



Let Me In!

People who visit my workshop to see the place where the prints are being made are usually quite impressed by the pleasant work space I have. I sit on a kind of 'platform' that holds my workbench, and which faces four very large windows, which overlook the stream that flows by just at the edge of the property.

When I set this up for myself just over ten years ago I had wondered a bit if having such a pleasant view would interfere with my ability to get work done. I do have to admit that I spend a fair amount of time gazing out the windows, but I think that overall, the cost in lost working time is more than made up for by the benefit to my mental health!

The platform is built in a sort of alcove extending out from one wall, and that space was not originally part of the room - it was the balcony. When I began construction, I removed the four large sliding glass doors that had made up the north wall of the room, cut off the balcony railings, and built a new wall - with those large windows - along the outer edge of the balcony. So the place where I sit to do my carving and printing was originally outside, but has now been incorporated into the interior space.

When I first thought of this idea, I had originally assumed that it would be difficult to obtain planning permission for such a renovation. I thought that it would be a lot of trouble to try and convince the planning department at city hall that such a modification would not adversely affect the integrity of the structure. But I was surprised to find that there is basically no such thing as 'planning permission' for renovations here in Japan. New buildings have to meet construction codes, but residential renovations fly 'under the radar'. To this day, city hall has no idea - nor any interest in - what I have done to my building.

I have mixed feelings about having such freedom. I myself am quite confident that the changes I have made are safe (including all the new wiring I have installed, none of which has been 'inspected'), and indeed my new wall is built to a far higher standard than was the original construction, including *triple-glazed* windows, something unheard of in this country. But when I look across the street at the large - and very rickety - laundry-drying platform that one of my neighbours has built on his rooftop, and which he uses for viewing the annual fireworks festival, inviting people over to join him ... I wonder if this is such good public policy.

In any case, my new wall has performed perfectly since it was built, now more than ten years ago; it doesn't leak, and my wonderfully strong and heavy windows don't rattle the slightest, even in the strongest typhoon winds.

But not everybody is happy. The day that the final window was installed and sealed in place was a black day for somebody, although I hadn't realized it at the time. I learned about the problem one spring day, while sitting at my bench working. I heard a quite strong bump against the left-most window, and saw that a bird had banged against the glass. As I watched, she repeated this, banging against the surface of the glass again and again, apparently trying to get in, before giving up a few minutes later and flying away.

But she was back again the next day, again trying to enter the room. She banged against the window so many times that she left a few small feathers stuck to the glass. Should I open it and let her in? Why was she doing this? And then, as I looked around my alcove, trying to understand what she wanted, I noticed up on

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the wall behind me - a wall that just a few months ago had been *outdoors* - some marks where it seems that a nest had been constructed.

Aha. That must have been *her* nesting spot, and she was returning to it to make this year's nest in the same place. I really debated long and hard about opening it up to let her continue her tradition, but realized that it would mean I would have to leave the window open for the next few months, rain or shine. In the end I decided not to let her in. Surely her instincts would have a 'Plan B' in place? After all, trees in the forest eventually fall down; the birds who nest in it must then switch to another location.

And so it was; she did eventually give up, although whether she simply found another place, or gave up nesting entirely, I have no way to tell.

What would it be like if I came home one day to find a transparent barrier preventing me from entering the house? How long would I bang against it before giving up? I wonder ...

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