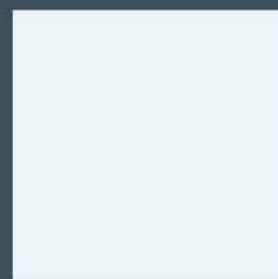


In the Details.

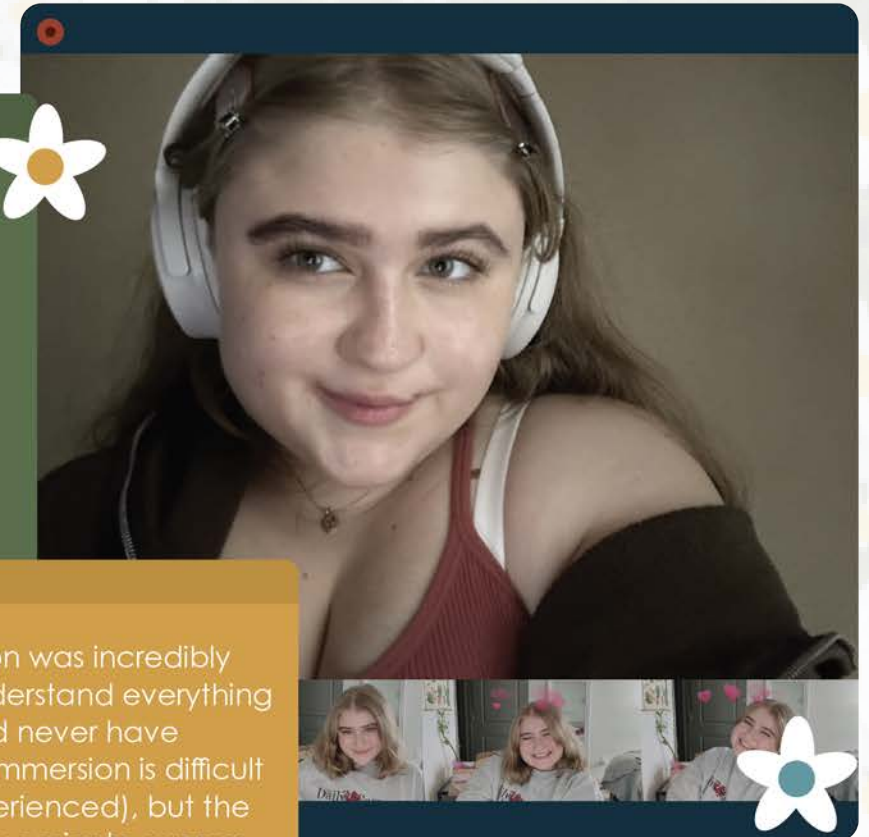


Letter from the Editor

I like to think I am attuned to color and design, especially how they influence me and the world around me. Being both a visual communications major and art history minor, I'm used to thinking about more than the aesthetics, often little details, deeper thought processes, and most importantly the effect of a work on its intended audience (often its function).



Traveling and experiencing Japan in person was incredibly immersive, and I was able to view and understand everything more in-depth, noticing little details I would never have thought of were I not present. The overall immersion is difficult to convey (of course it is meant to be experienced), but the aforementioned "little details" are perhaps easier to express. In this little "zine," I want to highlight some of my favorite examples of color and/or design being used that helped influence my overall experience and immersion in Japan.



Architecture

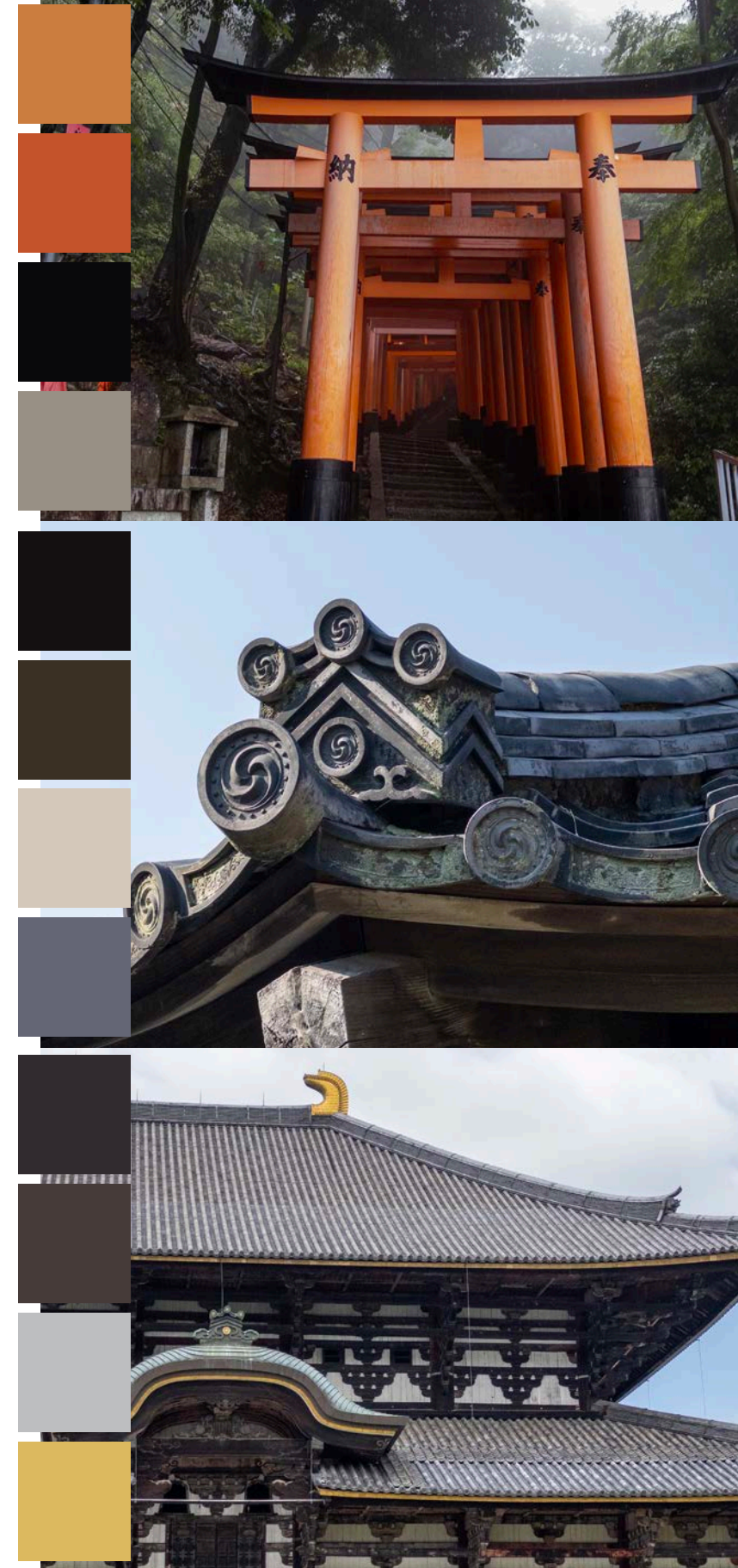


Architecture, unlike other visual arts, is typically meant to be experienced, not just viewed. There is always a deeper purpose than one that is purely sculptural. Visuals are still important, though, as they draw the visitor in and serve symbolic purposes. The use of color in shrines and temples is just one aspect of this visual design, but it is incredibly intriguing, especially thinking about which colors are used and why.

Red is probably the most iconic and recognizable color used in Japanese shrines and temples. This red, or more accurately vermillion, is used at many shrines at the torii that mark the start of a sacred area, but red is also used at some shrines themselves or even Buddhist temples. This bright color is said to scare off evil spirits, and it provides a contrast to the lush green trees that often surround the architecture, especially at Shinto shrines. While there is sometimes wear on the red paint, it is clear the structures are repainted often in order to maintain its purpose as well as its aesthetics. The permanence of the bright red makes the architecture feel enduring and timeless, as if the structure has looked the same for hundreds of years, withstanding natural wear and tear.

A lot of architecture in Japan, however, does not always feature the bright red, instead appearing more neutral with browns and whites. This does not mean that these structures were never painted or more colorful, just that they are not currently. It is hard to say why these shrines and temples may no longer be painted, as surely it differs case by case. Maybe it required too many resources, or the site caretakers took a different means of restoration. Of course, some shrines and temples were also likely just left unpainted. A lack of paint forces the viewer to focus on the materials in a more natural state, such as the wood of buildings or the bark used as roofs. As both Buddhism and Shintoism emphasize nature in their respective faiths, this extra focus on the materials may be an extra step in strengthening belief and thought.

Another color used in shrines and temples is more of a material, which is gold (or gold leaf). Rarely is gold used as the main hue for this architecture, although Kinkaku-ji is a notable exception. Because of the value associated with gold, using it even as an accent elevates the site and structure, giving it added importance. As the structure is elevated, so is the belief and religion with which the architecture is associated.



Food

The food in Japan is incredible. Of course this is an overly simplified statement, but really in every category, the statement is still accurate. Many Japanese foods I had were so intentional in preparation and presentation, as well as texture and, of course, taste. Even if the food was not something I would reorder again or if the flavor just wasn't my favorite, there was always something to appreciate.

It was rarely the case that I had to dig deeper about the food I was eating, however. As often as I said "phone eats first" as I took pictures, it was hard for me to find actual photos of a lot of food I ate because I was so eager to jump right in and eat.

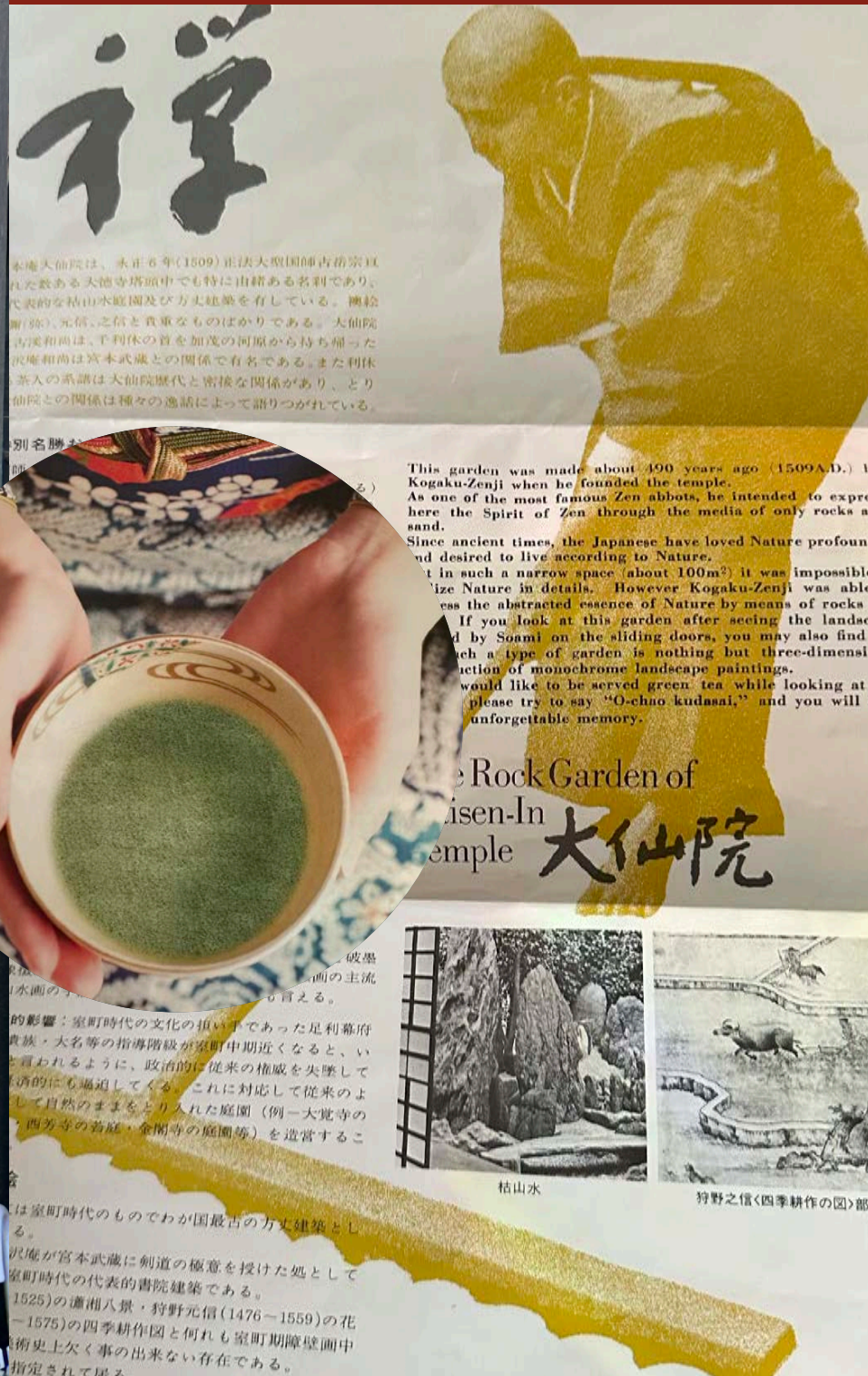
A lot of the things that make the food so "Instagrammable" or photogenic are the same things that make it irresistible to eat immediately upon receiving it. The presentation of the food was usually thoughtfully curated and aesthetically pleasing, from elaborate desserts to composed ramen. Of course, this made these foods so fit for photos, but I always instead opted to delve right in.

The intentional presentation made it so I absolutely had to "mess it up" and enticed me to mix everything together to make the perfect bite. Many of my photos I had taken showed my food midway (or all the way) through this process, when I realized it was worth documenting.

While presentation is just one aspect of a meal, being brought beautifully composed food gives you a sense of value, where you feel grateful for someone putting in the effort to make you food that looks, as well as tastes, good. Usually the price for these kinds of meals are lofty in the United States, but in Japan, even a snack could provide this contentment.



Design in the Wild



In my major, we are encouraged to do visual research, where we collect examples of design, color, photography, etc. that inspire us or have a quality we might want to emulate one day. So much of the advertising I saw in Japan was different from what I see in my day-to-day life in Columbia. Not being able to understand what the ads were really saying a lot of the time forced me to look strictly at design principles used.

