



restorative retreat

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Discover how Pritzker Prize laureate Shigeru Ban designed Shishi-Iwa House No.02, a unique wood and glass retreat built around nature in Karuizawa, Japan.



(Above) SSH No.02, a rectilinear structure made of Japanese cedar wood and glass, was completed in May 2022.

(Facing page) An open-air pathway wraps around Shishi-Iwa House No.02.

Just one hour by bullet train from Tokyo, Karuizawa makes an ideal weekend escape from Japan's bustling capital. Tucked away in this tranquil area in the Nagano Prefecture is Shishi-Iwa House.

This boutique accommodation boasts a collection of three intimate retreats – underscored by a mastery of contemporary architecture, design and art, seamlessly intertwined with nature. All three houses are within walking distance from each other, and guests share all common facilities such as a library, kitchenettes, and a lush garden.

The first two Shishi-Iwa Houses (SSH No.01 and SSH No.02) were designed by renowned Japanese architect Shigeru Ban. They were completed in 2018 and 2022 respectively. SSH No.03 was designed by Ryue Nishizawa, co-founder of SANAA, and launched in early

May 2023. These are the first hotel projects for both Pritzker Prize-winning architects.

The property is developed by HDHP GK, a social enterprise sponsored by HDH Capital Management helmed by Singapore-based CEO Huy Hoang. His brief to the architects was to build a full scale house without using any expensive materials.

"It's unusual to have the two very different architectural projects sitting side by side – but this allows guest to visualise them within the same retreat," Hoang says. During the art and architectural tour, which is part of the hotel's programme, staff will bring guests to view and appreciate the buildings. "We know that architecture is usually underappreciated but it has the power to impact emotions – just like any design work," he adds.

hospitality



shigeru ban
Architect, Shigeru
Ban Architects

forest masterpiece

For Shishi-Iwa House 1 (SSH No.01), Ban created a bespoke atmosphere for the rooms and spaces. He carried on with works, during the pandemic, on Shishi-Iwa House 2 (SSH No.02), which has 12 guest rooms on the first floor; the rooms were designed with a clean contemporary edge and private outdoor terraces, and fitted with inviting hinoki cypress wood bathtubs.

The large, open and airy communal space on the second floor is where the restaurant and wine and whisky bar are located. The latter is fitted with a tiled bar and high walls of coloured panels.

“The only thing that SSH No.01 and SSH No.02 have in common is that they are made of timber structure. The site of SSH No.01 was relatively large with many

tall trees that were worth saving, so the plan evolved as a curved shape. SSH No.02 had a very tight site so the plan had to be efficient,” says Ban.

According to Ban there weren't too many challenges with SSH No.02 despite the tighter space. “As the site was quite narrow, we had to think about the construction process. For example, half of the skywalk on the far end of the site had to be constructed first, together with the main building, as the crane would not be able to enter once the building is fully built. Although all timber trusses were prefabricated at the factory then pre-assembled on ground at site, the trusses had to be raised and brought to location for installation by crane. This meant the second half of the skywalk could only be built after all the trusses were installed,” he explains.

(Below) SSH No.02 appears to float among the trees.

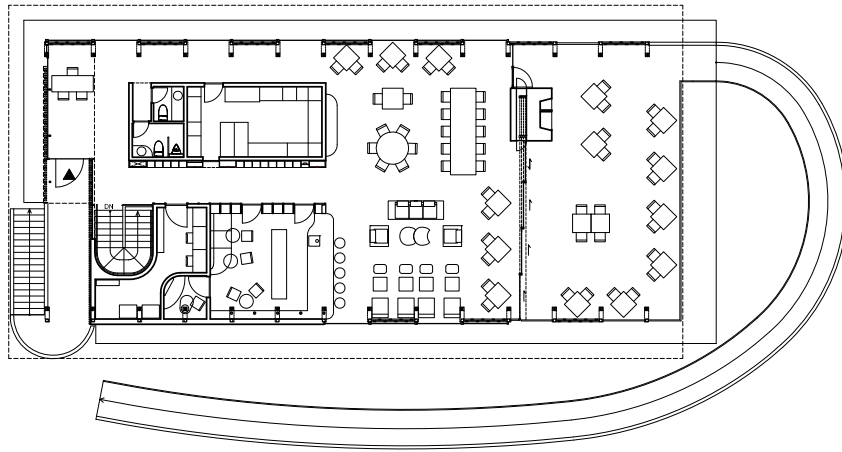
(Facing page) The dining area features architect Shigeru Ban's famous paper tube furniture.



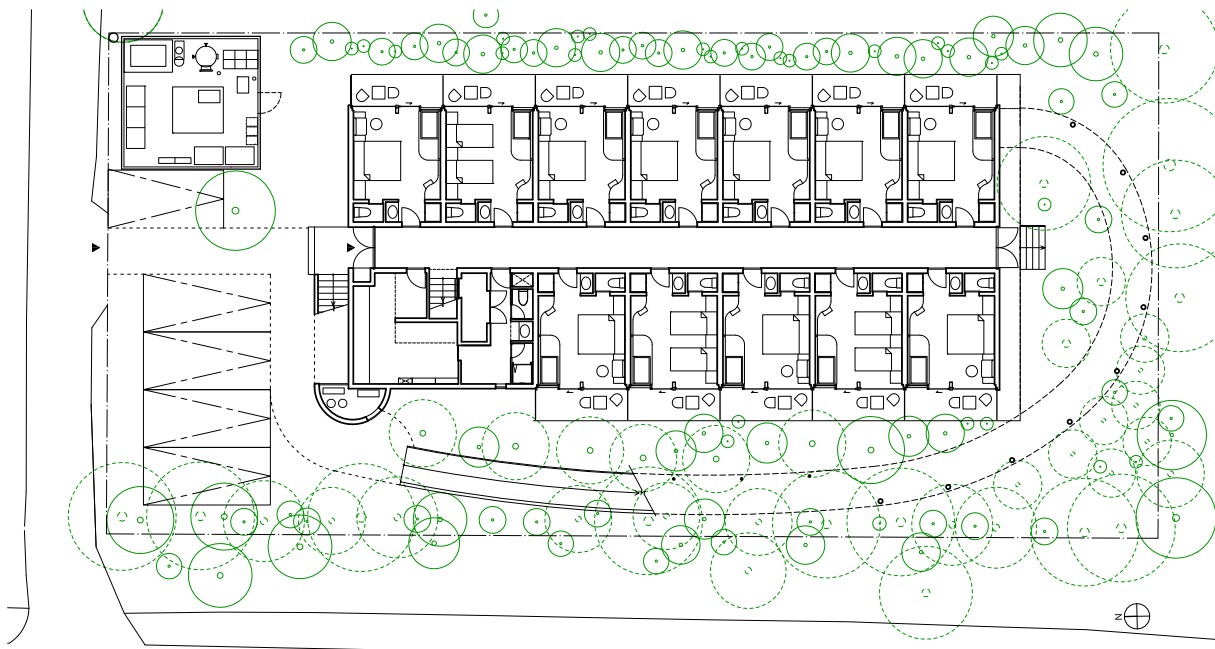


hospitality

floor plans

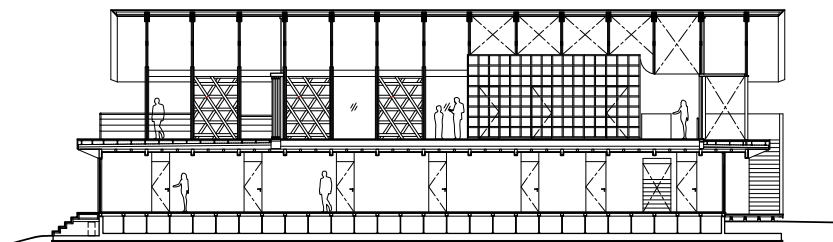
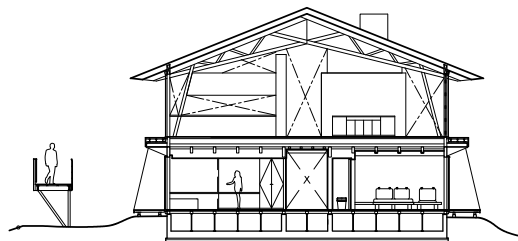


2F PLAN
S=1/300



1F PLAN
S=1/300

section



SECTIONS
S=1/300

The outdoor skywalk is an architectural highlight of this build. The open-air pathway wraps around the building, creating a gentle transition from the outside to indoors. What's unique is that the wood and glass structure appear to 'float' above the trees in its natural landscape.

"Initially, the concept was to bring guests up by the skywalk and first enter through the dynamic space on the second floor. Also, it is a rare experience that you get to approach a building by going around it and seeing it in various perspectives. As the project developed, a staircase in the front entrance was added for operational reasons and easy access," Ban adds.

The architect elaborates on his design vision: "The combination of timber trusses spanning 12m and latticed timber load-bearing walls pushed to the perimeter of the building not only allowed the space beneath to be very spacious and flexible without any columns, but also made the building to be very 'transparent' and open to the (surrounding) nature."

"I wanted the guests to experience the sense of unity between the building and the landscape. The same timber structure continues out to the terrace, with only large sliding doors differentiating the indoor and outdoor space," he says, adding that once these sliding doors fully open, the space becomes continuous, and guests will have the freedom to use the expanded space as they wish.

(Below) Shigeru Ban wants guests to experience a sense of unity between the building and the landscape.



hospitality



project name

Shishi-Iwa House No.02

location

Karuizawa, Japan

site area

992.17 sqm

building area

637.74 sqm

year of completion

May 2022

architect firm

Shigeru Ban Architects

lead architect

Shigeru Ban

contractor/builder company

Sasazawa Kensetsu

furniture brand

Shigeru Ban custom design furniture

materials and furnishings

Known for his sustainable paper tube furniture, Ban designed most of the chairs and tables for SSH No.02. All fixed and built-in furniture such as shelves and bar counter are also custom designed by Shigeru Ban Architects.

Ban envisioned the dining and bar space to “feel natural and raw rather than artificial and neat” – revealing timber structure as finishes, as well as plywood ceiling and hinoki wall finishes with beautiful wood grains.

Meanwhile, lending some colour to the space are the white volume of the fireplace and leather panels along the corridor. Ban points out: “The fireplace is located on the second level terrace, next to the sliding doors. This white volume also acts as a pocket for the sliding doors. When the doors are fully open, guests can easily move between the indoor lounge space and outdoor terrace.”

Additionally, there is a small library along the corridor leading guests to the dining area. “On one side, there are shelves and display for books, artwork or photography, while the other side is a wall displaying a grid of leather panels, wood panels, mirror and

transparent acrylic panels. There’s a hidden door in this wall grid that brings guests to the Wine & Whisky Bar. Only then the guests will find out that the wall is actually a full height shelf that showcases a collection of whisky,” Ban shares.

Hoang sums up: “Our concept is made for today’s generation [of guests] who want to know more about the origins of how the product is made. They want to know about architectural designs, the materials, and the paintings on the wall. They may want to know why you plant Japanese maple trees instead of sakura. It’s a curious type of generation.”

According to him, this mountain retreat was created with an interest to use architecture as a means to provide a peaceful sanctuary and a place for intellectual creativity. “It’s a different kind of luxury. It’s an active type of luxury. It’s minimalist and the rooms are small by luxury standard. But our generation now is driven by the experience.”

Ultimately Shishi-Iwa House aims to be a place to reflect and restore energy as well as ignite new ways of thinking for guests during their stay.

(Below) The 12 guestrooms boast a clean, contemporary setting with glass doors that open on to private terraces. Each room has a different textile design by artist Asami Sato.

(Facing page) A large communal space spans the upper level; this is home to The Restaurant, The Wine & Whisky Bar and Forest Terrace.

