TOKYO, JAPAN
AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE

The residence of the United States Ambassador to Japan, with its spacious reception rooms and large garden, offers serenity in the center of downtown Tokyo.
In 1925 the U.S. Government acquired the estate of Prince Hirokuni Ito, an adopted son of Japan's first Prime Minister Hirobumi Ito, from the Japanese government for $115,000. Two years earlier, an earthquake and subsequent fire had destroyed the prince's residence along with the adjacent U.S. Embassy buildings.

American H. Van Buren Magonigle and Czech-born Antonin Raymond designed the residence along with the chancery. Raymond had come to Tokyo to work for noted American architect Frank Lloyd Wright on the Imperial Hotel in 1919. Structural Engineer Tachu Naito from the University of Tokyo, well known for his work on the Tokyo Tower, advised on seismic protection and fire prevention. The residence is a blend of Moorish and Asian stylistic influences with colonial overtones. Raymond redesigned the garden and driveway to obtain the northwest entrance prescribed by the Asian philosophy of Wind and Water for wellbeing. The highly ornamented exterior is reminiscent of Wright's influence – the white stucco walls are enhanced with decorative bands of precast stucco as well as colorful mosaic tiles.

This residence was among the first houses built by the United States specifically as an ambassador's residence, and it was one of the first projects of the new Foreign Services Building Commission set up by President Herbert Hoover. Dubbed "Hoover's Folly" at the time, the chancery and the residence, with imported walnut wall panels and Vermont marble flooring, were completed during the Great Depression at a cost of $1.25 million.

During World War II the compound was under the protection of the Swiss government. From 1945 to 1951 General Douglas MacArthur lived in what his staff called "The Big House." On September 27, 1945 Emperor Hirohito came to the residence to speak with MacArthur. The next day a photograph of their meeting in the living room was printed on the front page of every paper in Japan. It conveyed the new, subordinate position of Japan's "living god." Hirohito had renounced his divinity, forever altering how the Imperial Family was viewed in Japan. This event is only one of many that exemplify the significance of the residence in American diplomatic history.