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On vintage saxophones:

They have better sound and are appealing due to wabi sabi. I bought a vintage Keltner ’57. Even though it is still old I much prefer to look at it than I shining piece of brass. An instrument is something that is given a lot of love by it’s owners. Being held in their hands for years. Sometimes I pick up my horn and think: I wonder what wicked things have been played on here. I don’t think about it being old at all!

If I were to pick up a brand new saxophone: I would look at it and think, damn that’s expensive. I like every scratch and blemish on the horn because it makes me think. The inside of the horn is deteriorated due to poor care, but I don’t care.

<http://www.shwoodwind.co.uk/Reviews/vintage_modern.htm>

* Japan
* Things don’t last
* Wabi Sabi art
* Cave Paintings
* Saxophone
* Clothing (thrift shopping)
* Philosophy Thoreau, happier life

I was fortunate to be able to travel to Japan from December 27 2015 to January 17th 2016. In Japan, I studied Ritual and Resillience with 13 peers from the University of Minnesota. While I could write on many Japanese experiences such as the food, the people, the transportation system, the shopping, the dogs... I'm going to write about Japanese aesthetics, specifically the prominent characteristic *wabi sabi*.

Before I explain what wabi-sabi is I want to communicate two pivotal experiences that my class participated in. Ther first is practicing *zen meditation*with an authentic-born-in-a-temple monk. The second is attending a *Japanese tea ceremony* hosted by tea master who has been practicing for over ten years and whose family has passed down the art of the tea ceremony through many generations. Both of these activities encompassed the idea of wabi-sabi-- meditiation being philisophical and intrinsic, the tea ceremony being aesthetic and extrinsic.

**Zen Meditation**

In Kyoto, my class went to a temple and we were taught how to meditate by an aged monk who was born in the same temple. The meditation lesson included an introductory how-to explanation, followed by two 15-minute meditation sessions, and then concluded with a QA. This was not my first time attempting to achieve an empy mind through meditation. The pressure of having a monk watching me made me focus more than usual and both of the sessions resulted with me having numb feet from me maintaining lotus leg posture, essentially cutting blood flow off from my long legs.

Let me paint a picture about how each session went. The monk preluded each session by creating two contrasting noises, first by smacking wood blocks together and then ringing a resonating high-pitched triangle-like instrument. Following the beginning and then two more times throughout the session, the monk uniformally stomped the tatami-matted floor in a counter-clockwise square where two paralell lines had novice meditation students facing inward before returning to his post in the corner. The monk symmetrically concluded each session with another high pitched resonation followed by another wooden*shmack*.

The most intersesting thing for me was listening to the elder monk echo Buddhist teachings regarding happiness and overcoming suffering. The monk explained that human-kind should find *resolve and acceptance* towards any situation we are faced with such as sickness, or the passing of a loved one, or starvation, or oppression-- that we should accept and appreciate the present moment for what it is. This mindfullness is neccesary to understand wabi-sabi.

**The Japanese Tea Ceremony**

I was the lucky one in my class that was assigned to research and present the characteristics of a Japanese Tea Ceremony. In [this fascinating documentary](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KT69ANFLm2k), the narrator thoroughly explains the reasons behind the aesthetics of the extremely simple traditional two-tatimi-mat sized tea house. He explains that *the tea ceremony is about bringing people together as equals* with disregard to social status, wealth, gender, etc. and that every aspect of the tea ceremony promotes this humanitarian social equality. For example, the entrance to a tea house is short so that every attendee must lower himself to enter. The narrator also explains that *the tea ceremony is about appreciating the moment*. The narrator educates how to appreciate small spaces by observing how large spaces seem to grow small, while small spaces grow tremendously. I find great truth in that wisdom and think that smaller rooms promote attention towards the unique micro-characteristics of the space that are otherwise ignored.

My class attended an atypical tea ceremony. It was not in a tea house, but rather a building with multiple tea rooms. The room we were in was larger than the traditional two-tatami-mat size in order to accomodate everyone. Regardless it had two traditional elements in an alcove: a scroll displaying a poem and a simple flower arrangement. Both symbolically reflect the current season *and are to be appreciated by the attendees*. Flower arrangements exemplify the Japanese aesthetic characteristic of*kire (cutting)*. We can find flower arrangements beautiful even though the flowers were *cut* from life-givin roots-- essentially, being cut off from the natural world.

We were served a sweet pink confection with gold flakes. A desert is a traditional element of the tea ceremony used to enhance the bitter flavor of the macha. Then we watched the tea master perform simple, slow, and deliberate movements while preparing the tea. While preparing the first cup, the tea master explained how an attendent is supposed to receive their tea. Bowing when the imperfect tea cup is handed to you and receiving it with both hands. Then, before you can drink, you are supposed to turn the cup so the design is facing the rest of the attendents. Then you can enjoy the tea. The tea ceremony is a seemingly simple event, but there it's actually the aggregation of many small acts and simple objects that makes it appreciable..

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meiji_period>

My host dad, Kazunori-San, brought me to the Edo Museum in Tokyo. I have never learned so much history in such a short period of time. I learned a plethora about the city of Edo (present day Tokyo) which was the sprawling central cultural hub of Japan. I learned about the Edo Period: the social classes and their corresponding lifestyles, the importance and emphasis of fire-prevention, the widespread appreciation and enjoyment of the arts, the thriving self-sufficient economy, the hand printed literature, the architecture—basically, I experienced what it would have been like to alive during The Edo Period.

In the Edo Period, the social structure was largely based on the type of goods a person produced as opposed to wealth. It was a moral-based social structure. The upper class were the samurais who produced agricultural goods and cared more about the arts than the acquisition of wealth. The middle class were the artisans who produced non-essentials. Lowest were the merchants whom did not produce goods at all. The majority of people lived prosperous and happy lives due to having a philosopher-king upper class.

After three hours of experiencing the Edo Period, the museum’s theme progressed into 1868 and into the beginning of the Meiji Period. During the Meiji Period, Japan made efforts to industrialize and adopt the same culture as their newly-met European counterparts had. I found that the entire history of the Meiji Period resulted in the tragic diminishing of the culture generated in the Edo Period—gone were the days of a culturally rich independent country.

The Meiji Period introduced, among other things, a bureaucratic government system along with its corruptive element, a national military to replace and abolish the samurai class, a transportation system connecting once isolated villages, and a government funded educational system replacing apprenticeship and private schooling. In 1871, the new government made strides to completely abolish the samurai class entirely by forcing them to cut their traditional top-knots and sport a more western doo. New factories outpaced centuries of artisan class craftsmanship. The Meiji Period ultimately threw merchants up from the lower class to the upper class and introduced the modern day working class.

The abundance of wabi-sabi aesthetic in the Edo Period was met with government-encouraged western ideals: simple and natural aesthetics replaced with the elaborate and manufactured, artisan carpentry architecture replaced with colonial architecture, woodblock printing replaced with the printing press, maintaining the old replaced with buying the new, eastern music replaced with British military music. Even with the the western-ideals-promoting-government, the abolishment of the once-ruling samurai class meant every person could experience, learn, and appreciate the wabi-sabi nature of the tea ceremony. Thus the tea ceremony has carried the wabi-sabi essence into modern day Japan.

“Our life is frittered away by detail... simplify, simplify.”

Wabi-sabi is an abstract characteristic of Japanese aesthetics. Feel free to read here and here for a textbook description. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_aesthetics#Wabi-sabi> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wabi-sabi>. Wabi sabi is commonly described as something that is imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete.

To me, appreciating wabi-sabi is essential to living contentedly and accepting the present moment for what it is. It’s a complete shift in mindset with nothing to lose, but a lot to gain. It’s grounding and realistic. Wabi-sabi replaces the unrealistic fantasy that everything I own should be flawless. It’s realizing that I will never design a perfect website or play my saxophone with a perfect tone. It’s being happy for what I have and not feeling the need to complain about trivial things. It’s accepting and appreciating myself for my own imperfections for they are what make me unique. It’s accepting other people for who they are. It’s acknowledging that the world is not perfect.

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In Henry David Thoreau’s book *Walden,* he teaches that living simply leads to the most fulfilling and happy life. He tackles topics such as literature,

I see the hipster Thoreau’s thoughts on clothing are that one needs clothing to stay warm and nothing more. That one should not feel ashamed or be socially scorned for wearing last year’s fashion or a worn piece of clothing.