

Imperial Hotel ...



Today & Yesteryear

WHEN Yoshi and I were young adults in Tokyo, before and after 1960, the Imperial Hotel was a focal point of sorts. Nowadays the Imperial looks like any other major hotel around the world. But in our heydays, it had quirky and squatty character, as seen at upper right. Designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and built in the early 1920s, the hotel sprawled for 45 years over a city block near the Imperial Palace. It was torn down in 1968 to make way for the modern and more efficient high-rise hotel, a disturbing bit of “progress” for many old Japan hands who wanted things to remain the same. The *Asahi Evening News* editorial offices, where I worked, were tucked beneath the elevated railway tracks behind the old Imperial Hotel. I interviewed many English-speaking bigwigs there, and often ate lunch at the Imperial’s coffee shop, which served delicious cheese blintzes, plump with a cottage cheese filling. I’ve never found cottage cheese blintzes anywhere else. Maybe I haven’t looked hard enough. Frank Lloyd

Wright’s Imperial was full of nooks and crannies, quiet and semi-secluded places with easy chairs and side tables equipped with ashtrays. I could enjoy respite from Tokyo’s hustle and bustle. Yoshi, before and after I met her, adored the Imperial’s French onion soup. In the decades since, she has never encountered an onion soup to match it. As old folks now, we always stay at a Shinjuku high-rise hotel, the Hyatt Regency Tokyo, which is a goodly distance from the Imperial. During this visit to Shinjuku, we descended to the subway station below the

Hyatt Regency and covered that distance, deep underground, with amazing speed. Nostalgia was the motivation. We wanted to have drinks at the new Imperial’s “Old Imperial Bar.” You see, architectural remnants of the old bar were retained in the new one. A waiter snapped the photo below. While we were there, we checked the menus of the coffee shop and a French restaurant in the hotel arcade. Cheese blintzes made with cottage cheese, just as I remember them, are still offered. French onion soup, too. We will dine there next time.



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November 2009