

NEWS



IMPERIAL HOTEL

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The Main Building of the Imperial Hotel, Kyoto Retains Its Registered Tangible Cultural Property Status

Now Registered as the "Former Yasaka Kaikan"

Tokyo, Japan, August 12th, 2026 Imperial Hotel, Ltd. has announced that, following deliberations by the national Council for Cultural Affairs, the Yasaka Kaikan—a Registered Tangible Cultural Property partially preserved and adaptively reused as the main building of the Imperial Hotel, Kyoto—retained its registration on July 9 under the new name “Former Yasaka Kaikan.”

The Yasaka Kaikan, recognized both as a national Registered Tangible Cultural Property and a Historic Scenic Structure of Kyoto City, had largely fallen out of use—including its theater, for which it was originally built—due to deterioration and concerns regarding seismic safety. While many culturally significant historic buildings are regrettably demolished when deterioration or seismic safety issues necessitate intervention, Imperial Hotel, Ltd. chose instead to preserve and revitalize a portion of the Yasaka Kaikan, culminating in the opening of the Imperial Hotel, Kyoto on March 5 this year.

In general, alterations affecting more than one-fourth of a Registered Tangible Cultural Property’s building area or ordinarily visible exterior require formal notification. Although the area preserved within the main building of the Imperial Hotel, Kyoto was reduced, the project successfully retained two exterior walls and portions of the original structural framework. It also involved the conservation and reuse of the original exterior tiles and terra cotta, as well as the reconstruction of the copper roof and decorative metalwork.

Thanks to these efforts, the facade composition—the building's most significant architectural feature—has been successfully preserved for future generations. In recognition of the value retained through the project and the new life given to the building, its registration has been continued under the name "Former Yasaka Kaikan." This represents a noteworthy example of historic preservation in Japan.

Preservation of the Main Building

Preserving of the Exterior Walls

From the perspective of preserving the historic cityscape, retaining the southwestern facade was a primary objective. With safety prioritized throughout the construction process, dismantling and structural reinforcement were carried out concurrently. The original exterior tiles and terra cotta were also carefully conserved and reused, while the distinctive eaves that characterize the building's appearance were preserved.



Preserving of the Exterior Wall Tiles

Most of the tiles on the prominent southwestern facade—highly visible to both local residents and visitors—were preserved using two principal methods. Some were retained in place and treated to prevent flaking and detachment, while others were carefully salvaged and reinstalled using the traditional Japanese *ikedori* ("live capture") technique. *Ikedori* is a preservation method in which historic materials are painstakingly removed without damage so they may be reused.



Through this meticulous process, a total of 16,387 original tiles—representing 10.6% of the original tiles used throughout the building before construction began—were successfully salvaged and reinstalled on the restored facade.

Photo courtesy of Obayashi Corporation

Preserving of the Exterior Terra-Cotta Reliefs

The terra-cotta reliefs adorning the exterior walls are another distinctive feature of the facade. Each piece was carefully restored according to its condition and securely stabilized using structural anchor pins. The reliefs feature the *hōsōge* pattern, a stylized floral arabesque motif traditionally associated with Japanese decorative art.



Restoration of the Roof

The copper roof, one of the defining features of the Yasaka Kaikan, was completely reconstructed due to deterioration. Using copper sheeting, its original shapes and dimensions were faithfully reproduced. Over time, the copper is expected to transition from its initial bright metallic hue to dark brown, then black, and eventually to its characteristic green patina, returning the roof to an appearance similar to that before renovation.



The character “歌,” engraved on the round eave-end tiles, was also meticulously recreated. *

*Pronounced *uta*, the character “歌” means “song” or “singing.”

Preserving of the Entrance Vestibule

At the main entrance, portions of the original ceiling and wall paneling within the vestibule were carefully preserved and reused. Etched glass dating from the building's original construction was also reinstated. Originally installed in the ceiling, this delicately engraved glass features a traditional plum blossom branch motif and preserves an important element of the building's original interior.



About the Imperial Hotel, Kyoto

The Imperial Hotel, Kyoto preserves and adaptively reuses a portion of the Yasaka Kaikan, a nationally Registered Tangible Cultural Property located within the grounds of the Gion Kobu Kaburenjo. Inheriting its valuable legacy while breathing new life into a 90-year-old local landmark, the hotel brings together timeless beauty and a contemporary sensibility. In April 2025, the hotel became a member of The Leading Hotels of the World, headquartered in New York.

About the Yasaka Kaikan

- 1936: Completed
- 2001: Registered as a national Registered Tangible Cultural Property
- 2011: Designated as a Historic Scenic Structure of Kyoto City
- 2026: Registration continued under the new name "Former Yasaka Kaikan"

The Yasaka Kaikan was built to complement the Gion Kobu Kaburenjo, a performance venue for geiko and maiko, and to meet the need for an assembly hall suited to a changing society. It was designed by Tokusaburo Kimura of Obayashi Corporation.

Each floor is crowned by a copper-clad roof, while the tower-like central section of the front façade, with its *tsukebisashi* eaves and *hōgyō-zukuri* roof, recalls the keep of a Japanese castle. These elements skillfully incorporate traditional Japanese architectural motifs.

Initially used for theatrical performances and *Ningyō Jōruri*, traditional Japanese puppet theater, the building was later used for a variety of entertainment purposes, including as a movie theater, dance hall, and concert hall, becoming a cherished landmark within the local community.



Photo: Masatomo Moriyama

Caption:

The Imperial Hotel, Kyoto, which opened in March 2026, preserves and adaptively reuses part of the Yasaka Kaikan.