

Clockwise from left: Lunching in the Gyre Building. The Hotel Andaz lounge. The Tadao Ando and Issey Miyake museum, 21_21 Design Sight. The entrance to Tokyo Ryokan.

TOKYO BY DESIGN

A heaving megacity, Tokyo is home to a myriad of design hives. This street-by-street guide offers a compass to the fleet of flagship stores, hallowed design halls and non-brand novelties that inspire the city.

by ROB GOSS
illustrations by MAKERS CO

Neon-lit, high-rise, crowded, and at turns unfathomably bizarre; flip through many of the brochures or guidebooks on Japan and Tokyo is painted as some kind of *Blade Runner*-esque vision of the future. In places, in fairness, it almost is. Take Akihabara, home to a global *otaku* (geek) culture that comprises such things as manga comics, arcade gaming, animation, and cosplay. Or look at the heaving Takeshita-dori high street in Harajuku and its colourful, bordering-on-odd teen fashions. There is, however, more to discover in Japan's capital than Hello Kitty, cramped rush-hour trains and robots. When it comes to contemporary design,

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sleek architecture and chic fashion, make no mistake that Tokyo is very much on the cutting edge.

THE GRAND OMOTESANDO-DORI
Look at Omotesando-dori. The almost kilometre-long tree-lined avenue in the heart of Tokyo originally functioned as the processional route to the Meiji Shrine, where the modernising Meiji Emperor is now enshrined, but over the years it has become a centre for fashion, design and architectural experimentation. The main street itself, Omotesando is the site of stores for high-end European fashion and accessory brands, but more interesting are the sleek multi-store buildings and malls like the Tadao Ando-designed Omotesando Hills (*omotesandohills.com*) building, which runs almost a quarter of the way up one side of the street. Opened in 2006, the self-taught Pritzker Architecture Prize-winning Ando

gave Omotesando Hills a signature six-floor atrium that dips three floors underground and rises three above, and which he linked together with a 700-meter spiral ramp dubbed the 'second Omotesando'. The ramp leads visitors past 100 or so shops and restaurants that after a major 10th anniversary revamp in early 2016 now offer a window to the various shades of contemporary Omotesando style. For fashion, there's the luxury urban streetwear of designer Mihara Yasuhiro (*miharayasuhiro.jp*) – a very Omotesando look – as well as Kolor Beacon (*kolor.jp/beacon*), which under lead designer Junichi Abe retails a range of almost utilitarian workwear-inspired clothing. At Hirotaka (*hiro-taka.com*) you can also catch a glimpse of where Japanese jewellery is heading, with Hirotaka Inoue's collection of minimal, yet exotic rings, earrings and other accessories that take their inspiration from shapes and colours found

in the natural world. Then there's Mark's style Tokyo (*marks.jp/en*) where the theme is 'contemporary Japanese design' with Good Design Award-winning stationery and travel goods. Apart from retailing sleek, functional and very urban-focused design, the store offers a colourful Pop Art stationary range in collaboration with Yayoi Kusama, Japan's queen of conceptualism.

Across the road from one end of Omotesando Hills, the Gyre building (*gyre-omotesando.com*) is another of the area's modern malls worth investigating. On the third floor, Gyre most notably houses the Tokyo outlet of the MoMA Design Store (*momastore.jp/momastore*), which stocks almost 2,000 design and interior items that range from kitchenware to stationery. While many of the items here are designed and manufactured overseas, MoMA also has a good selection of locally made goods, from Teruhiko Sahashi's affordable marble tumblers to Mina Takaoka's rich platinum and gold leaf bowls, as well as design classics such as Isamu Noguchi's 1950s paper lamps.

BEE LINES AND BARISTAS

Wandering off the main Omotesando-dori into the area's back streets calls forth even more examples of chic Tokyo. On Cat Street, which cuts across Omotesando-dori next to Gyre, there's a chance to see what's going on with street fashion – not the brash youth trends of

AN ARCHITECTURAL TIMELINE

From early Western influences to the advent of the high-rise urban complex, you can trace the progression of architectural trends in Tokyo by visiting some of the city's landmark structures.

KINGO TATSUNO'S TOKYO STATION (1914)

A student of British architect Josiah Conder, who designed many of the first Western buildings that appeared in Japan during the early Meiji era, Tatsuno became a prominent architect in his own right with buildings like the Bank of Japan and the Marunouchi-side building of Tokyo Station, which today faces the glistening Marunouchi and Shin-Marunouchi skyscrapers. The Neo-Baroque design uses steel framing and features a distinctive redbrick façade, and inside has a vaulted dome that after a five-year restoration ending in 2012 is once again in pristine condition.



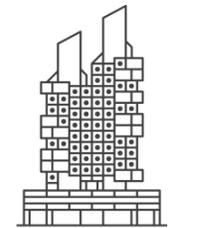
JIN WATANABE'S WAKO BUILDING (1932)

A rare survivor of the devastation of WW II, Wako Building is now one of several high-end department stores in the Ginza district, although it began life during the post-earthquake rebuilding of the city in 1923. Built in the Neo-Renaissance style and with a curved granite façade, it highlights the ongoing influence European architecture had on the likes of Watanabe and other leading Japanese architects of the day (even though Japan at this time was becoming ultra-nationalistic). Its signature clock tower even apes the chimes of Westminster.



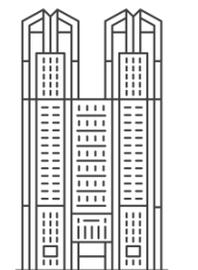
KISHO KUROKAWA'S NAKAGIN CAPSULE TOWER (1972)

Postwar, with Tokyo in tatters, architects had to work on necessity – to rebuild as quickly and affordably as possible. It wasn't until the late 1950s that Japanese architects and designers began again to revel in creativity, and it was here that the Metabolism Movement was born, with young architects like Fumihiko Maki and Kisho Kurokawa attempting to create structures under the concept of organic growth. Kurokawa's Nakagin Capsule Tower in the Shinbashi district is a Metabolist classic, featuring two interconnected concrete towers home to 140 self-contained prefab capsules that can be connected to create larger spaces or added to in order to expand the building.



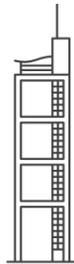
KENZO TANGE'S TOKYO METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT BUILDING (1990)

The opening of the twin towers of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's offices in Shinjuku in 1990 gave Tokyo a new landmark and at 242 meters was to be the tallest structure in the city until the construction of Tokyo Midtown in Roppongi in 2006 (*see main text*). Even today, it dominates the Shinjuku skyline, towering menacingly like something from a dystopian future. Or, as *Lonely Planet* perfectly puts it, "like a pixelated cathedral". Looking at the scale of Tange's creation, the building was the final step toward what would be Tokyo's next urban development trend – the ever-growing number of massive 'city within a city' tower complexes that began with Roppongi Hills (*see main text*).



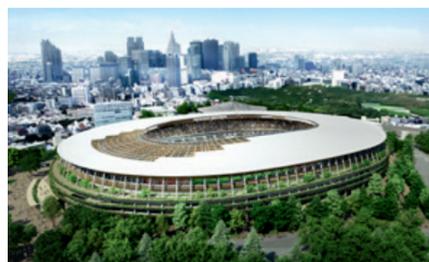
One of Isamu Noguchi's washi paper lamps available from the MoMA Design Store. Farming-net light pendants by Tokyo design studio Nendo. Muji Rice Cooker designed by Naoto Fukasawa.





**SHIGERU BAN'S
NICOLAS G. HAYEK CENTER (2007)**

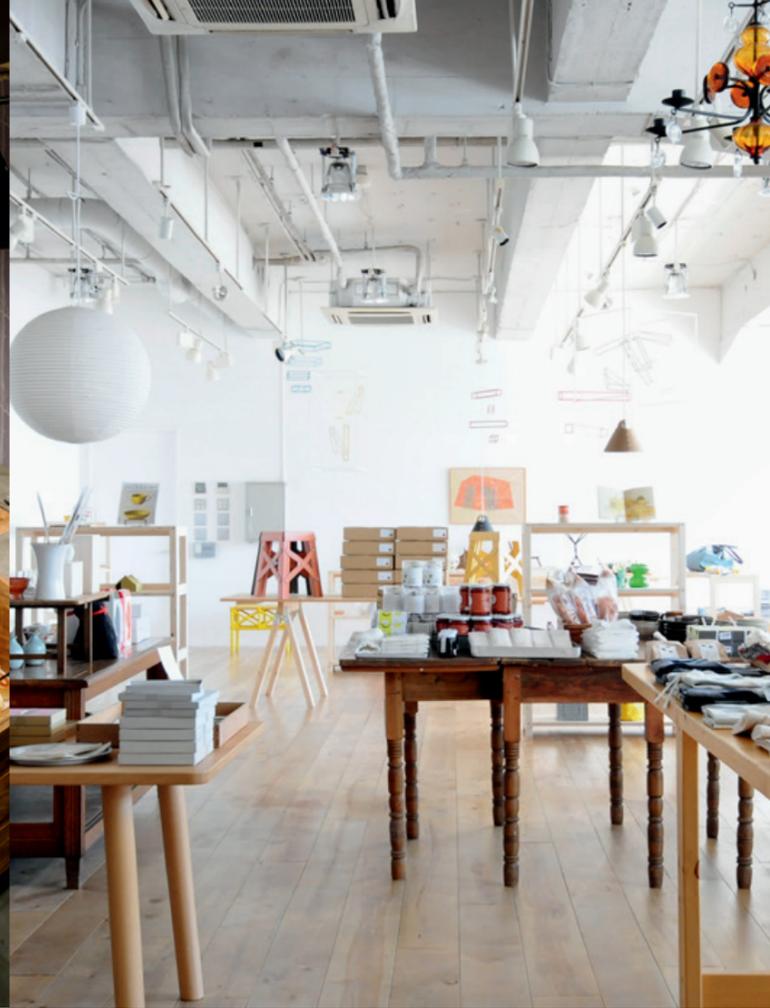
One of Japan's seemingly ever-growing number of Pritzker Architecture Prize-winning architects, Shigeru Ban has become well known for his innovative use of cardboard tubing in architecture and in particular his work to design quick-to-construct housing for disaster victims, such as those affected by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. He is also one of Japan's most stylish and modern-thinking architects, as his design for the Swatch Group Japan's head office (the Nicolas G. Hayek Center) in the plush Ginza district shows. Home to offices and showrooms for each of the Swatch Group's brands, the exterior is defined by four-storey-high glass shutters that when open allow the building's cavernous ground floor atrium to function as a walk-through, and wall-to-ceiling vegetation in the atrium that offers a verdant retreat from the busy, built-up streets of Ginza.



THE NEXT OLYMPIC LEGACY

It took a while to get there, but as of December the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games has a design for its Olympic Stadium. Back in 2012, when Iraqi-British architect Zaha Hadid won the contract with a planned 80,000-seater stadium set to be built by 2018, things had appeared to be going smoothly, but then came the backlash from Japanese architects, who argued that Hadid's design was too big for its proposed location and too expensive. Some complained that a Tokyo Olympic Games design should be created by a Japanese architect. And when all was said and done, two years later Hadid's plan was scrapped by the Japan Sports Council and the bidding was reopened.

The bidding came down to a choice between designs from famed Japanese architects Toyo Ito and Kengo Kuma, the latter of whom was one of the vocal critics of Hadid's original design. Kengo Kuma's oval design, which features a lattice framework that incorporates wood and greenery that should help it blend into its site in Tokyo's sprawling Yoyogi Park, won out for its 'Japanese-ness'. Barring any hiccups, it is set to be completed by late 2019 at a cost of ¥155bn, and it will be the only fully new venue for the 2020 Olympic Games, which will utilise a range of existing facilities across Tokyo that includes Kenzo Tange's neighbouring Yoyogi Gymnasium Stadium, built with its distinctive suspension roof for the swimming and diving events at the 1964 Games.



Takeshita-dori, but a more sophisticated urban look. It's along this street connecting Omotesando to Shibuya that you'll also find The Roastery by Nozy Coffee (tysons.jp/roastery/en), a collaboration between Californian-inspired restaurant group and brewer T.Y. Harbor and Japanese company Nozy Coffee that highlights another trend in Tokyo – the city's burgeoning love affair with artisanal coffee. Like the dark, almost industrial interiors at the centre of which is a 360-degree barista counter, the menu here is hipster-simple, with just three coffee options scrawled on the blackboard menu that can be made with a varying choice of two single-origin beans. Walk along Cat Street all the way to Shibuya and you could sample a slightly stronger drink trend, craft beer at Goodbeer Faucets (goodbeerfaucets.jp). Along with an explosion of new microbreweries across Japan, new places to try local and imported craft beers seem to pop up almost monthly in Tokyo, from tiny independent bars to outlets run by world-renowned craft brewers like BrewDog (in Roppongi). With minimalist interiors punctuated by shimmering stainless-steel taps that serve a changing range of 40 Japanese and overseas craft beers, Goodbeer Faucets, however, is worth the walk for its selection and the lively mix of customers that runs from fashionistas to beer geeks.

Back to Omotesando. While the area has become known primarily

as a very chic, contemporary destination, it also has its 'old Japan' moments, and they are well worth seeking out to get some kind of understanding of the traditional Japanese art and architectural styles that still influence many in modern-day Tokyo. The Meiji Shrine (meijijingu.or.jp/english) behind Harajuku Station (just beyond the northwest end of Omotesando) is a sprawling, calming retreat from the city with a main shrine built in the 1920s to hold the souls of the Meiji Emperor and Empress that provides a beautiful glimpse at traditional architectural aesthetics. At the other end of Omotesando-dori, tucked away in the equally fashionable streets of Aoyama, comes the Nezu Museum (nezu-muse.or.jp/en), which houses the 7,400-piece collection of Japanese and other pre-modern Asian art put together by industrialist Kaichiro Nezu (1860-1940) in a slick Kengo Kuma-designed building.

THE HIGH ARTS

Fashion, architecture and design have certainly reshaped Omotesando in fairly recent years, but it isn't alone in that. Long known as a place for eating, drinking and partying at night, the Roppongi area also underwent a major transformation in the 2000s with Tokyo's first pair of 'city within a city' mega-structures, the Roppongi Hills (roppongihills.com) and Tokyo Midtown (tokyo-midtown.com/en) complexes. Opened to incredible hype in 2003 at a cost of US\$ 2.5bn, Roppongi Hills set the tone for numerous urban redevelopment projects that followed, its buildings combining residences, office space, retail space, five-star hotel, TV studio, restaurants and bars, galleries, and beyond. At its heart is the 54-floor Mori Tower, which as well as observation decks with hypnotic views across Tokyo features one of Tokyo's best contemporary art and design galleries

From left: Aerial rendering of the new National Stadium designed by Japanese architect Kengo Kuma. The Tadao Ando-designed Omotesando Hills atrium with shops and restaurants. The Roastery, one of Tokyo's best roastery cafés. The Claska Gallery & Shop "Do" on the 2nd floor of the hotel.

Tokyo designer Mina Takaoka's gold and platinum Leaf Bowl available at the MoMA Design Store. Spring/summer 2016 collection by Japanese fashion designer Mihara Yasuhiro. Kyusu, product designer Daisuke Kitagawa's take on an espresso maker.

up on its 53rd floor in the shape of the Mori Art Museum. As of writing, the two main exhibitions here are a look at urbanism, architecture and innovation by architect Norman Foster's Foster + Partners and contemporary Japanese artist Takashi Murakami's The 500 Arhats collection, while upcoming shows will include the next instalment of the museum's triennial Roppongi Crossing series developed to highlight Japanese contemporary artists.

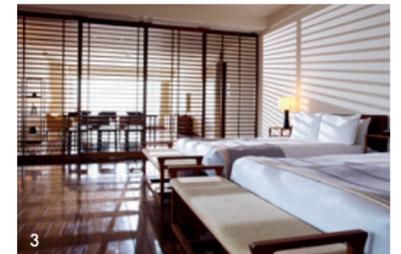
In 2006, a rival to Roppongi Hills then appeared with the opening of the US\$ 3bn Tokyo Midtown less than a kilometre away, bringing a similar mix of ingredients to what was now one of Tokyo's most 'in' areas. As Roppongi Hills was capped with a Grand Hyatt, the top of one of Tokyo Midtown's buildings is home to a Ritz-Carlton. And where Roppongi has Mori, Midtown has a duo of art venues with the traditional arts and crafts of the Suntory Art Museum and the Is-

sey Miyake-Tadao Ando collaboration 21_21 Design Sight (2121designsight.jp/en). Currently displaying an exhibition on the design and function of *zakka* (loosely translatable as 'sundries' or 'miscellaneous goods'; running until June 2016), 21_21 Design Sight was created to showcase contemporary design and its role in society, which it does not just with ongoing exhibitions but also with regular presentation events and workshops in a distinctive Ando-designed building featuring one floor above ground that's capped with giant steel plates and another sunken below ground. Away from the art and design, inside Midtown's main building the focus is on shopping, in particular with a range of fashion, design and lifestyle stores. Here, representing the rise of the 'non-brands' is a branch of Muji and its understated interiors and clothing, the latter often defined by simple stripes and natural tones, while the growing trend to embrace traditional arts

and crafts with a modern twist (or sometimes not) is on view at The Cover Nippon (thecovernippon.jp), which brings together cloth, furnishings, ceramics, ironware and lacquerware from artisans around Japan.

ARTISANAL ALLEYWAYS

Looking beyond Roppongi's two complexes, it would be hard to overlook the National Art Center (nact.jp/english), which as well as being the final architectural project of Metabolism Movement co-founder Kisho Kurokawa also became the third of Roppongi's three major contemporary art venues when it opened shortly after Midtown in late 2006. For scale, the 14,000m²/150,000 sq.ft. of exhibition space is unmatched in Tokyo, yet oddly for a facility of that size (in Japan, anyway) there is no permanent exhibition. Instead, each year at the NAC sees an incredibly diverse range of shows, with 2016 scheduled to have classical art exhibitions on Renoir and also the Venetian Renaissance as well as a retrospective on the work of fashion designer Issey Miyake and another show highlighting the prize-winning works from the 19th Japan Media Arts Festival. You can call that eclectic. It is also one of the many venues that takes part in the annual Roppongi Art Night, a self-titled 'one-night, all-night art extravaganza' held since 2009 in late April that sees many of Roppongi's art venues open throughout the night along with one-off art events and happenings out in the streets.



WHERE TO STAY IN STYLE

Up until the late 1990s, accommodation in Tokyo was limited by comparison to other major international cities to rather staid Western-style hotels. Earthquakes, fires and war didn't help Tokyo hold on to the kind of traditional accommodation that cities like Kyoto have, and the city was slow to embrace design hotels and major international luxury brands. Fast-forward 15 years, however, and Tokyo has it all.

1. ANDAZ TOKYO

From the Grand Hyatt in Roppongi through to Shinjuku's Park Hyatt (*the Lost in Translation* hotel) and the Mandarin Oriental in Nihonbashi, to name just a few, Tokyo now has no shortage of ultra-luxury hotels, but it took until 2014 for the Andaz brand to land in Japan. It landed on top of the 52-storey Toranomon Hills, the latest in a long line of towers that combine office space with shops, restaurants and more. Designed by Toni Chi and Shinichiro Ogata, the Andaz takes inspiration from classic Japanese interior design, incorporating natural materials, washi paper and simple woods with touches like *fusuma* screens, but it also goes hard on indulgence with spa and treatment rooms, fine dining options and an open-air bar way up on the 52nd floor. www.andaztokyo.com

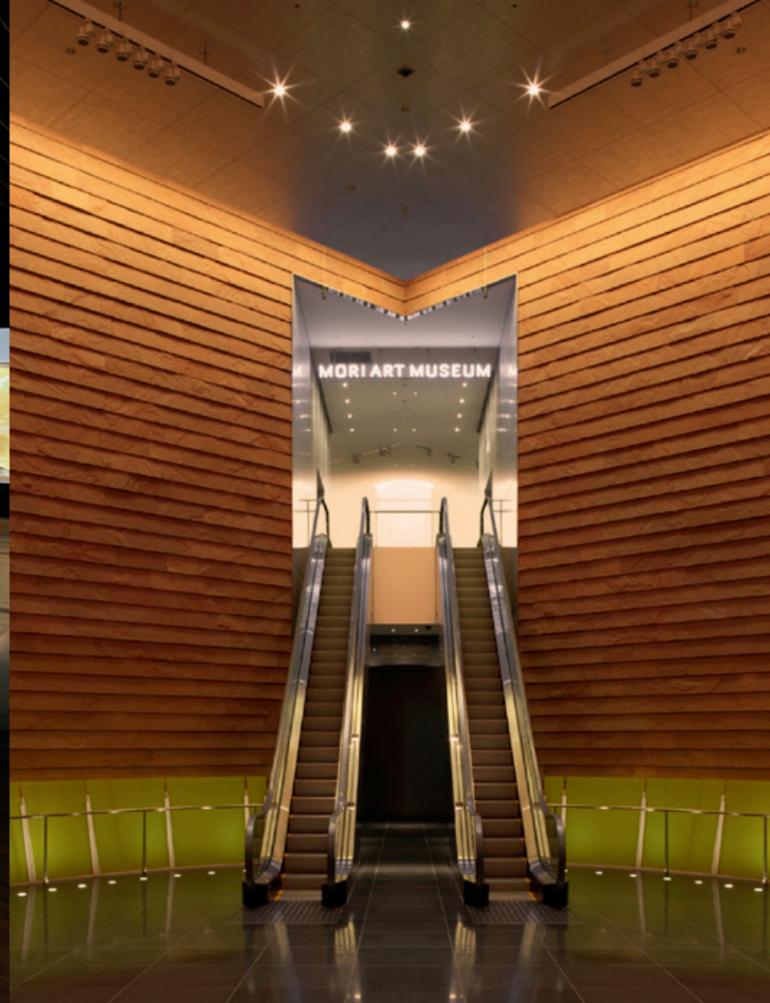
2. TOKYO RYOKAN

Tokyo may not have much in the way of traditional accommodation, but the contemporary Tokyo Ryokan's three rooms have been built

very much with the traditions of the Japanese inn (called *ryokan* in Japanese) in mind, using a combination of *tatami* matting and polished cedar flooring, *shoji* paper screen doors, *shik-kui* plaster walls, and other centuries-old materials and construction methods that naturally ventilate and brighten the inn. It's a case of design hotel meeting old Japan under the mantra of 'less is more', and doing so in a prime location for exploring the old Asakusa part of town. tokyoryokan.com

3. THE CLASKA

A rarity when it opened and still one of Tokyo's best design hotels, the Claska's 21 rooms are each based on one of five themes, ranging from traditional (with partial *tatami* flooring and paper screen windows) to Scandinavian-influenced modern to weekly residences, and benefit from being in a quiet corner of trendy Meguro Ward (about a five-minute taxi from the nearest station, Meguro). Giving the hotel more of a community feel is its contemporary gallery, design store and hip café-bar, which attract local creatives. claska.com



DESIGN READS

NAOTO FUKASAWA
(PHAIDON 2007)

One of Japan's most renowned and influential contemporary product designers, Fukasawa's work is examined by himself and in the essays of artists, designers and academics that include Kenya Hara, Jasper Morrison and Antony Gormley, introducing readers to more than 100 of Fukasawa's designs and what he calls his "simple, restrained and user-friendly approach."

HIROSHI FUJIWARA: FRAGMENT
(RIZZOLI 2014)

A founder of Harajuku style – of street fashion, art, design, and music – Hiroshi Fujiwara's impact on contemporary Japanese design has been profound. In many respects, he's been the tastemaker of a generation, and this richly illustrated book provides a first comprehensive look at his extensive and ground-breaking work.

DESIGNING DESIGN BY KENYA HARA
(LARS MULLER 2015)

As creative, elegant and perfectly simple as his design work, *Designing Design* captures graphic designer Kenya Hara's insights into, influences on and approaches to his craft. As the art director of Muji and president of the Nippon (Japan) Design Center, among many other roles, Hara is a design giant in Japan – one of the people responsible for shaping the look of twenty-first century Tokyo.

Not all of Tokyo's cutting-edge trends, however, are found in built-up complexes and plush areas like Omotesando and Roppongi. Over in Naka-Meguro hip takes a very different form, with small, independent outlets dominating, be they cafés, boutiques, galleries or vintage stores. The vibe here is laidback, almost bohemian, and is never better than in late March and early April when the Meguro River running through the area turns pink with the seasonal cherry blossoms and is then lit at night with lanterns as local cafés and bars set up in the street for the annual *hanami* (cherry blossom viewing) festival. While Roppongi and Omotesando have major art galleries, Naka-Meguro goes small, with intimate venues that include *The Container* (the-container.com); actually a single shipping container that each year features four site-specific installations by Japanese and international artists that often take on socio-political themes.

Likewise, the stores in Naka-Meguro – housed in low-rise buildings, found in narrow streets that beg to be explored – shun the obvious glitzy brands and tend to go for retro or new artisanal items. Capturing that Naka-Meguro vibe best are places like Cow Books (cowbooks.jp/english) and its wide selection of art, design and beat generation books in English and Japanese from the 1950s to 1970s, and J'Antiques, which looks like a rundown bric-a-brac store from the outside, but is a great example of

Naka-Meguro style with antique furniture alongside vintage American womenswear and menswear, buttons, badges, signage and all sorts of other bits and pieces a Tokyo hipster needs. Then there's the new, with the likes of 1LDK and 1LDK Apartments (1ldkshop.com), which aesthetically is almost an artisanal Muji, offering simple, functional and natural toned clothing, housewares and a variety of other lifestyle goods from its own Universal Products label and other small Japanese and overseas producers. It would be easy to spend a whole day in Naka-Meguro exploring places like these and still not have scratched the surface, but combine it with some time in Omotesando and Roppongi and you will at least come away with an idea of where contemporary Tokyo is headed, and a view of the city that belies its neon-lit image.

Three must-see museums in Tokyo (from left): The National Art Center, the Suntory Museum of Art and the Mori Art Museum.

IMAGES: THE NATIONAL ART CENTER, KEIZO KIKU, MORI ART MUSEUM

NAVIGATING TOKYO

In one sentence: ignore buses (except for airport expresses) and stick to trains, the subway and walking. Tokyo's extensive train and subway network means you are rarely more than a 15-minute walk from a station of some kind or other. Better yet, except when a rare big earthquake or typhoon hits town or when a suicide by train occurs (sadly, not infrequently), the trains and subway are extremely reliable and punctual, running between roughly 5 A.M. – midnight.

Tokyo Metro and Toei are the two main subway companies and both operate numerous lines that crisscross central Tokyo. Most trains are operated by Japan Railways (JR). You can buy tickets at vending machines near the ticket gates on rail lines and subways, but it can be confusing to work out your fare, especially at stations with no English guidance, and it's not very convenient buying tickets every time you hop on and off a train. To make things easy, buy an electronic Pasmo or Suica pass (¥500 deposit required; can be bought at any ticket machine), which you can pre-charge and then swipe on the turnstiles when entering and exiting a station to automatically deduct the fare. Pasmo (Tokyo Metro) and Suica (JR) can be used interchangeably on any Toei, JR or Tokyo Metro line, as well as on other private rail lines and many buses. Many convenience stores and vending machines accept them for payment, too.