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JAPANESE HOMES AND LIFESTYLES

An Illustrated Journey
through History

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and
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NOTE: Japanese names appearing in the text before 1868 are given in the Japanese order, with surname preceding given name; names after that date appear with surname following given name.

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The Heian Capital and the *Shinden* Style

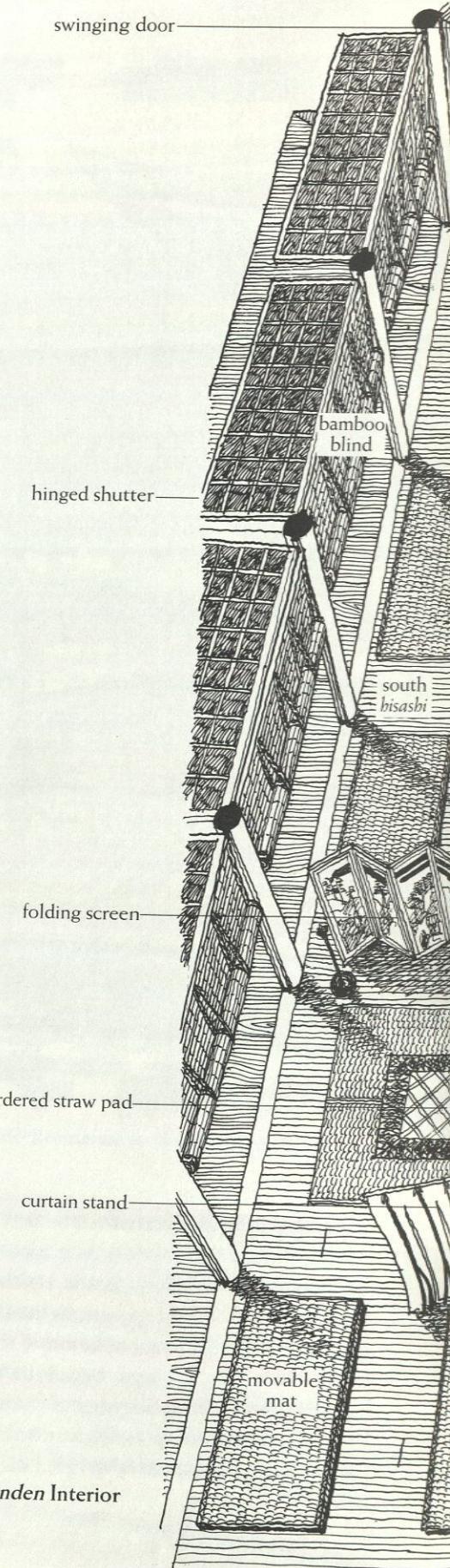
In 784 it was decided to move the imperial residence from Heijō to Nagaoka, which was to remain continually under construction until 794. At this point, however, a further decision was made to shift the capital to Heian (present-day Kyoto) instead. It was here that high-ranking aristocrats were to take up permanent residence and build mansions in the period-defining *shinden* style.

The layout of the Heian capital followed more or less the same grid pattern as the Heijō capital, but the arrangement of streets and blocks was more clearly defined so as to provide suitable sites for building aristocratic residences. At the outset, only two temples were allowed, one in the eastern half and one in the western half of the city.

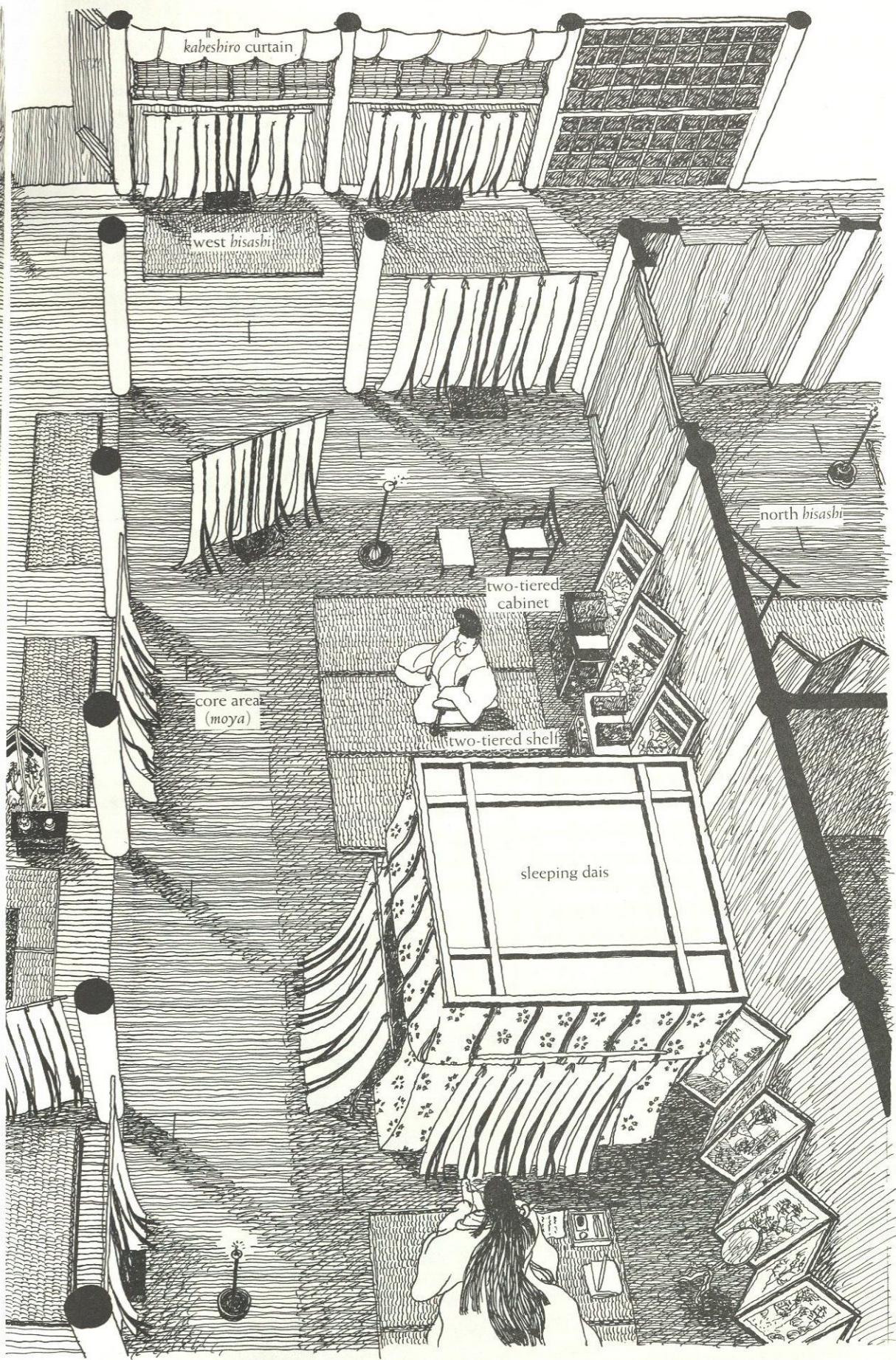
The grid employed at the Heijō capital had fixed the distance from the center of one main street to the center of the next at 180 *jō* (1 *jō* equals approx. 3 m.), which meant that any difference in the width of roads produced residential blocks (*bō*) of varying sizes. However, in the Heian capital the unit of measure was taken as one *chō*, which was laid down as 40 *jō*, with the width of the intervening alleys counted separately; hence every block was of the same size.

The area of the grounds of an upper-class residence ranged from one to as much as four *chō*; the minimum plot allotted to ordinary government officials was known as a "one householder" (*hito-henushi*; i.e., 1/32 of a *chō*). This was only half the area allotted in the Heijō capital—a sure sign that the bureaucratic population had undergone an increase.

When the aristocracy began building their residences in the capital, their chosen architectural design was the *shinden* style. The process whereby this style developed is not clear. It seems that at first people had a left-right symmetrical arrangement in mind. In fact, such an arrangement is never found in practice. The reason for this seems to be that the main entrance and rear entrance on east and west created a horizontal axis that



■ *Shinden* Interior



clashed with the vertical (north-south) axis represented by the main building of the compound, producing an asymmetrical arrangement.

The *shinden* style placed the *shinden* (the main building where the head of the family lived) more or less in the center of the grounds, facing south over a pond and connected by open corridors to annexes to the east, west, and north. From the east and west annexes, "gate corridors" (i.e., corridors with a gate giving access midway along their length to the inner grounds) stretched out to "fishing" and "spring" pavilions, which overlooked the pond.

Near the main gate there were a household office, guardhouse, carriage house, and other structures. Near the rear entrance, situated on the opposite side of the compound, stood the kitchen, ritual affairs office, and so on.

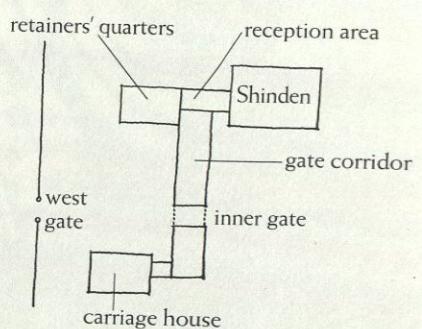
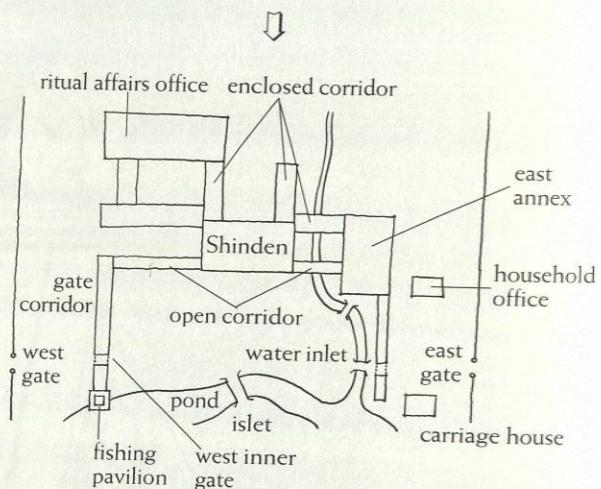
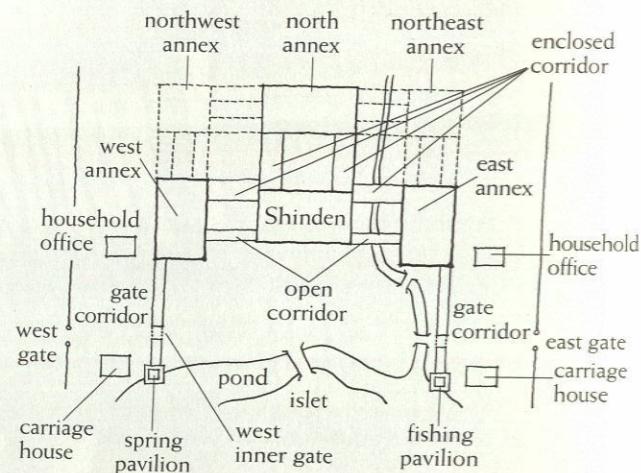
The visitor entered from the main gate, where he alighted from his ox-cart and left his attendants, and passed via an inner gate and the south garden into the *shinden*. The master of the house received guests in the south peripheral (*hisashi*) area, the north peripheral (*hisashi*) area being reserved for everyday living.

The interior of the *shinden* consisted of a core structure (*moya*) flanked by peripheral structures (*hisashi*). The *hisashi* could be built on one side of the *moya*, two sides or four sides, or in a variety of other ways. This created a large, open space, which had to be divided into functional areas by partitions such as folding and single-leaf screens, curtain stands, decorative tapestries, *kabeshiro* walls (curtains with bamboo blinds behind them), and bamboo blinds. These areas were distinguished by such other appurtenances as movable mats, round cushions, straw pads with decorative borders, woven mats, lacquered tables, chairs for ceremonial use, two-tiered shelves, and cabinets.

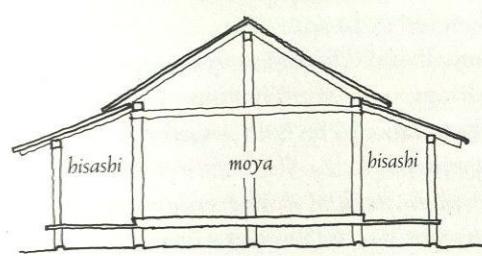
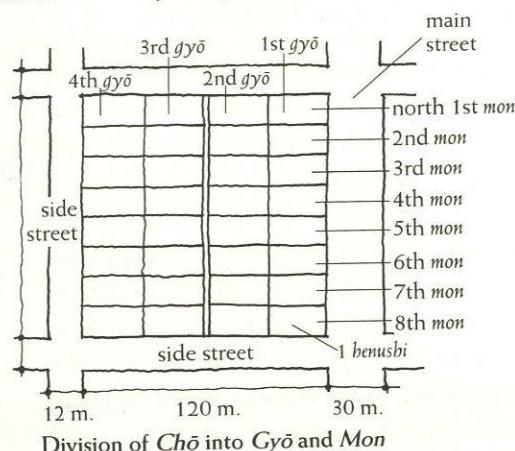
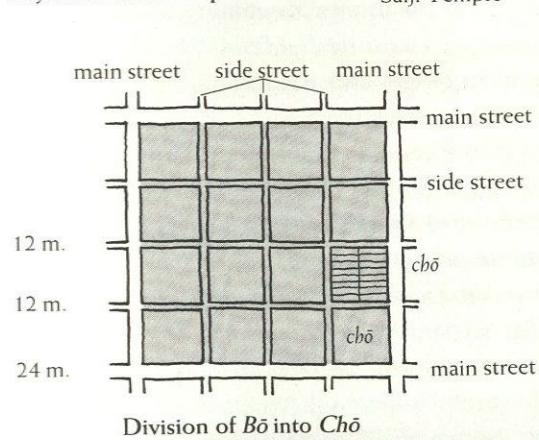
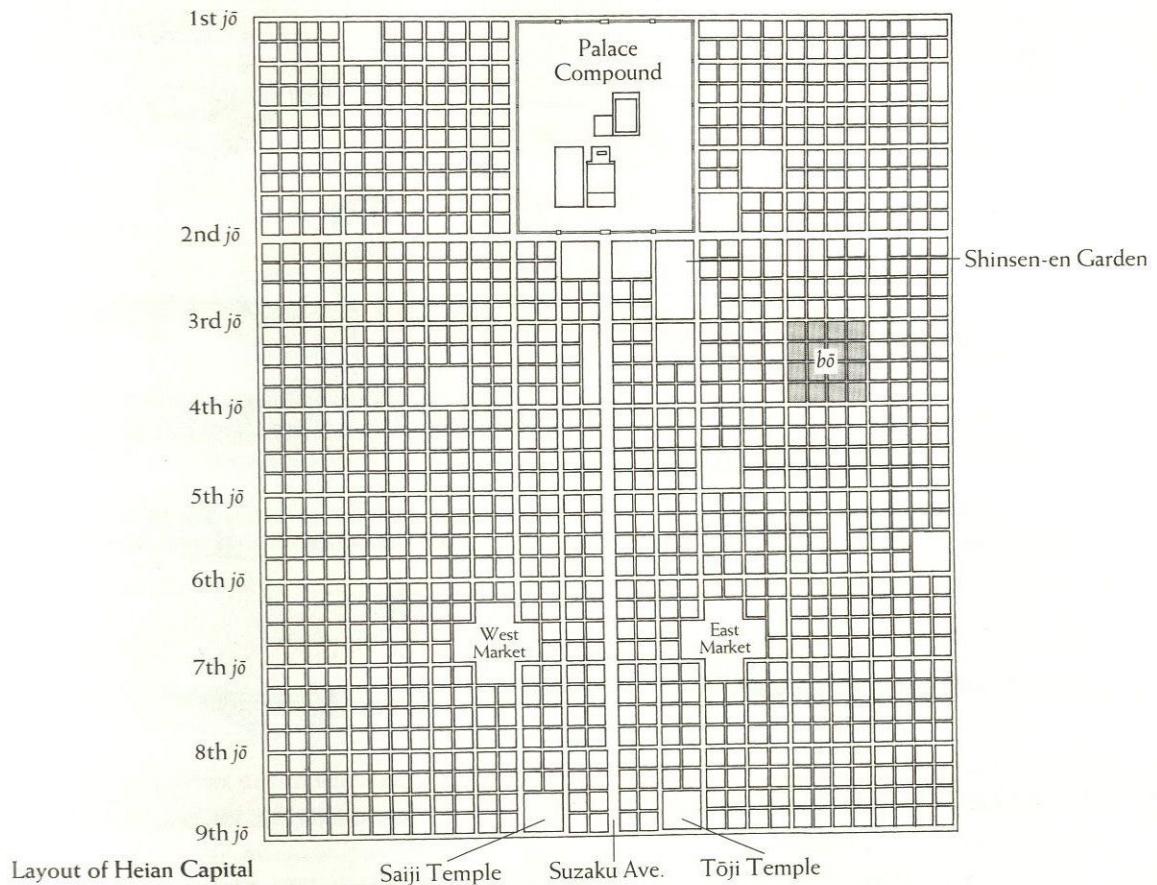
The *shinden* was the place where the male or female head of the household and his or her spouse lived, while daughters—with or without their spouses—lived in the annexes.

In marriage among the aristocratic class of the day, the man generally went to and from his

own home and the woman's, returning to his own home in the morning, a style to which the relaxed layout of the *shinden* style seems to have been peculiarly well suited.



Changes in the *Shinden* Style



The *Moya* (Core) and *Hisashi* (Peripheral) Sections

