



## Borrowed Time ...

Although I have been living in this building for nearly thirteen years, it is of course somewhat older than that, as I purchased it from a previous owner. He had moved in when it was just built, and checking the records now I see that this was back in 1995, so the place is about 18 years old. Although my western friends will find my next statement hard to believe, this means that this home is beginning to approach the end of its life.

The 'magic number' in the case of standard-issue homes of this type is thirty years. Never mind the fact that many people purchase such buildings on thirty-five year mortgages; thirty years is the expected life span.

The general culture in Japan has never felt it necessary that individual homes should be built to last. Public buildings have always been constructed substantially - think of the old days ... the castles and temples - but the ever-present threat of earthquake, not to mention the fire danger in the crowded townscapes, made it impractical to expect that homes would last a long time.

So 'shoddy' has always been the way to go, and this tradition still holds, although I do have to admit that construction companies have upped their game in recent years, and people are beginning to expect more life from their houses these days. Perhaps fifty years, if they are lucky?

My home is one of a group of three that were built at the same time. Both of my neighbours have repainted their exterior, one of them twice. Both have re-done their roof. As I sit here writing this, I can hear the sounds of construction coming from the third house in the row, where it seems they are gutting their entire kitchen and bathroom for a renewal project.

I have done nothing at all. (I am speaking of the house itself; I *have* of course continually worked on renovation/construction of my workspace down in the basement.)

My roof is covered with mosses, and the metal pieces that line the ridge are visible rusty. One of the gutters came off years ago, leaving the rain water free to run down the exterior wall. The caulking between the sections of exterior siding has crumbled in many places, possibly allowing water to enter here and there. The window behind the kitchen sink barely functions at all, and when it rains, water drips from the frame down into the sink. The soil beneath the water meter has given way a bit, and the meter assembly is now suspended by the pipes that enter and leave it. The external stairs running down to the workshop are no longer white (painted), but have taken a deep brown tone - they are rusted from top to bottom. There are sparrows nesting in the attic space, having taken advantage of a gap under the eaves to get access. I no longer have hot water at the main kitchen sink, as the mixing tap broke a few years ago, and is not replaceable without taking out the entire sink unit.

I could continue in this vein for quite a while, but you get the idea.

It has come to this for a few reasons; I haven't had much money for renovations in recent years, but I have also been careless with the maintenance because I have always had the feeling of 'What's the use?'. Knowing that the place is 'junk' has held me back from doing much work on it. When I bought it I basically had the feeling I was buying land/location (and the concrete workshop downstairs), and not a home. I knew the house itself was temporary and I expected to simply replace the structure all at one go sometime 'in the future'.

Well, as we all know, these days we are all 'living in the future'. And I, especially so!

Excuse me, while I head off to the DIY center. I've got to get some more duct tape - my biggest purchase recently!

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