion

The local architect, engineer, contractor, and trades carry out the permitted overseas building work. Kominka Preservation Works, Toda Komuten, and the appropriate regional partner remain involved to support the work specific to the Japanese structure and materials.

- ◆ Site preparation, foundations, anchoring, and local structural work
- ◆ Frame raising and assembly of the traditional timbers
- ◆ Technical guidance from Toda Komuten during key stages
- ◆ Coordination between the Japan team and local architects, engineers, builders, and timber framers
- ◆ Travel by Japanese carpenters or specialist craftspeople when required
- ◆ Installation of traditional components and completion of specialist work
- ◆ Continued coordination through completion and handover

On-site support and instruction

Members of our international project team can provide on-site support and technical instruction during reconstruction as needed, working directly with local timber framers, carpenters, builders, and craftspeople. This helps ensure that the traditional structure and components are assembled and incorporated correctly.





Project Cost Categories

Each project is estimated according to the structure, design, condition, destination, and level of support required.

Category 0 Planning survey and professional fees

Japan-side design and survey work, overseas architect and engineer, contractor pricing, and project coordination.

Category 1 Traditional structure from Japan

Documentation, dismantling, cleaning, repair, replacement work, trial assembly, and packing.

Category 2 Optional materials and components

Roof tiles, shoji, doors, ranma, stone lanterns, furniture, fixtures, reclaimed timbers, and other selected items.

Category 3 International shipping

Containers, inland transport, freight forwarding, export and import procedures, port charges, customs, insurance, and delivery.

Category 4 Technical guidance and specialist support

Drawings, technical information, remote guidance, travel, and on-site assistance from Japanese carpenters or craftspeople.

Category 5 Construction overseas

Architect, engineer, contractor, subcontractors, foundations, enclosure, utilities, local materials, and finishes. Local construction costs are normally developed by the overseas architect, engineer, and contractor and vary according to location, codes, site conditions, design, and finish level.

How Project Costs Are Determined

Projects range from incorporating reclaimed materials into new or existing buildings to relocating complete traditional structures, so there is no standard price. Costs vary according to the structure and its condition, design and use, work required in Japan, destination and shipping, specialist support, and local approvals and construction. A preliminary cost framework can be prepared after an initial discussion. Detailed estimates follow as the structure, design, scope, destination requirements, and project teams are confirmed.





Starting a Project

An initial discussion is most useful when it includes the following information:

1

Location

Country, region, and whether a site has been secured.

2

Intended use

Home, guesthouse, cultural venue, retreat, studio, museum, garden building, or another purpose.

3

Approximate scale

Desired floor area and whether the project may use a complete structure or selected components.

4

Design direction

Faithful reconstruction, adaptive reuse, or a contemporary building incorporating traditional materials.

5

Current team

Any architect, engineer, timber framer, contractor, institution, or regional partner already involved.

6

Timing and budget

Target dates and an initial budget range for both the Japan work and overseas construction.





Visit Japan: Meet the Team, Explore Structures, and See the Work Firsthand

We warmly welcome prospective clients, architects, builders, timber framers, craftspeople, and others involved in the building arts to visit us in Japan at any stage of a project.

A visit may include viewing and selecting a structure or individual architectural elements, meeting Toda Komuten and members of the traditional craft community, seeing documentation, dismantling, repair, or trial assembly work, and learning how the building will be reconstructed overseas.

These visits help the overseas team understand the structure, materials, traditional techniques, and reconstruction process before work begins at the destination site.

Possible visit content

- ◆ Viewing and selecting a complete structure or individual components
- ◆ Meeting the Japan project team and traditional craftspeople
- ◆ Reviewing the design and planned use of the structure
- ◆ Observing documentation, dismantling, repair, or trial assembly
- ◆ Understanding numbering, packing, and reconstruction procedures
- ◆ Preparing overseas architects, builders, and timber framers for the reconstruction stage

A changing selection of complete structures, frames, traditional components, and reclaimed materials is preserved in storage or being considered for rescue. Current information and photographs are available upon request.





Kominka Collective Programs: Connecting People and Traditional Building Culture

In addition to stewardship and relocation preservation projects, Kominka Collective supports educational and cultural initiatives that help connect people with traditional architecture and the craftspeople who sustain it.

Educational Programs, Public Events & Presentations

Lectures, workshops, exhibitions, public programs, and presentations related to traditional architecture, building arts, preservation, and rural revitalization.

Architectural Study Tours & Community Build Programs

Immersive educational experiences introducing participants to traditional carpentry, roof thatching, earthen construction, restoration projects, historic villages, and the people who continue these traditions today.

Research and Documentation

Documentation of traditional structures and their histories, preservation techniques, cultural landscapes, and emerging approaches to heritage stewardship and adaptive reuse.

International Exchange & Craft Fellowships

Building relationships among architects, builders, preservationists, students, museums, Japanese gardens, and cultural organizations in Japan and abroad.





JOIN US IN PRESERVING TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE

Traditional buildings are more than remnants of the past. They are living repositories of knowledge, craftsmanship, culture, and memory, and valuable resources for the future.

By preserving traditional structures, supporting craftspeople, and sharing knowledge across generations and cultures, we can help ensure these remarkable buildings continue to inspire, educate, and enrich the lives of future generations. We welcome opportunities to collaborate with those committed to traditional architecture, craftsmanship, cultural heritage, and the continued life of historic buildings.



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