

Meditation Rooms

"We are over-stimulated and bombarded constantly," says New York City-based architect Gavin Macrae-Gibson, "so there's an increasing need for these spaces that are purifying and allow you to get away from the constant intervention of the outside world." Meditation rooms are cropping up more often in custom homes, according to industry pros. Homeowners increasingly want a place free of to-do lists and clutter. These spaces exude calmness through simple forms and materials. Rich woods, traditional Asian artifacts, and abundant but soft light are common design elements for generating soothing surroundings. Architect Stephen Muse thinks that many homes have some sort of meditation space even if there's not a formal room dedicated to the purpose. He says, "A place to escape everyday life and feel really comfortable is important, even if it's just a quiet corner." —Shelley D. Hutchins



"The owner started his art collection as a teenager," says Gavin Macrae-Gibson. "The art is symbolic of his life, so this meditation room is a place to contemplate art and the life it represents."

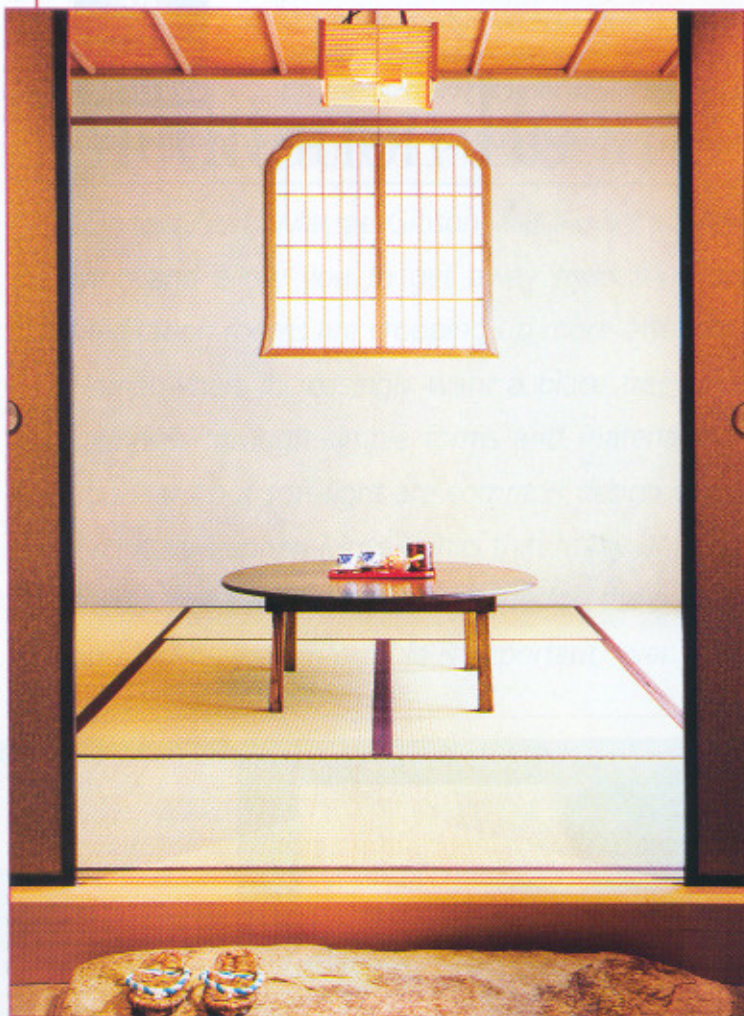
The Art of Calm

Architect and owner selected key pieces that would inspire calm thoughts as well as tell a story. The centerpiece is an origami

light fixture approximately equivalent in size to the tatami mats below. The fixture, one of Isamu Noguchi's Akari Light Sculptures, is a single piece of paper folded into tetrahedrons.

Curly maple floors grace this six-tatami-mat alcove while steel and glass doors open onto the adjacent terrace for an indoor/outdoor relationship that is a basic element of traditional Asian meditation rooms. The space measures about 17 feet by 12 feet and sits at one end of a U-shaped public area. Enclosed on three sides and oriented so that the one meditating faces away from the open wall, the room nonetheless flows freely into living space. "You can see it from all over," says Macrae-Gibson, "so it adds a meditative quality even when you're not in it." Builder: J.S.C. Construction, Yonkers, N.Y.; Architect: Macrae-Gibson Architects, New York City; Lighting designer: Earley Light, Providence, R.I.; Photographer: Durston Saylor.

Trend Lines/Custom Touches



The owners of this Washington, D.C., home spend significant time in Japan and wanted a house that conveyed Japanese sensibilities within more Western architectural forms. Within that stylistic fusion, they wanted a piece of real Japanese tradition in the form of an authentic tatami room.

Architect Stephen Muse thoroughly researched the program and designed an eight-mat room (tatami room size is determined by the number of mats used) that opens to a

Tranquil Tradition

Japanese garden. Mats shouldn't be laid in a grid pattern for fear of bad fortune, but symmetry is important to clear the mind. Along one wall is a tokonoma mat, raised 5 1/2 inches off the floor. "Ceremonial objects are placed on this special mat," says Muse, such as objects used to perform tea ceremonies.

Paper shoji screens slide across glass doors creating several layers to open or close for various outdoor links. Spanish cedar lines the ceiling and a standard window is covered with a traditionally shaped shoji to complete the authentic interior. Builder: Peterson & Collins, Washington, D.C.; Architect: Muse Architects, Washington; Photographer: Maxwell MacKenzie.

This San Francisco single-family structure used to be a bar. Then it was moved to its current location and split into a duplex. Lawson Willard's task was to transform it into a coherent custom home for an owner who values tranquility. "He wanted an oasis from the city," says Willard about his

Transcendental Transition

client, "and a transitional space to hear gentle water and see specific objects that would change your mindset." The entry sequence moves visitors from the garden gate into a meditative state via a 300-square-foot entry foyer.

The owner wanted his prized Thai Buddha to be the focus of the space. A skylight backlights this peaceful icon, while a pond outlined in dark slate inlaid with brass gurgles gently at Buddha's feet. The fountain's mechanics are hidden in the statue's base and the slate trim projects about 2 inches over the water for a seamless look. Willard jokes that the pond will last longer than the house. "The entry is about 5 feet above street level and the contractor had to build a wood structure up from the ground and encase it in concrete for support." Builder: Structural FX, San Mateo, Calif.; Architect: Lawson Willard Architecture, San Francisco; Interior designer: Your Space, San Francisco; Photographer: David Duncan Livingston.

