

When the Nakagin Capsule Tower opened on April 5, 1972, its first 140 tenants each received a commemorative lamp shaped like the building. Decades later, Takayuki Sekine, a retiree and former manager at a chamber of commerce, learned of the building in an architecture guidebook. He and his wife, Yumiko, purchased capsule B1004. They were pleasantly surprised to find a unit that still retained its original furnishings and charm. Steadfast residents until the building's final years, the Sekines collected memorabilia—including this lamp, which transformed the Nakagin Capsule Tower's architecture into an everyday object. Takayuki's figure is visible in the blown-up nighttime photograph on the opposite wall.

Minami first encountered the Nakagin Capsule Tower in 2010, when he visited capsule B1004 and met its resident, Takayuki Sekine. Captivated by the building's architecture and its layered histories, he began documenting it. By then, the towers were veiled in netting to protect pedestrians from falling debris, and some long-unoccupied capsules had severely decayed. However, many remained in good condition, and their lived-in quality contributed to their charm. As Minami observed, the capsules had “accumulated the passage of time and the traces of people who had inhabited them.” Even in decline, the remaining residents kept maintaining and transforming their spaces—and the building continued to adapt.

These five short interviews, filmed almost two years before the Nakagin Capsule Tower's demolition, feature some of the building's last residents. They reflect on what drew them to the building and how they adapted their compact units—each just under “six tatami mats” in size, as Kurokawa described them—to suit their lives. In 2014, amid ongoing debate by the Nakagin company over the proposed demolition of the building and redevelopment of the site, a small group of residents launched a preservation and restoration effort under the slogan #SaveNakagin. The materials they produced—videos, zines, photos, and blog posts—are not a static record but a living archive, meant to be shared, activated, and celebrated.

Just days before demolition of the building began in 2022, the Nakagin Capsule Tower Preservation and Restoration Project (formed by a small group of residents) partnered with Yuta Tokunaga, a specialist in 360-degree architectural documentation, to create a detailed 3D model. To do so, they used digital photogrammetry—a technique that stitches together thousands of photographs to reconstruct spaces in precise virtual form. Tokunaga captured public areas and several capsules, producing a final record of the complex with all its traces of life intact. Presented here as a navigable, interactive installation, the model is both a high-resolution archive and an experiment in digital preservation—keeping the building alive, even after its dismantlement.

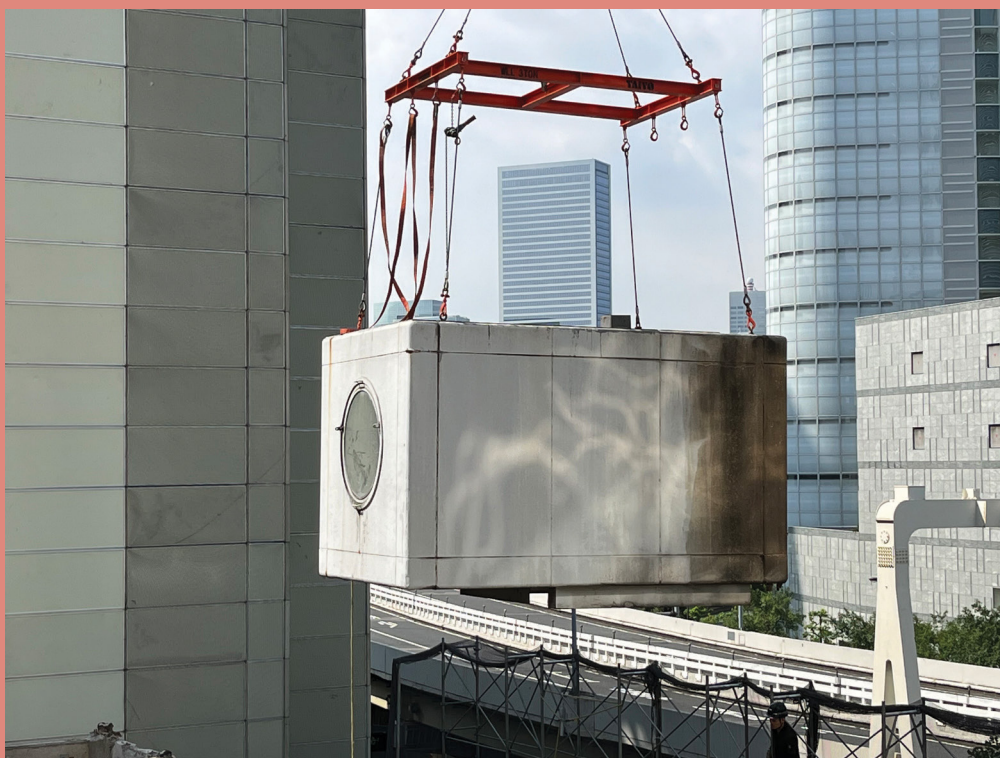
While Kurokawa is best known for the Nakagin Capsule Tower, his most enduring contribution to the architecture of daily life may be the concept of the “capsule hotel.” In 1977 his office was commissioned to design a hotel for a men-only sauna and bathhouse in Osaka. Opened in 1979 and still in operation today, the facility features double-decker “capsule beds” for up to 450 guests. Each capsule bed resembles a miniature spaceship and is equipped with a control panel for air conditioning, a television, and an alarm. After its debut, the Capsule Inn Osaka became the prototype for a compact hotel typology that soon spread across Japan and beyond.

Though often attributed solely to Kurokawa, the Nakagin Capsule Tower was the product of a collaborative design process—a fact made visible in these original architectural drawings. Drafted and signed by multiple team members, they reflect the collective labor behind the project. Nobuo Abe, who had worked on the Capsule House for Expo '70, led the design and construction of the capsules. Aiko Mogi, the team's only woman member, was responsible for many of the architectural drawings, including those of the building's facades. Koji Shimosawa designed the tower cores, while Kenjiro Ueda developed the plinth connecting the two main towers, where the Nakagin real estate company relocated their headquarters shortly after the building's completion.

With the design of the complex finalized by spring 1971, the Nakagin Company launched a marketing campaign to promote the unprecedented building type. Aimed at businessmen—the intended buyers—flyers and brochures emphasized personalization, much like selecting features for a new car. Standard amenities included a 13-inch Sony color TV, alarm clock, and Sanyo refrigerator, with optional upgrades like a Sony radio and tape recorder and a Sharp electronic calculator. For the brochure sketches (seen in the page-turner below), Abe enlisted an illustrator from *Car Graphic* magazine, who infused capsule ownership with the thrill of driving a sleek roadster.

Produced shortly after the building's completion, this short promotional film opens with Kurokawa and his close collaborator Nobuo Abe chronicling the conceptualization and construction of the project. Its closing sequence features a fictionalized portrayal of the kind of client Nakagin hoped to attract: a commuting businessman arriving at the building, checking his mail, taking the elevator to his “capsule,” and unwinding with a shower, a book, and music. As one of the promotional pamphlets explained, domestic tasks in the building could be outsourced—housekeeping was handled by “capsule ladies,” and meals were assumed to be consumed outside—reflecting a gendered urban model built on invisible labor by women.

“There was something so beautiful about seeing the capsules fly up in the air again,” recalled Koe-chan, a self-described “cosplay DJ” and one of the tower’s last tenants. She first spotted the “Lego-like building” from a nearby highway and instantly knew she wanted to live there. Years later, she watched as the building was disassembled, with capsules being lifted by crane—just as they had been installed. Demolition began on April 12, 2022, following failed preservation efforts. It became a widely shared spectacle on social media and national television. The concrete cores were ultimately torn down, but the original entrance sign—on view above—was salvaged.



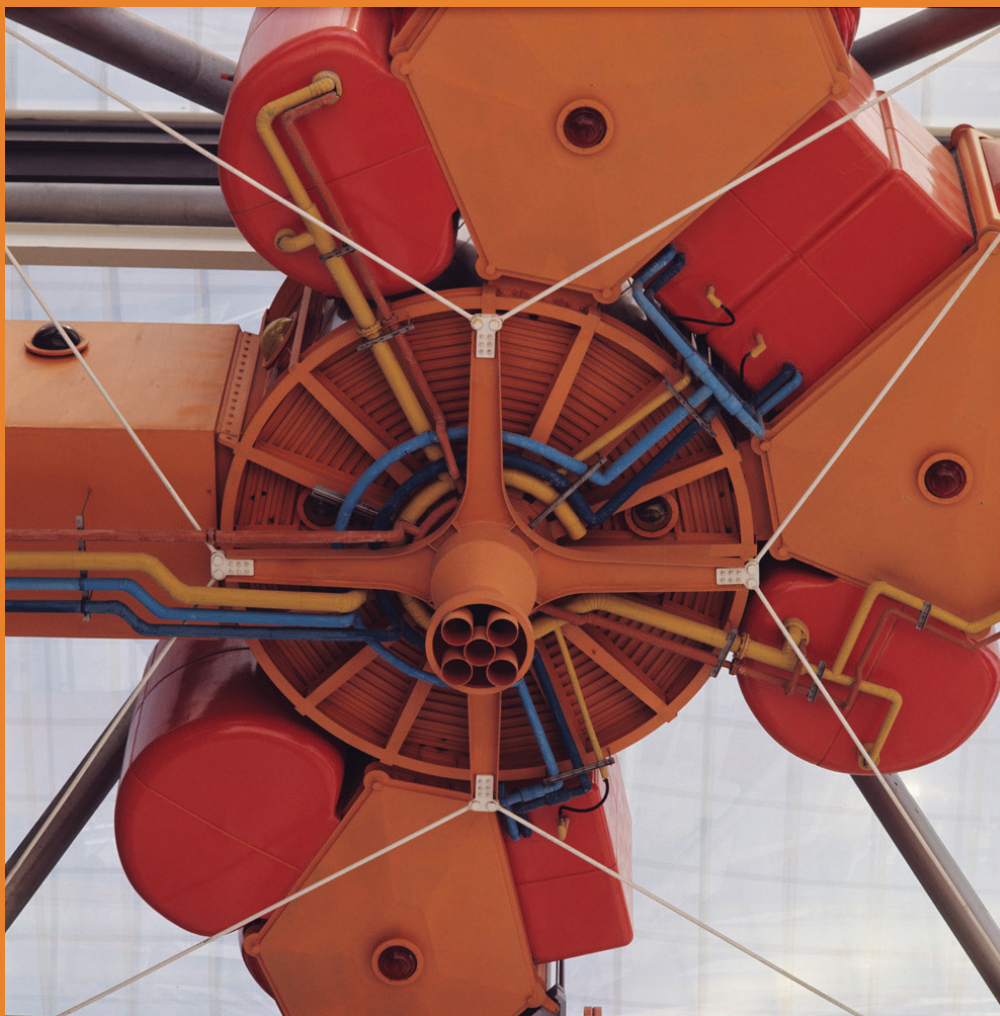
A capsule from the Nakagin Capsule Tower in midair during the building’s dismantling, 2022. Photograph: The Nakagin Capsule Tower Restoration and Preservation Project

Though initially popularized through black-and-white photographs, the Nakagin Capsule Tower was far from monochrome. Stairwells spiraled upward in vibrant hues: “coral” red and orange in Tower A; “peacock” blue and turquoise in Tower B. Electric blue carpeted capsule floors, while ochre yellow covered the floors of the offices on the plinth level. Reflecting the Metabolist interest in biology, Kurokawa and his office drew this palette from nature, effectively softening the building’s futuristic image. Capsule A1305, now in MoMA’s care, once sat at the top of Tower A. The exhibition’s pink and orange tones echo that ascent—reviving the chromatic environment residents and visitors once passed through on their way to a capsule in the sky.



Interior view of the stairway in Tower A, 1972. *Completion of the Nakagin Capsule Tower Building* [brochure in Japanese] (Tokyo: Nakagin, 1972). Courtesy the Nakagin Capsule Tower Preservation and Restoration Project

The World Exposition of 1970, held in Osaka, marked the first time Kurokawa was able to realize his concept of “capsule architecture,” in which larger structures are composed by combining modular “capsules.” He contributed two key examples to the expo. The most publicized was the “Beautilion” pavilion—a three-dimensional grid of two hundred prefabricated cross modules into which thirty stainless steel boxes were inserted. Less famous yet more consequential for his later design of the Nakagin Capsule Tower was the Capsule House. Suspended from the roof of the expo’s Theme Pavilion, this prototypical dwelling featured three capsular rooms and bathrooms—for a man, woman, and child—clustered around a circular corridor.



Kisho Kurokawa Architect & Associates, Capsule House in the space frame of the Theme Pavilion, Expo '70, Osaka. 1969–70. View from below. Photograph: Tomio Ohashi

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The Nakagin Capsule Tower is the defining example of “capsule architecture,” a concept Kurokawa first articulated in his 1969 *Capsule Declaration*, which outlined eight foundational principles for an architecture of replaceable parts. He revised and expanded the declaration in 1970 in his book *Kurokawa Kishō no sakuhin* (Kisho Kurokawa’s work), which translated the manifesto into a multimedia format. Designed by fellow Metabolist Kiyoshi Awazu, the publication included a foldout poster and a vinyl record featuring a robotic voice reciting the declaration’s first five points. Together, these elements offered a striking new model for communicating complex architectural ideas to a wide audience.

While early twentieth-century modern architects in the West embraced the age of the machine, Japan's Metabolists turned to biology and life processes to devise an architecture capable of transforming over time. Formed in 1960, the group declared: "The reason why we use the biological word *metabolism* is that we believe design and technology should denote human vitality.... We are trying to encourage the active metabolic development of our society." Its youngest founding member, Kurokawa advanced this vision with his 1961 Helix City Project. Inspired by DNA's double helix, the project imagined Tokyo's Ginza district growing dynamically—both horizontally and vertically—via helical service towers and residential buildings linked by bridges in a seemingly endless pattern.