



SPECIAL PROMOTION

Craft, climate and character: Japan's new architectural language

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TOKYO — Japan's built environment is undergoing a shift that is quiet in tone but significant in direction. After decades shaped by standardization and a broadly shared national vocabulary, architects and developers are looking closer to home for cues. Demographic currents are pulling people back into some urban centers while thinning out others. Tourism has returned with new expectations. Climate pressures are turning sustainability from an aspiration into an operating condition. Together, they are nudging design away from abstraction and towards the specifics of place.

The winners of the PropertyGuru Asia Property Awards (Japan) 2025 make this shift visible. Selected by an independent panel of judges, the honorees were presented at the PropertyGuru Asia Property Awards International Luncheon, held at The Athenee Hotel, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand, on December 12, 2025. The awards were conferred by Eddie Guillemette, chairperson of the

judging panel and CEO of Midori no Ki (MNK), alongside Anton Wormann, panel member and founder and CEO of Anton in Japan Media and Japandi Houses.

These award-winning developers do not represent a single school of thought, nor do they share a unified aesthetic. What connects them is a renewed respect for the contexts they inhabit, whether climatic, cultural, or social, and a clear willingness to allow those conditions to shape the brief.



Jozankei House by ALT Design & Construction, Best Bespoke Residential Architectural Design & Interior Design (Hokkaido) Winner | Image: PROPERTYGURU

That instinct is pronounced in Hokkaido, where short winter days and long seasons of snow shape both daily life and architectural possibility. One of the year's most telling works is Jozankei House by ALT Design & Construction, awarded both architectural and interior honours for the region. Rather than resisting the northern climate, the design accepts it: timber is used as structure and atmosphere, carved voids guide weak winter light deep into the plan, and the architecture tightens as temperatures drop. Visitors enter through a modest threshold before the building opens out, revealing a measured sequence of volumes that feel neither defensive nor exposed.



SANGO PROJECT by SANGO CONSTRUCTION CO., LTD., Best Luxury Villa Development (Hokkaido)
Winner | Image: PROPERTYGURU

A parallel approach appears in another Hokkaido winner through a low-slung villa, SANGO PROJECT by SANGO Construction Co., Ltd. Deep eaves and a sheltered entry sit lightly within the landscape, while framed outlooks anchor the interior. Both projects demonstrate a simple idea that feels newly urgent in Japan: buildings work best when they respond directly to the conditions that govern them.

Further south, in Chubu, material culture becomes the leading influence. Lake Yamanakako Villa, recognised for its residential architecture, sits in woodland where the forest itself becomes a design partner. Its geometry remains restrained, but the experience is richer than the minimalism suggests. From the entrance, the house unfolds through a series of aligned views, a choreography of frames that changes with the light, especially in the early morning when the foothills are still heavy with mist.

That sensitivity to material extends into the year's standout retail environment. The Kato Knife Gallery and Workshop by BAUM Ltd., which secured both retail design awards for Chubu, handles timber, stone and metal with the economy of movement that defines the knife-making craft it represents. The building functions as both gallery and workshop: customers move from the showroom into spaces where blades are honed, the architecture becoming a quiet bridge between process and product. It is Chubu's sensibility translated into built form.

Across these early examples, a pattern starts to take shape. The most compelling ideas do not generalise; they commit. They allow each region's character — climate, craft, or cultural rhythm to guide the design rather than smoothing those differences out.

Kansai brings another dimension to the story: the pressures and freedoms of contemporary urban life. Osaka, now attracting younger workers back into its central districts, is seeing a lift in demand for flexible, efficient housing. JY Suites Tsutenkaku, developed by Jean Yip Developments and named Best Affordable Condo Development (Kansai), reflects these shifts. Its interiors are compact, calm and usable; its amenities support a range of working patterns. The developer, recognized as Best Lifestyle Developer and Best Developer, has read the local market with accuracy: mobility rather than growth is shaping the region's next phase.

In Chugoku, the conversation moves from homes and workplaces to learning. 8 Syuujikan by K2-DESIGN ARCHITECT & ASSOCIATES, winner of Best Educational Architectural Design (Chugoku), treats the school not as a backdrop for teaching but as a framework for exploration. Classrooms and shared areas encircle a central space, encouraging movement and visibility. Open thresholds allow children to navigate by instinct rather than instruction, an approach that echoes recent research into spatial cognition in early education.



ILUVIO Resort Motobu by K2-DESIGN ARCHITECT & ASSOCIATES Co., Ltd., Best Resort Architectural Design & Interior Design Winner | Image: PROPERTYGURU

Okinawa then introduces an entirely different tempo. ILUVIO Resort Motobu, honored for both its architecture and interiors, interprets the island's breezeways, horizon lines and shaded verandas into a

composed coastal retreat. Rather than isolating guests from their environment, the resort aligns itself with local rhythms: slow mornings, open views, and a deliberate quietness in its material palette. Even its “one booking per day” model reinforces that intention, lending the project a sense of hospitality shaped by place rather than policy.



Yokohama Symphostage by Obayashi Corporation, Best Office Development Winner | Image: PROPERTYGURU

Japan's commercial and workplace projects are evolving in parallel. In Yokohama, Symphostage — developed by Obayashi Corporation and named Best Office Development — takes daylight, air quality and operational clarity as essential components rather than finishing touches. Tapered floorplates bring natural light deep into the workspaces at a time when companies are rebalancing office use after years of hybrid arrangements. Access to terraces and carefully controlled ventilation reflect a broader shift in workplace design across Asia: comfort is becoming a strategic asset.



FOUR SEASONS HOTEL OSAKA by CURIOSITY, Best Hotel Interior Design Winner | Image: PROPERTYGURU

The same calibration appears in Osaka's FOUR SEASONS HOTEL OSAKA, which earned the award for Best Hotel Interior Design. Designed by CURIOSITY, the interiors weave regional craft references into a global hospitality framework without resorting to pastiche. Texture, geometry, and light do most of the work, balancing familiarity with precision.

Even the year's leading sales gallery signals a broader recalibration in how spaces are marketed. LOUCA – Model Room by INFINITY Co., Ltd., winner of Best Sales Gallery Interior Design, strips away theatrical sets in favour of a believable domestic sequence. Buyers pass through a series of rooms shaped by proportion and daylight — restrained, confident, and designed to feel lived rather than staged.



Taken together, these projects reveal a country leaning towards pluralism in its built identity. The idea of one Japanese architectural language, once reinforced by national standards and material homogeneity, is giving way to a more contextual approach. Climate, craft and community now shape different answers across different regions.

The PropertyGuru Asia Property Awards (Japan) 2025 offer a clear record of that change.

From Hokkaido's timber geometries to Chubu's disciplined materiality, Kansai's lifestyle-led urban forms and Okinawa's coastal compositions, the work is increasingly guided by the logic of place. Japan's architectural future will not be uniform, and that distinction is fast becoming one of its most valuable assets.