



Describe your design philosophy.

I strive for designs that are modern, minimalistic and create strong relationships with nature. I love spaces that are modest yet beautiful, poetic yet comfortable, and elegant yet playful. I find beauty in simplicity and the richness of natural materials.

I grew up in Tokyo in a traditional Japanese house. Traditional Japanese homes are carefully designed to cultivate the enjoyment of nature, the beauty of the materials with which they are built, and the play of light and shadow created by the composition, all of which are held within a functional balance. Those ideas are perfectly suited to contemporary design and living.

I'm also interested in sustainable design. I feel an obligation to create designs that are healthy, energy efficient, and durable. Understanding and applying building science is critical to my design practice.

What was the "lightbulb" moment when you realized you wanted to pursue architecture?

I came to architecture late, having worked in finance in my 20s. At 29, I went through a series of life-changing events, which prompted me to reconsider how I wanted to live the rest of my life. I had always enjoyed design, so I took an introductory architecture class at the University of Washington. At one point during school I became ill and spent time recovering, first in a primitive cabin and then in a more comfortable home. I noticed how each space impacted my recovery, both physically and mentally. I realized I could help others by designing healthy and comfortable spaces. Then, I started daydreaming the moment seeing people enjoying the space I design.

Simply put, 'Japanese architecture is something you experience, rather than what you see.' Can you elaborate?

Japanese architecture is often reduced to tropes such as those we see in restaurants and stores. None of those capture the essence of being in a Japanese space. In traditional Japanese architecture, spaces unfold as a journey. It's something you feel with your body and mind.

What aspects of your life before becoming an architect have shaped your design principles and style?

When I was a stock analyst in Tokyo, I looked at trends to determine which would likely be permanent and which would be temporary. I use the same approach when I design homes. I ask my clients about their current needs and how they see their future. From there, we work together to identify priorities.

Favorite part of the design process?

I love the beginning of a project. Thinking of possibilities, trying various layouts, and shaping forms. I share my clients' excitement in thinking about their future.

Best travel destination for inspiration?

Naoshima (Art Island), Japan

Favorite detail of your childhood home?

Engawa is a veranda in a Japanese home. It's an inside-outside space, and often located to enjoy the garden. I remember sitting there as a small child, playing and sometimes falling asleep. It was a happy place.

Nahoko Ueda, Principal | Ueda Design Studio