



TOKYO

a certain style

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Introduction

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Word has it that Tokyo is the hardest city in the world to live in. \$10 cups of coffee, \$100 per head dinners, \$100,000 per square meter land prices. . . . But for us Japanese, the stories you hear have no more reality than the notion of coming home from work to find the wife in a kimono bowing at the entry way with the subtle pine-wood whistling of a tea ceremony kettle in the background. This vision is already little more than a scene from some classic Japanese movie, or some Japanophile's dream. Neither has anything to do with the way most of us actually live here.

Let me tell you: our lifestyles are a lot more ordinary. We live in cozy wood-frame apartments or mini-condos crammed to the gills with things. Formica-topped kotatsu heater-tables plunked down on throw rugs. Western furniture sitting right on top of the tatami mats. It's what we find comfortable. Cramped quarters? You could say that. To a European or American, a good many of the rooms must look like something out of the slums. But you should see some of the stuff we keep in those dumps. Real expensive luxury items.

For the Western sensibility that says if you're rich you'd want to move away from everyone else and build a nice big house, somewhere you can live "in style," the idea that we would choose to live in these "rabbit hutches" like we do probably seems kind of strange. Maybe even comical. But let me tell you: this lifestyle ain't half bad. Sure, for the same amount of money, we could rent much larger

places way out in the burbs. And yet we consciously opt for living in tiny cubbyholes right in the heart of the city. Well, first of all, Tokyo is a safe city. Safe enough for a girl to throw a coat over her pajamas and head out to the corner convenience store in the middle of the night. Safe enough for a drunk to fall asleep by the side of the road with his wallet sticking out of his pocket. Almost never will any harm come to either of them. So if that's the case, why not get yourself a one-room pad close by your favorite bookstores and boutiques and restaurants and watering holes? You can use your neighborhood as your extended living room. At least in this city, there are plenty of happy folks who think that's really the life! Bookstore shelves are lined with more publications on Japanese space than you'd ever want to see. Glossy coffee-table books on the heights of the Japanese aesthetic tradition, whole series of large-format monographs on neo-Zen contemporary architecture, interior decor magazines with full-color coverage of minimal-chic rooms that stylists have fussed over. But how many of these places look lived-in? That's because what these books show are the co-creations of known architects and photographers, or else very skillful presentations of designer products. It's because no one can live like those pictures that make them attractive showpieces.

Just how many of us do you think actually live in the kind of interiors featured in those luxurious photo-documentations? On the other hand, I know lots of people who manage to live in cluttered, closet-sized walk-ups with great

ease and style. And yes, I do mean style. By definition, a "style" is something you can see catching on among different people; whereas if you can't find one person around you living the other way, it can hardly be considered a "style."

Let's put an end to this media trickery, giving poor ignorant foreigners only images of the most beautiful Japanese apartments to drool over. Hence this book; I wanted to show you the real Tokyo style, the places we honest-and-truly do spend our days. Call it pathetically overcrowded, call it hopelessly chaotic . . . hey, that's the reality. And, I might add, a reality that's not nearly so unpleasant as you might imagine. Take a seat: there are tangerines and your TV remote control on the kotatsu, piles of books beside your cushion, a wastepaper basket a mere arm's toss away. Now you get a feel for the "cock-pit effect" we love so well.

Sure, if world economic trends continue to spiral downward, there's going to be a lot more people living in a lot tighter spaces. Who knows? This art of living well in small quarters just might prove to be the style of the future.