



Historic Hotel

PERHAPS a photograph like the one directly above should be featured in this account of Yoshi & Jackson's three-day stay at Yokohama's Hotel New Grand in March 2009. The photo shows the adjacent 18-story tower built in the 1990s. But I prefer the watercolor painting scanned from a postcard purchased at a hotel shop. Anyway, we never even inspected the tower because I was only interested in the old building, the one built in 1927, the one in which General Douglas MacArthur and other famous personages stayed. At bottom right, Yoshi and I click glasses – hers a martini, mine a gin and tonic – while sitting at the old hotel's marble-topped bar, surrounded by dark, much-varnished paneling. It was an occasion of sorts. For years we had wanted to stay at the New Grand, which is one of Japan's five historic western-style hotels. We had stayed at all the others – the Kanaya in Nikko, the Mampei in Karuizawa, the Fujiya in Hakone and the Nara Hotel in the ancient capital of Nara. For us, this concluded a personal tour. Our New Grand room was on the top floor, the fourth floor of the old building. Our window was the fourth from the corner, partially obscured by a tree limb in the watercolor paint-



ing. If we had thought about it when we phoned for reservations months earlier, we could have requested General MacArthur's Room 316. Even more amusing to my older Japanese friends would have been my selection of Room 318, where novelist Jiro Osaragi lived throughout the 1930s and wrote a couple of masterpieces. You see, I once strongly criticized Osaragi for the outrageous number of coincidences in his 1948 novel *Homecoming*, and my Japanese friends, who revere the book as a nostalgic postwar classic, have never let me forget it. They miss no opportunity to remind me that coincidences happen all the time. Yes, but never to the extent that Osaragi employs them in his *Homecoming* plot. Well, it's enough to say here that Japanese fiction readers are far more tolerant of plot-quickenings than Americans are. One of these Osaragi fans, Masa Usami, was in Yokohama to greet us and show us around. Masa and his wife Fusako, naturalized American citizens and virtual neighbors in Southern California, were there to refurbish their Yokohama condo for sale. At upper right, Masa and I grab a quick breakfast at McDonald's, where I could smoke with my coffee. Yokohama, like nearby Tokyo, was devastated by American firebombings in 1944-45, and the B&W photo at right shows the harbor area as it looked at the end of war. At upper right in the old photo is the Hotel New Grand, miraculously intact. At bottom right is a nighttime aerial view of another part of the harbor as it exists today. Masa, older than I am but more a kid, dragged me onto the huge Ferris wheel. I'm glad. From the top, it offered a panoramic view of the port city.



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Yokohama Postscript

THE huge Ferris wheel at the Yokohama harbor amusement park was unlike any I had ever seen. People rode in capsules that were equipped to deliver commentaries in both Japanese and English. It moved very slowly and a single revolution took close to 20 minutes. The view of the city was spectacular. When good friend Masa Usami, my Yokohama guide, snapped the photo at right, he positioned his camera to capture a cluster of distant buildings that can be seen through the window to the left of my head. One of those buildings was the Hotel New Grand, where Yoshi and I were staying. Back at the hotel, on another of the three days spent there, Masa's camera caught an animated Yoshi after she joined us in the tea/coffee lounge off the lobby. There is talk about a ban on smoking everywhere in Yokohama, even in bars, but it hasn't happened yet. Masa and I spent some time at an interesting Yokohama historical museum, and went shopping/strolling with our



wives in the fashionable Motomachi area. Yoshi bought a pair of shoes. We were only a 20-minute subway ride from Tokyo's Setagaya, so the four of us visited "Mr. K" at the spacious office he calls "Eureka." Yutaka Katayama, or Mr. K as he is known in the Nissan/Datsun/Z-Car world, built the Datsun brand into an international powerhouse in the 1960s and '70s, with Masa at his side as chief engineer. Mr. K, his wife Masako and his son Mitsuo

were waiting for us, and we all gathered around a large table for a lunch of delicious dishes. Masa aimed his camera again, catching Mr. K and me as we attacked a tray of *sushi* and tried to keep up with chatter conducted mostly in English for my benefit. Mr. K is 99 years old now. I'll see him again in the autumn, when we next return to Japan, shortly after his September birthday. Then I'll hug my old friend at age 100. I'll be almost 78, but he thinks that's young.

