

# Korea's Traditional Architecture & Interior Design of the Blue House

IN OUK OH / Professor KyungWon Univ.

## Korea's Traditional Architecture

We are living in a so called, "Artificial Environment", which we have created ourselves. Our daily lives evolve around this artificial living condition, which indeed is the reality of today's ever changing world. This phenomenon, in turn, redefined the concept of design that enabled us to cope with our lives: the purpose of design and its process is to fulfill the physical and cultural need, which have accumulated as byproducts of the environment. Naturally, we have learned to pass on the history which became the foundation for the future. Through the repeated processes of the learning method, the population cultivate themselves with proper understanding and appropriate attitude toward design. Furthermore they can develop their own spiritual and technical skills.

The Blue House Project is an example to see the idea of accepting our history, traditions, while utilizing it as a design idea to the maximum. The concept of the design evolved from the fact that both past and present moments can neither be ignored nor repeated. In fact, history can be an excellent source of design ideas. By analyzing past social behaviors and living conditions, we can expand our imaginations beyond limits. Each society and its local condition have tremendous effects on the development and progress of artistic theories, techniques and craftsmanship, and potential design of everyday use-products. Furthermore, we should value the benefits that we receive from a specific culture with an appreciation, as it contributes to the process of design concepts.

Before I start with the Blue House project, I would like to make a few comments on the spirits behind Korean traditional architectures. Art, compare to other media, is the most important factor when judging a nation's characteristics. Historically, Korea has kept its balance: neither the art being too bold nor passive. For this reason, throughout history we tried to avoid neither invading others nor being invaded by them. The predominant Korean sentiment was to appreciate the nature became the basic attitude behind traditional architectures. Rules, regulations and details are as important as for others, but the appreciation of nature was much greater than the rules to Koreans.

## I. The Blue House: The Main Building

We started off our project by adopting traditional Korean design elements to an interior space and by combining traditional style with modern style, thus achieving harmony. We set up the following objectives as guiding to the concept of the interior design of the Blue House's main building.

- 1) To emphasize the traditional Korean style as the main image.
- 2) To harmonize traditional and modern style.
- 3) To emphasize the historical and cultural background of Korea.
- 4) To inspire the public interest towards our traditional culture.
- 5) To express courteousness in the interior.

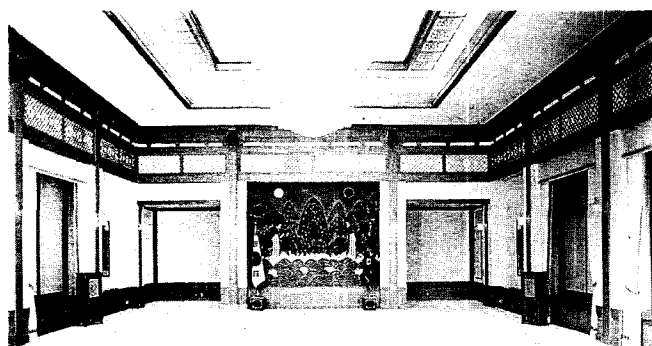
We set up these objectives to follow closely on the planning stage. Especially, we defined these objectives to accomplish our goal, which is to the interior trend of the past, present, and future's design motives, by reviewing our own culture and tradition.

Overall atmosphere of the Main Building interior was studied from one of many Royal Palace's interiors. We reserved the maximum ceiling height to open up the interior space. We also employed exquisite details, as one can see through the simplified designs on the vertical walls. Moreover, the grid ceiling patterns occupies viewers attention. The finishes expressed the natural feeling as well. For example, careful selection of wood in its natural color matched well with the white background of the plaster coating on the wall.



Central Hall connects the main conference building on the left and formal dining and banquet building on the right side. The 76 meter long Central Hall also connects the informal dining room directly and the Grand Staircase in the middle of the Central Hall leads to the second floor, where all the administration offices including the President's office are located. On either side of the staircase, 4 sets of round columns with simplified traditional capitals are placed to symbolize the central space and to emphasize the significance of the left and right axis. Outer surface of the columns are decorated to express delicacy of our traditional motives such as lotus seeds and flowers. Vertical wall surfaces are decorated as minimum as possible, since front space of the walls are where the antiques furniture and art pieces to be located. The conceptual design of main conference and the formal dining room derived from the simplified traditional Korean design elements and shows great efforts to keep the atmosphere of a traditional interior in its details and spatial organization.

The beauty of the simplified design is elaborated through the latticework of windows and grid ceiling designs. The wall behind the head table is protruded to emphasize a large piece of famous painting ILWOLDO: painting of the sun and the moon. The purpose of such plan is to avoid a rigid authoritarian atmosphere: instead, to create a hosting one.



Two-story high Grand Wall surface starts from the main staircase and comes up to the second floor. The grand wall is decorated with a mural painting of the original map of Korea called DaedonggyoJido. Either side of the second floor hallways are planned as a gallery space where traditional artifacts and antiques can be located. The wall surfaces between each office and conference room are designed to place arts and antiques in the future and to continue using this space as a gallery or an Event Hall to express our rich history. The concept of the design of the second floor hallways not only serve as functional corridors but also as vestibules before each office and an open gallery space to appreciate cultural richness. Carefully selected artifacts can be located on a

specific side of a hallway. Traditionally, the left side is reserved to symbolize the military and right side, the literature. Influenced by the theory of Feng-shui, each artifact within the hallways followed careful consideration in its direction.

Finishes for the hallways are wood moldings, painted white walls, wooded floors using traditional techniques, and custom-designed area rug with Korean design motives placed on top of the wooden floor.



## II. The Blue Houses: The Presidential Quarter

The concept behind the Presidential Quarter (the Quarter) was to realize the importance of our traditional design and to express through our design language. At the same time, this project was a chance to reorganize and show the progress of traditional and modern interior designs in Korea.

These were the following objectives of the interior of the design of the Quarter.

- 1) To express the absolute perfection by combining the traditional design elements with today's advanced techniques, representing modern design elements.
- 2) To emphasize the interior finishing techniques to unify the design motives and to continue creating a comfortable space.
- 3) To examine the exterior design of the Quarter and to attempt to be considerate in designing interior space.
- 4) To accommodate as a functional place for the President's family accompanying elegance and symbolic image in the interior space.

Although the symbolic image of the Quarter should reflect traditional images and motives, functional characteristics of the modern period could not be ignored. In addition to adopting western style with traditional style, combining the function with tradition was the most critical issue in design of the Quarter's interior.

The floor plan is divided into three different parts based on the users and main functions; master suite space, family gathering space, and public entertaining space.

- 1) The master suite includes a living room, a western

style bed room, bathroom, dressing room, Korean Ondol—heated floor room and a study room.

- 2) Family space consists of a small dining room, family Ondol room, and family member's bedroom.
- 3) Public entertaining space includes a guards office, meeting room, entrance hall, dining room, a pantry for dining room preparation, kitchen and rooms. In addition, multi-purpose utility room, electrical and mechanical room, and storage are located on the basement level for its functionality to be away from public.

Overall organization of the quarter is based on the Korean traditional architecture's layout and subtle touch of the western life style, so as to accommodate functional requests of the daily users, such as family members.

Public space, such as the entrance hall, vestibules and hallways, are treated as transitional space from public to private and from traditional to functional modern style. Simplified details and design elements play as key roles in expressing the purpose of the transitional entrance area. Selecting appropriate materials to create specific atmosphere is done successfully. For example, to connect the outside natural feelings with interior floors and walls, materials, such as wood, plaster, and granite slabs are used. Those natural materials have been used frequently in our traditional architecture.

The decorative patterns on the corridor walls are employed again on the ceiling's design, achieving a unified design concept. Continuation of the designed patterns on the ceiling helps viewers to read the interior space as a whole from top to bottom. The interior design, however, shouldn't just be decorative, but should be functional as well.

For example, the decorative patterns are repeated on the doors of the built-in shoes storage located on the right side of the entrance and consoles on the left side to assist users for sense of direction.

The door between the entrance hallway and the second corridor leads to the corridor, which connects the master suite space on the left side and to the family space on the right side. This corridor, it serves as a private vestibule for the entire Quarter's family members. This private zone is a representative space and interchangeable space that reflects the President's taste, personal interests, and style. Therefore, this hall is designed to accommodate both traditional Korean style and classical western style to accommodate any kinds of request by the President. Vertical walls are decorated as minimum as possible other than the shape of columns set in the wall as a relief. Recessed ceiling design with decorative beams and traditional grids are to soften the rigid rectangular shape of the corridor and to give rhythm to the space. Specially designed lighting fixtures that reminds one of a traditional transportable lighting fixture called, "Chungsa Chorong".

The ondol, using hot water system, floor is covered with quarter sawn pine planks and custom designed area rug is placed in the middle of the vestibule. The walls are finished with wood and silk wallpaper to create a warm and comfortable traditional image of a Korean style home.

The design concept had to consider placing personal collections and artifacts in the vestibule, we had to set up a simplified space, similar to that of a gallery that combined both modern and Korean style interior. Had the vestibule contained no decorative elements, such as modified shape of columns on the wall or metal strips for hanging art works, it would have been an unbearably dull space.

### III. Conclusion

Depth and outstanding beauty of Korean architectures can not be discussed in these short pages. The Blue House Project was an excellent experience for us to review and learn how to accept traditional motives and combine with modern functions. This project cannot be repeated just as our history cannot. However, as history lies behind our concept, this project can be an excellent example in our future to analyze today's understanding of traditional architectures.

