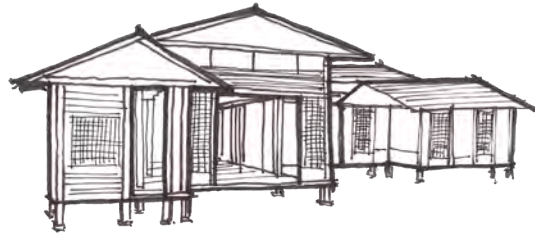


# GOVERNED BY HIERARCHY: JAPAN'S SAMURAI DISTRICTS



The rigid samurai code of ethics has long been romanticized in film and literature around the world. Further investigation reveals that this inexorable hierarchy governed all aspects of feudal life, including the built environment. For 700 years, samurai comprised the highest tier in a rigid caste system, and they served as Japan's civic and military leaders. Their residences were designed in accordance with precise planning guidelines that directly correlated to status and rank. We propose to visit the six major preserved samurai districts in Japan to study how this hierarchical system was applied at three scales: urban planning, site design and building design.

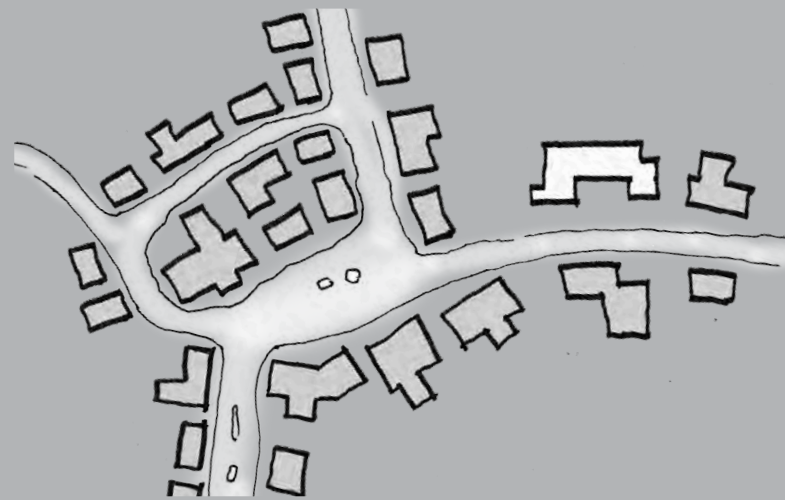
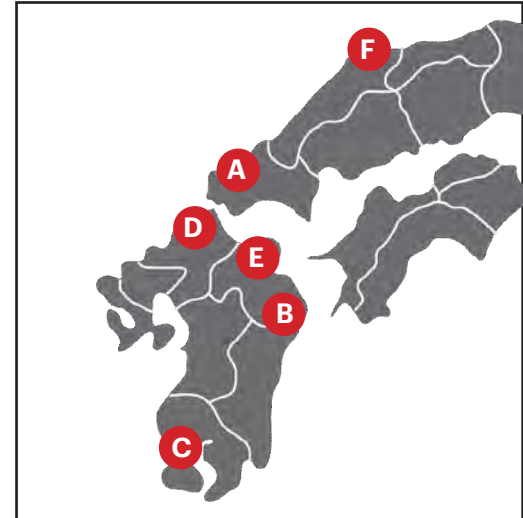
Medieval Japanese cities followed basic planning principles that originally correlated to defense strategies. A castle was the civic and geographic center, surrounded by samurai residences, with merchants and artisans concentrated in specific districts farther afield. The buildings became rigorously reflective of the societal structure: high-ranking samurai lived near the castle in large residences, while lower-rank homes were increasingly subordinate in location and character. Portions of the samurai districts in Usuki and Chiran have been preserved nearly intact, providing ample opportunity to observe how this hierarchy dictated the urban plan.

A central principle of traditional Japanese design is the harmonious closeness between buildings and nature. Within the samurai districts, each house was intentionally situated within the landscape to create a pleasing set of spatial hierarchies. While the buildings were rigid and symmetrical, the gardens were often purposefully picturesque. Small "view gardens" were intentionally framed to be seen, but not accessed from an interior room. Larger gardens, surrounding the homes of more prestigious samurai, could be extensive and take on symbolic forms. For example, rock formations and a pond imitate a sacred mountain in the unique Tsukiyama Sansui garden in Chiran.

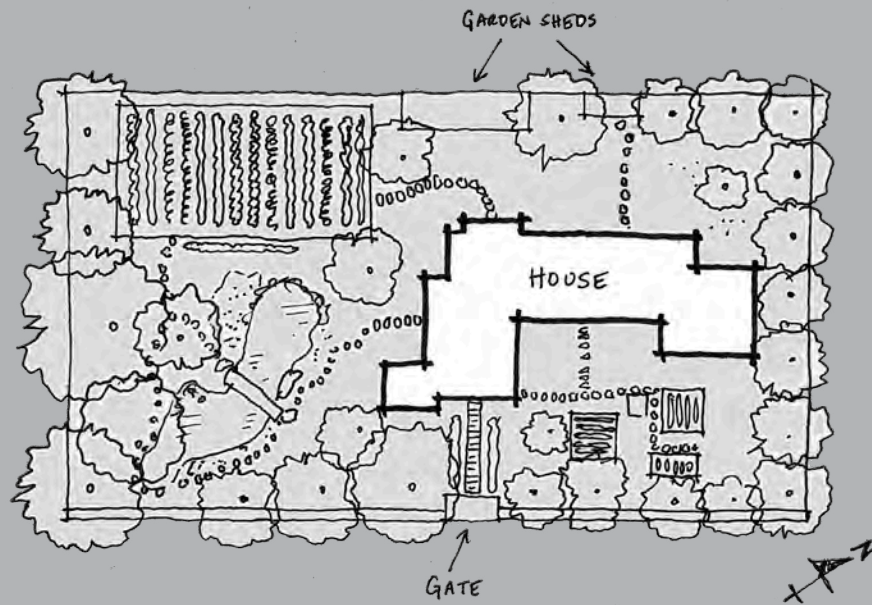
The strict sense of hierarchy was further applied at the building design level. From the overall proportions and layout of the residences, down to the specific sizes of pillars and design of entry gates, everything was strictly related to a samurai's rank and societal standing. The rooms within the house were laid out in a methodical way, with proportions based on *tatami mat* modules. Each of the six villages has several superb examples of preserved homes, ranging from a simple low-caste pharmacist's home in Nagamachi to the large samurai mansions of Kitsuki.

The international influence of Japan's architectural legacy is well-documented, from Frank Lloyd Wright's well-known inspiration to more recent Pritzker winners Tadao Ando and Shigeru Ban. The design principles inherent in the samurai villages were central to Japanese society for hundreds of years and the high level of preservation indicates their continued importance. The rigor with which the underlying design principles were carried through urban planning, landscape design, and architectural detailing could be deeply informative towards RAMSA's master planning projects in Asia and around the world.

BUDGET	
Airfare	\$2100
Hotel	\$1300
Transit	\$500
Sites	\$400
Food	\$700



## URBAN PLANNING



## SITE DESIGN



## BUILDING DESIGN



**A. HAGI CASTLE CITY**  
This former regional capital and trade hub features both samurai and merchant homes.



**B. USUKI DISTRICT**  
The winding alleys are framed by temples and residences, configured for defense.



**C. CHIRAN DISTRICT**  
This district's lush gardens include seven different traditional designs.



**D. NAGAMACHI DISTRICT**  
This district contains examples of residences from different caste levels.



**E. KITSUKI CITY**  
Two hilltop samurai districts demonstrate the hierarchy between the samurai ranks.



**F. MATSUE OLD TOWN**  
Several ranks of samurai residences surround one of Japan's oldest extant castles.