

Dear Will-san,

I was honored to be invited to the 2007 Timber Framers Guild conference. Originally Mr. Sugimura was supposed to participate in the workshop as a master carpenter. However, his wife had problems with her health. He asked me to take over the important job as a master carpenter.

I have been to 2003 TFG conference and to 2005 Kezurou-kai in Oakland. This was my third time here and I would like to write what I thought over these visits.

Japanese carpentry skills were passed down from a master to an apprentice, and again from the apprentice to an apprentice. I was not an exception. I apprenticed under my first master carpenter for four years and went on working for three other master carpenters as a craftsman. I was 23 when I started my own business after spending 7 years as an apprentice and a craftsman.

When I was an apprentice, I lived with my first master and spent all day working with him. I don't recall having my own time. The skills were never 'taught'. Even if he explained something, I don't think I could remember what he said because I didn't have the basic knowledge. I watched my master and his older apprentice working many times. Every time I watched their work their skills were imprinted in my brain. Now I think that's how I learned and those skills are applied to my work. Nowadays I don't think there are apprentices who live with their master carpenters and learn.

Recently there are fewer opportunities for a master carpenter to pass down his skills to his apprentice. This is because the customers want houses that do not require special techniques. Diversity of life styles brought out the need of different styles of houses. The major house builders with huge capital and competitive strength have started introducing a variety of houses as a product. It is true that they are popular because you can choose and combine what you like as if they are fast food items. They can keep rain and wind out for the time being. They look nice with innovative design. And the short length of construction amazes me. It takes only three months for 200m² (660ft²) house to be completed from a contract to finish. However, I think we, craftsmen, are somewhat responsible for reasons that people want to get that sort of houses. I can think of several reasons. We didn't go out to sell to people. We just worked without adapting to lifestyle changes. Customers get confused by famous house builders' advertisement and salesman's sale pitch and sign even though it is several hundred thousand dollars purchase. A very few people are acquainted with carpenters unlike the past.Å@

I was surprised to find every one of the participants was very serious and willing to work. I could feel that they wanted to learn the skill so much.

In 2003 it was my first time and I was a captain. The pressure of being a captain was heavy on my shoulders and because of that I was not as calm as this time. I was different this time. I believe that our attitudes were inspiring to the students and that they were able to learn from us. You can't work if you have just knowledge, but if you don't have knowledge, you can't work either.

I worked on the house in the slide show all by myself including designing and actual construction. Actually I worked only on woodwork part, but it took me seven months before the raising. I did not fit joineries temporarily beforehand. It was the first try. In the raising ceremony people in the area got together and the event became like a festival. Carpenters can't make mistakes. If they make a mistake, they won't be able to get a contract in the area. They

would have to close the business. I know a house which was demolished the day after the raising day because carpenters made mistakes. A different carpenter built the house. It should be raised without mistakes, but in the reality it is very difficult.

There are only a few carpenters who can join the logs in a complicated way in the area. There is no one who has the skill among Kezurou-kai members. There are some people who can make something similar. I didn't mean to brag about myself.

I felt the students were enthusiastic about learning Japanese construction and skills even more than Japanese people. You can't absorb skills into your body from just listening and watching. You have to make many mistakes and from those mistakes you learn something. I believe your skills will improve that way.

There are many people who want to brag about their skills and try to get reputation. I don't want to have reputation, but I would be honored if there is even one more person who wants to live in the house that I built.

I have built 34 new houses in the neighborhood since I was 23 years old. I am willing to share my skills with someone even if that person is in the States. I had chances to hear what American craftsmen are feeling from James Wiester. Unfortunately there are people who teach wrong skills. So far you can learn professional skills only from those people. I've heard that Japanese foods are popular in foreign countries. As far as food culture there seems to be some governmental organization involved in certification of Japanese foods. If you don't protect wooden construction that way, fake "Japanese" construction will spread and leave a negative legacy.

Finally thank you for valuable experiences, the opportunities to get to know people and the friendship.

Nishiyama