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INTERVIEW

“Integrating my heritage’s aesthetics into Switzerland feels natural”

Interview with Yuichi Kodai, architect and co-founder of *Kodai and Associates*

Kodai and Associates, founded in 2018 by architects *Claudia Maggi* and *Yuichi Kodai*, focuses on providing tailored design solutions that connect interior and exterior spaces. The firm combines East-West cultural influences to create functional and aesthetically pleasing environments. With a strong emphasis on collaboration, *Kodai and Associates* is involved in various projects across Switzerland and Europe, aiming to enhance the integration of built spaces with nature. For this edition of our newsletter, we interviewed Mr. Kodai.

Can you share with us the story behind the founding of *Kodai and Associates*?

Kodai and Associates was originally founded in Kyoto and is now based in Zurich, led by myself, Yuichi Kodai, and Claudia Maggi. My time is now evenly split between Japan and Europe. Over the years, I’ve observed a significant shift in how my culture is perceived globally, as the internet has expanded access, making these aesthetics and values more recognizable to the broader public. From the beginning, I wanted to create spaces with a feeling that transcends cultural differences and sparks curiosity. Japan and the West share a long history of cultural exchange, beginning with the 1867 Paris Expo. This influence continued with modernist architects like Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and Frank Lloyd Wright,



Architects Yuichi Kodai (left) and Claudia Maggi (right) are the founders of *Kodai and Associates*, based in Zurich © *Kodai and Associates*

and was furthered in the 1990s by Tadao Ando’s work, which continues to inspire Swiss and Western architects. Our foundation is strong and now ready to pursue a new level of harmonization that respects each culture’s identity. We aim to build upon this layer, blending these influences into spaces that feel both authentic and harmonious, instilling a sense of wonder that invites deeper engagement.

What are the core vision and philosophy of your company?

We intend to fuse the core values of my heritage within a Western context through our architecture. Growing up in Kyoto, I was immersed in the rich historical layers and creative traditions that shape our architectural environment—values that, I believe, resonate universally, regardless of nationality or religion. Our vision is to create timeless, borderless environments by harmonising client narratives and their origin, local materials, and sustainable practices. We blend Eastern and Western influences, with a focus on

integrating art, architecture, and garden, to create spaces that not only serve a functional purpose but also foster a deeper connection between people and their surroundings. Ultimately, we aim to evoke a sense of “wonder,” inviting occupants to explore and connect with the space on a deeper level, discovering new perspectives and nuances each time they engage with it.

What has been your most rewarding project to date, and what made it special for you?

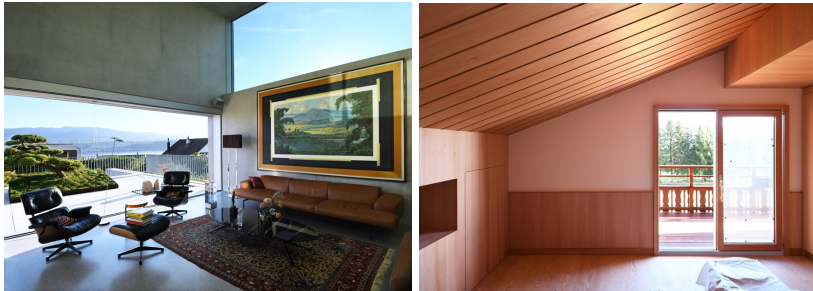
The KOHTEI project, a Zen temple completed in 2016 when I was the Director of Architecture at SANDWICH, in collaboration with contemporary artist Kohei Nawa in Kyoto, remains one of the most representative projects of my career. This building contains all the themes I continue to explore today, including art, architecture, garden, and craftsmanship, all realised as a comprehensive experience inspired by Zen teachings. Historically, noble

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A curated living room (left) a Swiss chalet with willow wood (right) © *Kodai and Associates*

(continued from page 1)

temples in Kyoto introduced cutting-edge ideas and designs that gradually influenced the mindset and aesthetic sensibilities of townhouse and villa design across the city. I see KOHTEI in the same way—as a source of inspiration from which I can decompose elements and integrate them into my individual projects, adapting them to everyday life. Through this project, I came to value the power of “wonder” in architecture. It taught me that there is no right or wrong way to understand a space, as each person’s experience can be uniquely moving.

How do cultural elements from Japan influence your projects in Switzerland?

European culture—particularly from Switzerland, the UK, France, and Italy—has significantly shaped my approach. My time with Herzog & de Meuron broadened my perspective on working with diverse cultural elements, showing me how different traditions can coexist in design. The Swiss dedication to precision and craftsmanship aligns with values of detail and refinement from my heritage. In the UK, I’m inspired by the respect for heritage and the blend of tradition with modernity.

France brings an appreciation for elegance and artistry, while Italy’s deep historical context, combined with its emphasis on materiality and traditional crafts, enriches my understanding of architectural lineage and timeless design.

How do you integrate the aesthetics of your heritage within a Swiss context, and do you find this process challenging?

Integrating my heritage’s aesthetics into Switzerland feels natural because both cultures share a profound reverence for nature. Our nations view mountains, rivers, and lakes as sources of our soul. I strive to extract this essence in each project, drawing from these landscapes and allowing nature to shape the design. By accessing the client’s values and combining lifestyle elements from both Switzerland and my background, we create environments that reflect a deep respect for each client’s past while embracing contemporary ways of living. This approach allows us to shape spaces that honour the distinct identities of both cultures yet feel cohesive and harmonious. Through our work, we hope to demonstrate that cultural fusion can enrich daily life, offering a unique balance that feels both familiar and refreshingly new while resonating universally with clients.

Can you provide examples of how you have integrated local materials or craftsmanship into your designs?

I express my values through interior architecture and garden design, using universally available materials—wood, stone, concrete, and plants—to foster a meaningful connection with the local environment. In a recent Zurich project, I incorporated locally sourced maple and elm wood, clay, and stones to create a space that harmonizes with natural light and the landscape. Both Swiss and Japanese design emphasize precision, resulting in meticulous detail. I often select Swiss stones for their familiar natural colors, which enhance the connection to the design. By thoughtfully positioning these stones, we evoke a sense of wonder that encourages daily discovery.

Finally, what upcoming projects are you most excited about?

I’m currently working on two exciting projects. The first is a mountain hut at 1800m in Switzerland, designed as a base for glacier skiing and mountain hiking. The second project is an art gallery for Stuart Lochhead Sculpture on Old Bond Street in London, focusing on pre-19th century masterworks. My ultimate vision is to create a Gesamtkunstwerk—a total work of art—where the interior and garden harmonize architecture and landscape, enriching people’s experiences of their surroundings.

Thank you for the interview!

Shigeru Ishiba is Japan's New Prime Minister

Following his victory in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) leadership race on 27 September 2024, **Shigeru Ishiba** was officially elected as Japan's 102nd prime minister on 1 October 2024. He takes over from Fumio Kishida during a challenging period marked by low public confidence in political leadership, economic instability, and escalating security threats in the region.

Ishiba secured his position with a decisive total of 291 votes in the lower house of the Japanese Diet, while his main opponent, Yoshihiko Noda, leader of the Constitutional Democratic Party, received 100 votes. In the upper house, Ishiba garnered 143 votes compared to Noda's 45. His election was largely assured due to the LDP's majority coalition with Komeito, which holds a significant number of seats in both chambers of parliament.

In a strategic move to solidify his mandate, Ishiba announced plans to dissolve the lower house on 9 October 2024 and call for an early election on 27 October 2024. This decision is seen as an effort to bolster support for his administration amidst lingering public discontent stemming from a political funds disclosure scandal that emerged late last year. This scandal

revealed that several LDP factions had failed to properly report their political expenditures, leading to a sharp decline in the party's approval ratings. Kishida's resignation from the LDP presidency paved the way for Ishiba to run for leadership again after previously unsuccessful attempts.

Ishiba faces significant challenges as he assumes office. Japan is grappling with a declining population and an economy still reeling from years of deflationary pressures. In his inaugural remarks, he emphasized the need for effective policies to address these issues. Additionally, he has advocated for the establishment of an Asian-style NATO collective security arrangement in response to rising tensions between China and Taiwan. Furthermore, Ishiba has expressed a desire to reassess Japan's security agreement with the USA regarding the status of U.S. troops stationed in Japan, aiming for a more equitable bilateral relationship.

As he embarks on this new chapter in leadership, Ishiba's ability to restore public trust and navigate these complex challenges will be critical for his government's success.

Sources: [Nikkei Asia](#); [Kyodo News](#)

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SITUATION

Swiss National Bank (SNB) Cuts Key Interest Rate to 1%

Due to a significantly lower inflationary pressure compared to the previous quarter, the Swiss National Bank (SNB) has announced on 26 September 2024 (with implementation starting a day after) that it would lower its policy rate by 0.25 percentage points to 1%. This adjustment follows the decision of the United States Federal Reserve to cut their own policy rate by 0.5%.

The SNB indicated that additional interest rate cuts may be required in the upcoming quarters to maintain medium-term price stability. It had already lowered the key interest rate by 0.25 percentage points in both March and June of this year. The central bank has also revised its inflation projections to 1.2% for this year and 0.6% for 2025, down from previous estimates of 1.3% and 1.1% made in June of

2024. This adjustment is attributed to the stronger Swiss franc, lower oil prices, and announced electricity price reductions for January. The significant drop in inflation suggests that second-round effects are expected to be less pronounced in the medium term. This new forecast is predicated on the assumption that the SNB's policy rate will remain at 1.0% throughout the forecast period. Furthermore, the SNB remains ready to intervene in the foreign exchange market if needed to prevent excessive appreciation of the Swiss franc.

In Q2 of 2024, global economic growth was moderate, with inflation rates in many countries still above central bank

targets, though declining. While growth is expected to continue at a moderate pace, risks like geopolitical tensions and persistent inflation remain. Switzerland's GDP grew robustly in Q2 with the SNB projecting a 1% increase for the year. The chemicals and pharmaceuticals sector performed particularly well, while other industries saw only modest gains. Future growth in Switzerland may be modest due to the Swiss franc's appreciation and subdued global conditions, but this effect is expected to lessen over time. The SNB forecasts a growth rate of around 1.5% for 2025, though significant uncertainty remains due to external factors.

Sources: [SNB](#); [swissinfo](#)

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TREND

Switzerland Named Most Innovative Country by WIPO Again

革新

INNOVATION

Switzerland continues to excel in the Geneva-based World Intellectual Property Organization's (WIPO) Global Innovation Index (GII), maintaining its position as one of the world's most innovative economies. In 2024, the country ranks 1st globally, a position it has consistently held for several years. The assessment was made based on 78 indicators.

The GII 2024 captures the innovation ecosystem performance of 133 economies and tracks the most recent global innovation trends. Switzerland has secured the top position in scientific, technological, and creative services, and it ranks within the top five across all other criteria in the study, except for infrastructure, where it placed seventh. Following Switzerland, Sweden and the USA took second and third places, respectively. They were succeeded by Singapore, the UK, South Korea, Finland, the Netherlands, Germany, and Denmark. The 31 leading economies are predominantly classified as high-income nations, with one notable exception: China, which ranks 11th and belongs to the upper middle-income category. The results of the study suggest that Switzerland's key strengths lie in its innovation inputs and outputs. In terms of innovation inputs, it demonstrates robust

performance in human capital and research, benefiting from high levels of education and research output. The country also boasts excellent infrastructure that supports innovation activities and a strong financial market that fosters innovation financing. On the output side, Switzerland excels in knowledge creation, leading in patents and scientific publications, which showcase its research capabilities. Additionally, there is a strong emphasis on creative industries and high-value-added products.

The GII 2024 emphasizes social entrepreneurship, highlighting how innovative ventures address critical societal challenges. Switzerland is noted for its supportive environment for social enterprises, contributing to its overall innovation landscape. However, despite its leading position, Switzerland faces challenges such as access to funding for start-ups and smaller enterprises. Moreover, broader economic conditions, including slow global growth and reduced investment in innovation, pose risks that could affect future performance.

Sources: [WIPO](#)

Agenda

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AGENDA

- ✓ EXPO 2025 in Osaka
Dates: 13 April – 13 October 2025
Theme: *Designing Future Society for Our Lives*
Find more information [here](#)

The official Swiss National Day at Expo 2025 is 22 April 2025. Find more information about the Swiss Pavilion [here](#)

JETRO is a government-related organization that works to promote mutual trade and investment between Japan and the rest of the world. Originally established in 1958 to promote Japanese exports abroad, JETRO's core focus in the 21st century has shifted toward promoting foreign direct investment into Japan and helping small to medium size Japanese firms maximize their global export potential.

The JETRO Switzerland Newsletter can also be viewed and/or downloaded online: <http://www.jetro.go.jp/switzerland/newsletter>

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