



Just Enough: Lessons in Living Green from Traditional Japan

By Azby Brown

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Just Enough is a book of stories, depictions of vanished ways of life told from the point of view of a contemporary observer. The stories tell how people lived in Japan some two hundred years ago, during the late Edo Period, when traditional technology and culture were at the peak of development and realization, just before the country opened itself to the West and joined the ranks of the industrialized nations. They tell of people overcoming many of the identical problems that confront us today--issues of energy, water, materials, food and population--and forging a society that was conservation-minded, waste-free, well-housed, well-fed and economically robust.

From these stories, readers will gain insight into what it is like to live in a sustainable society, not so much in terms of specific technical approaches, but rather, in terms of how larger concerns can guide daily decisions and how social and environmental contexts shape our courses of action. These stories are intended to illustrate the environmentally-related problems that the people in both rural and urban areas faced, the conceptual frameworks in which they viewed these problems, and how they went about finding solutions. Included at the end of each section are a number of lessons in which the author elaborates on what Edo Period life has to offer us in the global battle to reverse environmental degradation. Topics covered include everything from transportation, interconnected systems, and waste reduction to the need for spiritual centers in the home.

Just Enough, more than anything else, is about a mentality that pervaded traditional Japanese society and which can serve as a beacon for our own efforts to achieve sustainability now.

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Editorial Review

Review

"As we all look forward with hope for a cradle-to-cradle world, Azby Brown honors us with the great gift of seeing the past of Japan with fresh eyes. I was born in Japan and know firsthand what inspiration can be found in its history of exquisitely elegant and effective solutions to everyday needs as we create the designs of the future." —**William McDonough** Designer, winner of the Presidential Award for Sustainable Development and co-author of *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things*

"*Just Enough* should be required reading for anyone who wants to help make today's world more sustainable. Brown has drawn from a source that most of us would never consider—Japan in the early 18th century. This society went through desperate times, and came through them successfully because the Japanese learned how to use the natural systems of life to work with them, not against them. With his wonderful distillation of lessons learned, including my personal favorite—"Build homes that are inspirational"—he translates this ancient weaving of human ingenuity and natural systems analysis into a blueprint for sustainability today. This is an extraordinary book that holds the keys we're looking for to rebalance both our planet and our own lives. Read it, please." —**Sarah Susanka** Architect and author of *The Not So Big House series*, and *The Not So Big Life*

"Azby Brown's book, using excellent examples from Edo-period Japan, proves that we have surrounded ourselves with many things that we don't need to live sustainably and happily. This is an important warning for the future, one that should make us all stop and think." —**Shigeru Ban** Architect, recipient of the Thomas Jefferson Medal in Architecture, designer of the award-winning Hanover Pavilion for Expo 2000. "The people of the Edo period intelligently managed their homes, fields, and forests, developed innovative designs for the things they needed, and maintained a sustainable society for three hundred years. This book conveys the secrets of that society with great clarity in text and sketches—knowledge that has great meaning as we face the immense challenges of our time." —**Dr. Terunobu Fujimori** Award-winning green architect and architectural historian. Professor at the Institute of Industrial Science, University of Tokyo Truly an eye-opener.

"Brown takes us behind the scenes, revealing the complex and ingenious techniques that put Japanese traditional life in harmony with nature. An indispensable reference for anyone wanting to know the secret formulae that made old Japanese life what it was." —**Alex Kerr** Author, *Dogs and Demons, Lost Japan*

"This timely and inspiring book reminds us how an advanced culture in the past that faced similar challenges to our own was able to live sustainably. We can all learn from a society that encouraged humility, considered waste taboo, suggested cooperative solutions, and found meaning and satisfaction in a beautiful life."

—**John Thackara** Director, Doors of Perception Design Conference. Author, *In the Bubble: Designing in a Complex World*

"Brown's elegant and accessible text with its lucid illustrations make this a wonderful companion for students and professionals in the fields of design, civil engineering, farming, construction, or Japanese history, or any person interested in leaving a more delicate footprint on the planet." —**ForeWord Magazine**

About the Author

AZBY BROWN was raised in New Orleans, Louisiana. He studied architecture and sculpture at Yale College, graduating in 1980. In 1985, he received a grant from the Japanese Ministry of Education to do research at the Department of Architecture of the University of Tokyo, where he received a master's degree. He is the author of *The Genius of Japanese Carpentry*, *Small Spaces* and *The Very Small Home*, all

published by Kodansha International. He became an associate professor of architectural design at the Kanazawa Institute of Technology in 1995, where he has also accepted a position in the Department of Media Informatics. In 2003, he opened the Future Design Institute in Tokyo, and currently serves as director.

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