



Minka: My Farmhouse in Japan

John Roderick

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In 1959 journalist John Roderick joined the Tokyo bureau of the Associated Press. There, he befriended a Japanese family, the Takishitas. After musing offhandedly that he would like to one day have his own house in Japan, the family—unbeknownst to John—set out to grant his wish. They found Roderick a 250-year-old minka, or hand-built farmhouse, with a thatched roof and held together entirely by wooden pegs and joinery. It was about to be washed away by flooding and was being offered for only fourteen dollars. Roderick graciously bought the house, but was privately dismayed at the prospect of living in this enormous old relic lacking heating, bathing, plumbing, and proper kitchen facilities. So the minka was dismantled and stored, where Roderick secretly hoped it would stay, as it did for several years. But Roderick's reverence for natural materials and his appreciation of traditional Japanese and Shinto craftsmanship eventually got the better of him. Before long a team of experienced carpenters were hoisting massive beams, laying wide wooden floors, and attaching the split-bamboo ceiling. In just forty days they rebuilt the house on a hill overlooking Kamakura, the ancient capital of Japan. Working together, they renovated the farmhouse, adding features such as floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors and a modern kitchen, bath, and toilet. From these humble beginnings, Roderick's minka has become internationally known and has hosted such luminaries as President George H. W. Bush, and Senator Hillary Clinton. John Roderick's architectural memoir *Minka* tells the compelling and often poignant story of how one man fell in love with the people, culture, and ancient building traditions of Japan, and reminds us all about the importance of craftsmanship and the meaning of place and home in the process.

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