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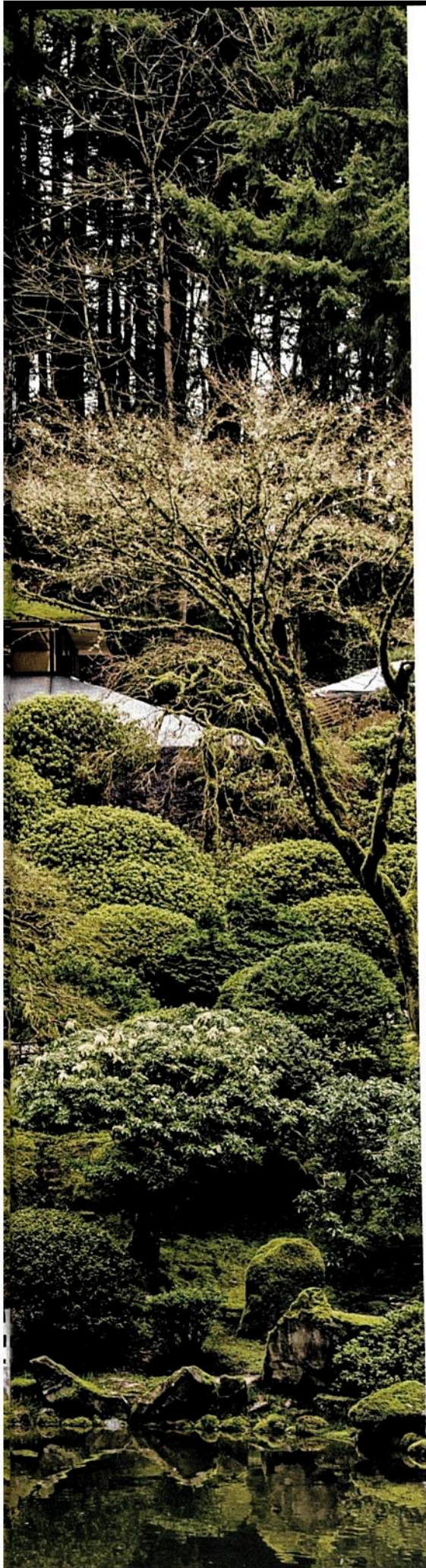
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DESIGNED BY ARCHITECT
KENGO KUMA (RIGHT),
THE NEW CULTURAL
VILLAGE NESTLES IN
OREGON'S PORTLAND
JAPANESE GARDEN.
THE PROJECT MARKS
THE ARCHITECT'S FIRST
PUBLIC COMMISSION
IN THE UNITED STATES;
JAPANESEGARDEN.ORG.



MAKING HIS MARK

Star Tokyo architect
Kengo Kuma plants his flag in
the United States with a
new cultural complex for the
Portland Japanese Garden

TEXT BY **BRIAN LIBBY** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **KYLE JOHNSON**

THE CULTURAL VILLAGE
FEATURES DOUBLE
ROOFLINES AND TIMBER
SLATS INSPIRED BY
TRADITIONAL JAPANESE
ARCHITECTURE.



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s the clouds part and sunlight hits a blossoming cherry tree, shadows dapple the Cultural Village, a trio of new buildings at Oregon's Portland Japanese Garden that house a café, visitor center, gallery, and library. Droplets of water drip from the complex's pitched green roofs, evidence of the morning's shower. Since its opening in 1967, the garden has offered visitors a place to commune with nature,

and these additions, designed by architect Kengo Kuma, only accentuate that sense of peace, mindful as they are of the landscape and the elements.

A star in his native Japan, Kuma is best known internationally for Tokyo's 2020 Olympic stadium, a commission he took on after the late Zaha Hadid's scheme was scrapped due to cost overruns. That project will be the latest in a long list of buildings he's designed for his hometown, from the 2009 Nezu Museum—also nestled beside a garden, with soaring roof planes—to the nearby SunnyHills cake shop, an intricate lattice of timber. Now 62 years old, Kuma has never had a wider reach. His new outpost for the V&A museum is taking shape in Dundee, Scotland. Also in the works are a Dallas skyscraper for Rolex, an apartment tower in Vancouver, and the Hans Christian Andersen Museum in Odense, Denmark, among countless projects. The Cultural Village marks his first public building in the United States.

"He's definitely in line for the Pritzker," notes Geeta Mehta, an architecture professor at Columbia University and coauthor of the 2011 book *New Japan Architecture*. "The stadium puts him in a very big league." Kuma's rising profile, she adds, comes at a moment when a generation of top Japanese architects are receiving the global attention they've long deserved. "People like Shigeru Ban and SANAA's Kazuyo Sejima, they were doing small boutique projects for a very long time, but now they're getting larger commissions in and out of Japan."

The Cultural Village reveals Kuma's enduring fascination with traditional Japanese architecture, particularly wood craftsmanship, pagoda rooflines, and zigzagging floor plans, which ensure each room has natural light from two sides. True to his overall body of work, however, the Portland project remains unapologetically contemporary, with razor-thin aluminum panels on the lower roofs, sliding glass doors, and Tyvek in place of rice paper as the filter beneath a skylight. The complex, moreover, was designed to LEED standards.

"We are living in the 21st century; we should present a new type of sustainable building," Kuma reflects in a conference room at the Jordan Schnitzer Japanese Arts Learning Center, the largest of the three new buildings. "But traditional Japanese architecture shows us a lot of hints about sustainability." The roof overhangs, for example, shield the glass-walled building from direct sunlight, reducing energy costs. The building also makes extensive use of wood to help limit its carbon footprint. "It is not a nostalgic building," Kuma adds. "It's a solution to a problem."

Different as Kuma's Portland complex and Olympic stadium might seem, the architect insists the two projects share key ideas, namely their integration into parklike settings and the interplay of light and shadow. At the Cultural Village, movable wood slats filter the light coming through the glass walls, while both projects employ multitiered eaves to create shading. "At the stadium we have four layers of roof. Here we have two. But the basic idea is the same."

For leadership at the Portland Japanese Garden, the \$33.5 million project required not only an unprecedented fundraising campaign but also a change in thinking. "We had board members who said, 'Whatever we do, it needs to be really traditional,'" recalls Stephen Bloom, the garden's CEO. "I'd reply, 'Traditional to what?' We have garden styles that span a thousand years. Japanese design has continued and will continue to evolve, and we have to represent that or we're misrepresenting what is an amazing design culture." ▀

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: KYLE JOHNSON; SCOTT FRANCES/OTTO; TAKUMI OTA; DAICI ANO; EIICHI KANO

KUMA'S 2010 GLASS-
ENCLOSED ADDITION TO A
MIDCENTURY HOME IN NEW
CANAAN, CONNECTICUT.

“We are living in
the 21st century;
we should present
a new type of
sustainable building,”
says *Kengo Kuma*.

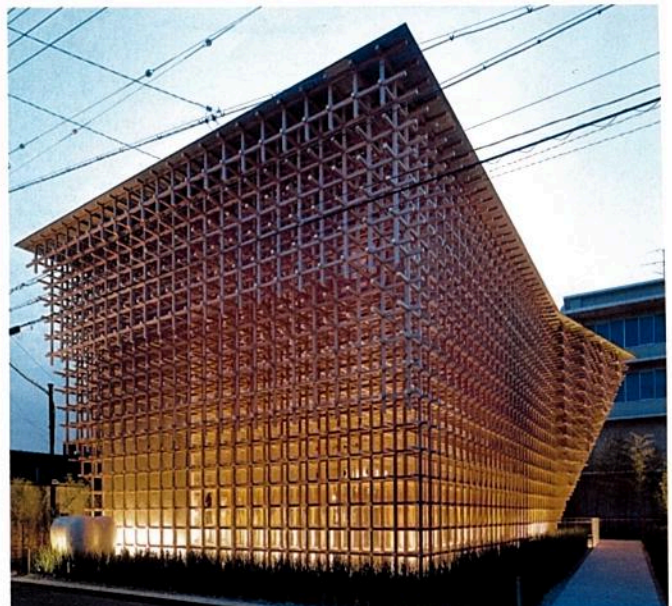


THE 2010 YUSUHARA
WOODEN BRIDGE
MUSEUM IN JAPAN.

A 2010 MUSEUM RESEARCH CENTER
JUST OUTSIDE NAGOYA, JAPAN.



PERFORATED-ALUMINUM PANELS CLAD HIS CURVACEOUS 2016
WUXI VANKE EXHIBITION SPACE, ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF SHANGHAI.





AD

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MAGAZINE

Kengo Kuma Tells *AD* About His Latest Project—a \$33.5 Million Cultural Complex

Star Tokyo architect Kengo Kuma plants his flag in the United States with a new cultural complex for the Portland Japanese Garden

TEXT BY [BRIAN LIBBY](#) · PHOTOGRAPHY BY [KYLE JOHNSON](#) · Posted June 9, 2017 · [Magazine](#)

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