

Introduction



KASOUKEN
ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH INITIATIVES FOR CREMATION, FUNERAL AND CEMETERY STUDIES
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As you come through the main entrance of the Woodland Cemetery (Skogskyrkogården) in Stockholm, Sweden, a breathtaking rolling lawn greets you. You will then be led to the straight path that leads to the primitive pine forest that houses crematoriums and the cemetery. It was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1994 for providing non-denominational spiritual comfort and the exceptional beauty of the natural property. It was the first architecture from the twentieth century to be listed, and has influenced the design of burial sites and crematoriums around the world.

What is so exceptional about Woodland Cemetery is not simply integrating the architecture with the surrounding nature. This serene environment is conducive to quiet contemplation. The architectural spirit is beautifully presented in this space to tend to the emotional needs of the mourners.

In many crematoriums we visited overseas, the landscape and the crematorium were integrated from the planning stage. Such approach not only accommodates users' needs, but also the better working environment of the facility employees. We strongly felt the crematoriums in many countries have shifted from an isolated, closed facility to an open facility with lots of lights.

In Japan, a location has been the foremost issue in building a crematorium. A cremation facility is often not welcome in many communities. The process of location selection often results in community consensus and sentiments rather than answering to the needs of the mourners. Landscape and architecture have been dealt with separately, resulting in unnecessary cost increase and sterile facility. Over the years, however, Japanese crematoriums have been inspired by overseas examples, such as Woodland Cemetery.

Kasouken has advocated the use of natural landscape when building a crematorium. We have advised municipalities in Japan to avoid unnecessary developments and put the landscape to good use. As a result, there are a number of crematoriums in Japan today that integrate the surrounding nature with the architecture. Slowly but surely, crematoriums in Japan are changing to this new concept.

It may not be possible in cities where space is quite limited, but wherever possible, and as much as possible, we should move towards planning a crematorium incorporated with a cemetery or a park. We hope that Japanese burial sites and crematoriums will manifest this new architectural spirit.

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