

# Falling Ceiling

By Jackson Sellers, Lake Forest, California

**Y**OSHI captured a bittersweet moment in November 2009 at the famous Mampei Hotel in Karuizawa. I don't look very happy, do I? Bandages cover cuts on my forearms, and bruises would show up in a few hours. It was a freak accident. As I was getting dressed for breakfast with friends in the main Mampei dining room, a huge ceiling panel weighing 51 pounds fell on me, for no reason I could discern except that I had leaned against the room's wall as I pulled on my pants. I say this moment was "bittersweet," not simply bitter, because hotel officials were more shaken up than I was. We benefitted. We were moved into a truly luxurious and expensive executive suite, and the Mampei bar, where I was well-known after a decade of patronage, would no longer take my money, no matter how exotic my whiskeys were. Of course we had to be moved out of our old room, which was now open to the creatures and insects that might dwell beyond those exposed ducts and cables. See the photo below. When I checked out later, the hotel's general manager and president expressed profuse apologies and bestowed gifts. My bill was half of what it should have been.





CHIEF desk clerk Shiratori-san, maitre d' Nagai-san and head bartender Ozawa-san are personal friends at the Mampei. Shiratori was just a bellhop when we first showed up at the Mampei a decade ago. He was the first to rush to my aid on this day, to stem the bleeding with bandages from a large Red Cross box. At left, bartender Ozawa snapped a picture of Yoshi and me in the bar that night. I was fine and saw no reason for the fuss. Our new suite was so large that I couldn't find a good spot to photograph it. The view below shows considerably less than half of the place. Really it was too big for us. When we go back to the Mampei in the spring of 2011, we will change rooms, but not to this elaborate suite.

