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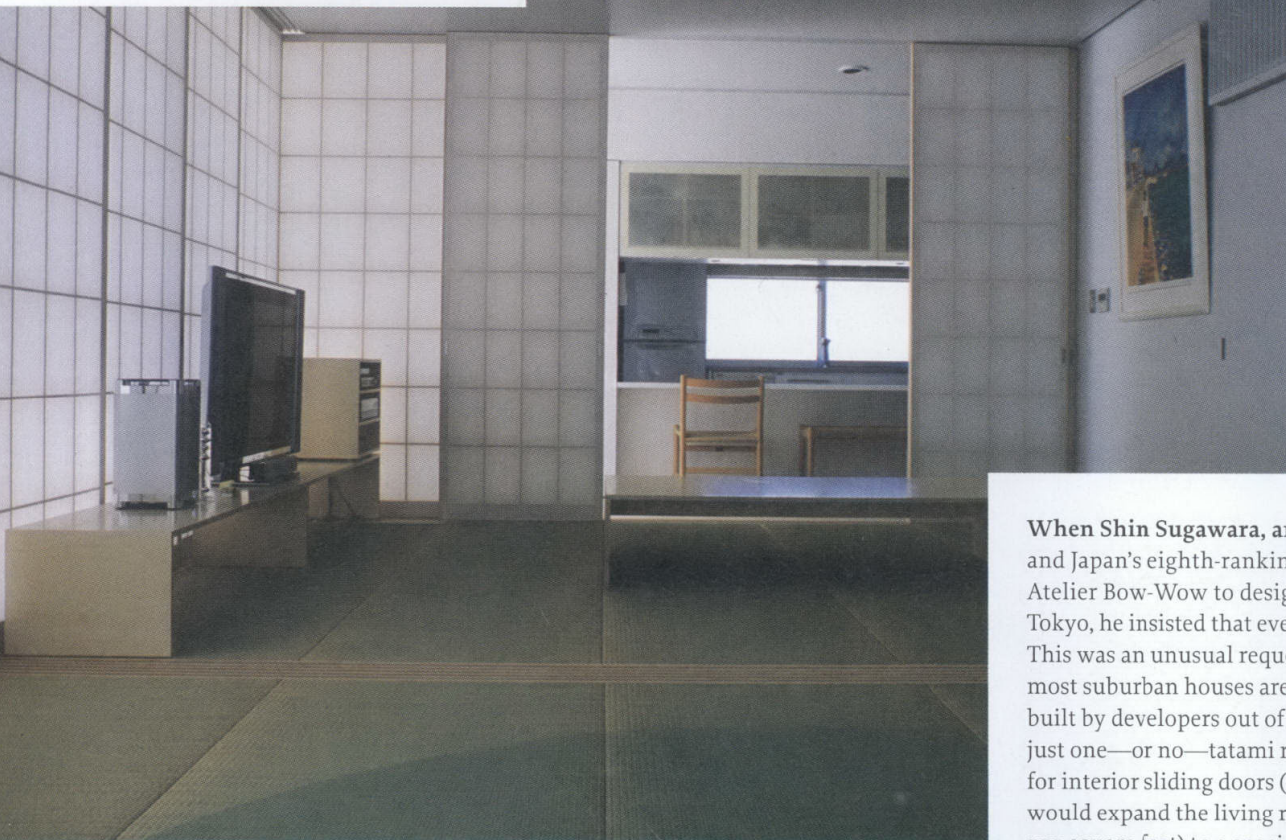


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In the JIG House, *washi*—that translucent, insulating multi-purpose paper of old—is replaced by fiberglass-reinforced plastic (FRP): The kitchen shelves are sandwiched with it, the Shinto altar upstairs is backed with it, and the bright-white second-floor bathroom is illuminated by an FRP skylight.

Chiba, Japan



Above: Extra-wide suspended sliding glass doors are veiled indoors by double-faced shoji screens constructed of a new, super-tear-resistant paper. Radiant heating underlies ultra-thin, high-tech tatami floors. Right: The house was built in a newly developed suburb of Tokyo.



When Shin Sugawara, an architectural paint dealer and Japan's eighth-ranking kendo master, hired Atelier Bow-Wow to design his family home outside Tokyo, he insisted that every room have tatami mats. This was an unusual request in modern-day Japan, where most suburban houses are now dull vertical boxes built by developers out of mostly artificial materials with just one—or no—tatami rooms. Sugawara also asked for interior sliding doors (once customary in Japan) that would expand the living room from ten mats (about 175 square feet) to a spacious 20, as needed. "I'm from the countryside," he explains. "When there's a wedding or a funeral, the whole family gathers at home."

The house, called JIG, suits Sugawara and his family perfectly. Like a bow pulled taut on a single steel arrow, the structure is a white rectangle suspended over four parking spaces, untroubled by vertical supports. "I hate clutter," Sugawara says. "I demanded only that our house be dynamic, clean, and individualistic." The architects tweaked traditional Japanese components like the narrow wooden veranda with Western and high-tech materials: steel, concrete, and multiple shades of interior paint, the last of which is still unusual here. But the overall effect is that of an old Japanese home in the country, where man-made elements conspire only to engender an appreciation of nature's simplicity.

JIG stands in an area so newly developed that to reach it you walk a temporary asphalt path through a red-dirt construction site that follows the elevated train toward Tokyo. But the Sugawaras hardly notice. The architects concentrated all downstairs views on the formal garden, a grassy rectangle bordered by a string of white-flowering trees: summer camellia, white magnolia, Japanese snowbell. And the master bedroom window, a four-by-four-foot industrial pane set inches from the floor, cleverly misses the view of the train. "The joy of a house," says Bow-Wow partner Yoshiharu Tsukamoto, "is measured by routine. Architecture gives rhythms to the groundless, erupting flow we call life." On fair days Shin's wife, Noriko, steps through this great aperture, which ingeniously doubles as a portal to the balcony, and, following a custom as old as the nation, hangs out the futons to air in the sun. ▶