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Water Temple

Tadao Ando

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Water Temple

Tadao Ando

Hompukuji — a subordinate temple of Kyoto's Ninnaji, the head temple of Japan's Shingon sect — is located on the northeastern part of Awaji Island. This new main hall for Hompukuji is located at the rear of the temple grounds, on a hill that affords a sweeping view of Osaka Bay.

The massive roof of the Japanese Buddhist temple has been its most visually symbolic element. At Hompukuji, I have chosen to substitute water and living lotus plants as that symbolic element, and have situated the main hall

so that entry involves “parting” the lotus-filled surface of a pond and descending into its depth.

The oval man-made pond — 40m long and 30m wide — is placed on a bluff, and the temple hall, underground, beneath it. The hall is composed of a round room, 14.0m in diameter, contained in a square room, 17.4m square. The round room is gridded with pillars, 4m tall and 21cm square, set at intervals of one ken (a ken is a traditional Japanese module, equivalent to 1.8m).

Walking over white sand, visitors ascend a path to the top of the hill and confront a long wall, with the infinite blue expanse of the ocean behind them. To the right, after passing through an aperture in the wall, is a constricted space that isolates a fragment of the sky between the 3m-high wall and a curved wall of equal height. Turning to the left, around the end of the curved wall, brings one to the broad pond with its cover of green lotus plants. To enter the main hall, one descends a staircase penetrating directly into the center of the pond.

The interior of the hall, and the pillars, are stained vermilion — this color becomes intense at the end of each day, as the reddish glow of sunset light suffuses the space, casting long shadows from the pillars deep inside the subterranean space, and inducing in the visitor a silence that transcends mundane concerns.











