

GUEST HOUSE

House of Light

James Turrell's traditional-style Japanese residence is both a hotel and a canvas for exploring the drama and meditative quality of light, writes Danielle Demetriou



TATAMI MAT FLOORS, sliding paper screens and wooden corridors: at first sight, it appears to tick all of the boxes of a classic Japanese home. Yet this rural house is far from ordinary. Twice a day, at sunrise and sunset, its interior is dreamily bathed in a series of rainbow-hued lights – from aqua blues and mint greens to acid yellows and deep pinks.

Welcome to the House of Light. The ambitious project was created by James Turrell, the American artist famed for his passion for lighting projects, for the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale in Niigata in 2000. Following 15 years of operation, its lighting systems recently underwent a complete overhaul after their original German technology went out of production. Turrell redesigned the systems entirely, switching from fluorescent lamp tubes to Philips's Color Kinetics LEDs, which the artist is increasingly using for his installations.

The House of Light is as elegant as it is dramatic: inspired by the Edo-era residence of a wealthy local landowning family, it has a long, wide staircase leading to the upper-level front door and a wooden walkway encircling the property beneath its overhanging roof.

Yet visitors swiftly realise that this is more artwork than just a guest house. As shoes are swapped for slippers in the stone porch, a signature Turrell square of warm orange lighting illuminates the rectangular inner ceiling of the wooden entrance hall.

Downstairs, the artist also used walls of concrete imprinted with the natural grain of wood for the bathroom space, which includes yellow-lit changing areas and a dark Japanese-style hot bath, illuminated only by sun in the day, or a narrow, water-level thread of blue LEDs by night.

The house's focal point is the room called Outside In, a large tatami-mat space with sliding washi rice-paper screens, with a minimal slit of red light in the indented tokonoma altar ►

RIGHT The house is inspired by Edo-era domestic architecture

LEFT A thread of LEDs lights the Japanese-style hot bath

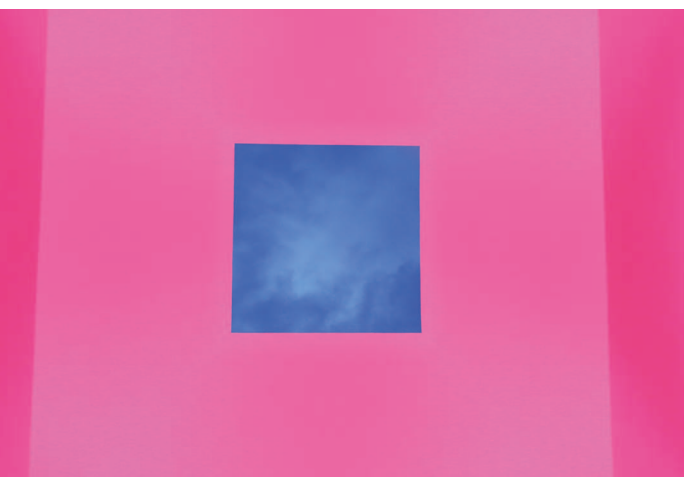
BELOW A rectangle of warm orange light illuminates the entrance hall





LEFT AND BELOW
LEFT The ceiling of the Outside In room includes a panel that slides back to reveal the sunrise and sunset, beginning a colourful sequence of illuminations

BELOW The downstairs walls are built of wood-imprinted concrete



space. Here, during my visit, at exactly 16.39 (the time of sunset), Turrell's carefully choreographed Light Program began, with a series of rainbow-bright illuminations – from blues to greens to pinks – bathing the walls and ceiling in a slowly changing sequence of colours. Pressing a button in the panel by the door results in the ceiling sliding back to reveal a perfect skylight framing a patch of sky, creating a dramatic complement to the room's light show.

The property, which accommodates up to three families at a time, is open for visitors to stay year round. Describing the project in his own words, Turrell has said: "For me as an artist who has sought the 'perception of light', the House of Light was an attempt to contrast as well as to incorporate day and night, the Eastern and the Western, tradition and modern." ♦

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