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#99 – Emotive Spaces

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Sustainability in Hotel Design
Emotive Spaces

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Ambiguous Boundaries

Aman Kyoto, by Kerry Hill Architects with Toyo Architects & Engineers Office
Words Neo Disheng Photography Naosato & Partners (courtesy of Kerry Hill Architects)

Four two-storey pavilions house 24 Guest Suites in a reductionist architecture of steel frames, dark-stained cedar screens and walls, and zinc-clad roofs.

In a valley surrounded by protected forests on the western outskirts of Kyoto, Kerry Hill Architects have distilled a sense of Japanese design for Aman by taking a sensitive contemporary approach to traditional design and construction strategies.

"Aman Kyoto? Is that the luxury resort on the hill – the one with several small pavilion buildings?" In Kyoto, as the taxi driver explained to this writer, destinations are referred to in relation to landmarks. It seems that within a year of opening, Aman Kyoto has been accepted as a landmark in one of the oldest and most discerning cities in Japan.

Over three decades ago, Aman Resorts redefined luxury for the hospitality industry with a strategy of creating low-density developments offering unparalleled exclusivity and attention to detail in exquisite locations. That the brand's unrivaled success continues to this day derives in part from the clarity in its identity, but largely from Aman Resorts' impeccable eye for the perfect site, and the right architect.

Kerry Hill Architects (KHA) has been one of the select few designing Aman Resorts properties since the brand's inception. Prior to Aman Kyoto, KHA had crafted close to a quarter of the 32 Aman properties located across continents.

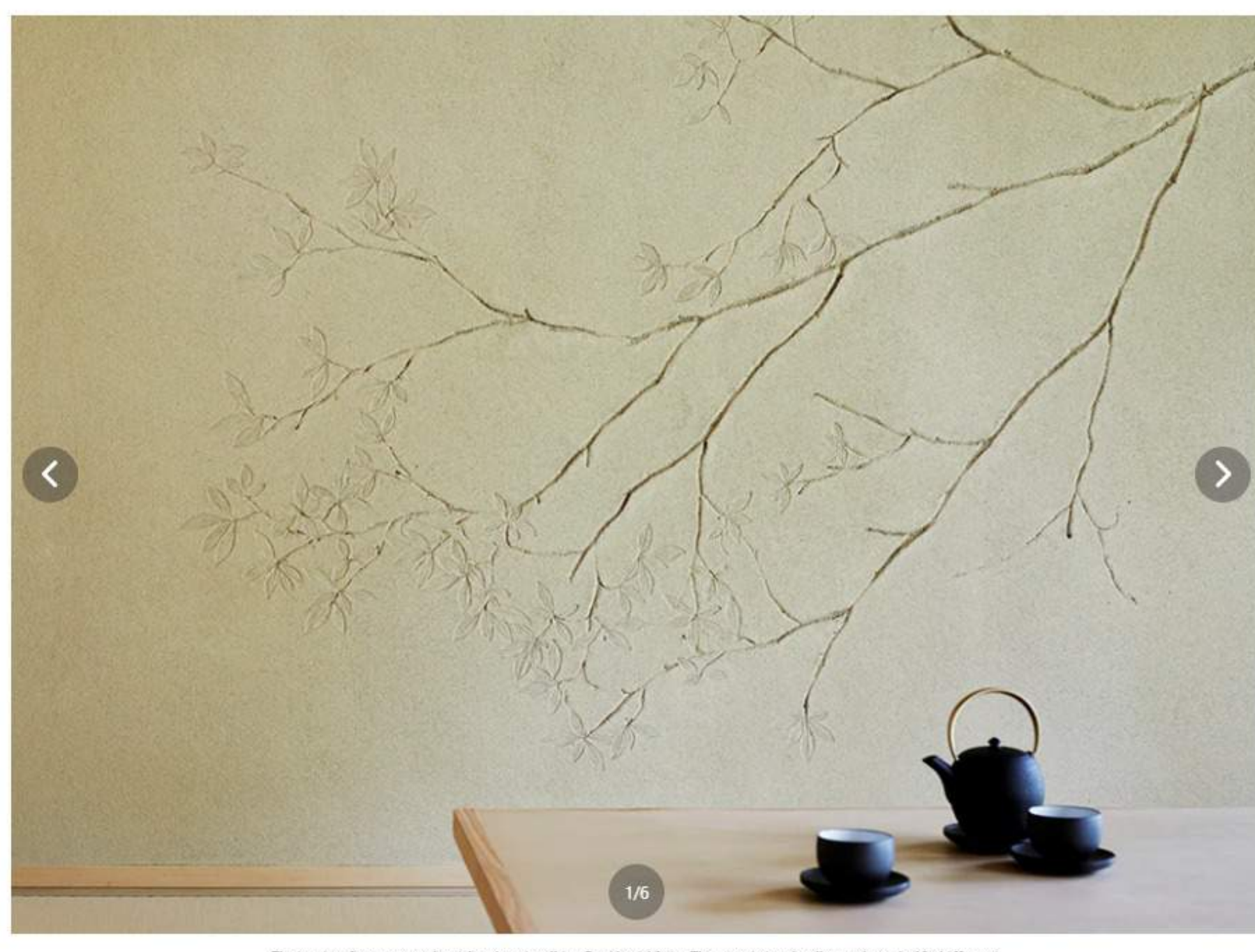
From the tropical thatched-roof villas in the former Amanusa (1992) in Bali, to the series of five lodges (forged with vernacular construction techniques) that are Amanokura (2004) in Bhutan, KHA's portfolio of Aman projects, while architecturally distinctive, share a common vein of deep sensitivity to the genius loci. They draw from local spatial logic and proportions, light and shadow, materiality and

construction methods, and are shaped with the studio's uncompromising attention to detail.

Aman Kyoto follows the acclaimed success of Aman Tokyo and Amanemu in Japan, both of which were also designed by KHA. The 16-hectare Kyoto site (incorporating 12 hectares of protected forested land) was originally the private garden of one of Japan's most revered makers of the obi (traditional sash). The breathtaking moss-covered rock garden is reminiscent of an ancient ruin, and can be traced to the owner's passion for archaeology.

According to KHA, a sense of place is established by the adaptation of vernacular spatial proportions and materials to "feel Japanese, while not being traditional". KHA adopted a visually simple, reductionist building approach where the private and social programs are separated in low-rise, individual pavilions that frame courtyards and gardens. KHA's careful retention of the garden's original state allowed the continuation of the site's narrative, which immensely enriches the overall reading of Aman Kyoto.

The circulation between the individual buildings allows one to experience the surrounding nature and landscape, which takes on different hues according to the season. Blending quietly into this rich and ever-changing background, the buildings are dressed in a neutral palette of dark, matte finishes.



The imprint of nature on a sakaki (cherry blossom) wall in a Presidential Suite. The commissioned wall artwork was by Naoki Kusumi.

Narrative, site and architecture coalesce in a unique way that resonates, beyond commercial motive, with well-travelled guests, foreign and domestic alike.

In contrast, the guest rooms are wrapped in a warm cocoon of light-toned local tsumo (Japanese ash) and tatami mats. In line with Aman tradition, the purity of the space is preserved by concealing electronic devices such as flat screen televisions behind sliding timber screens. Similarly, outside, the mechanical and electrical equipment that serves this sprawling complex is kept out of sight through meticulous planning.

The design scheme can also be read in terms of how it blurs boundaries on various levels. Not just physical boundaries between indoor and outdoor, architecture and landscape, and so on, but on a deeper level – the intangible boundaries as well. As the famed Aman service welcomes and pampers, and the series of surreal experiences heightens one's awareness, normal daily life fades away and gradual immersion in the Aman lifestyle takes over.

Some works of architecture can be understood on paper; others, like Aman Kyoto, need to be experienced in order to be fully comprehended. Here, narrative, site and architecture coalesce in a unique way that resonates, beyond commercial motive, with well-travelled guests, foreign and domestic alike. The staunch following of

Aman guests who travel the world seeking new Aman experiences can attest to this emotive experience.

For this tribe of ardent 'Amanjunkies', Aman Kyoto not only offers an architectural master class and an enthralling new Aman experience, but also access to authentic Japanese culture. For the Kyoto community, partly due to the foreign perspective and the thoughtful reinterpretation of cultural references in this context, the resort represents an interesting opportunity for one to re-engage in dialogue with their own culture.

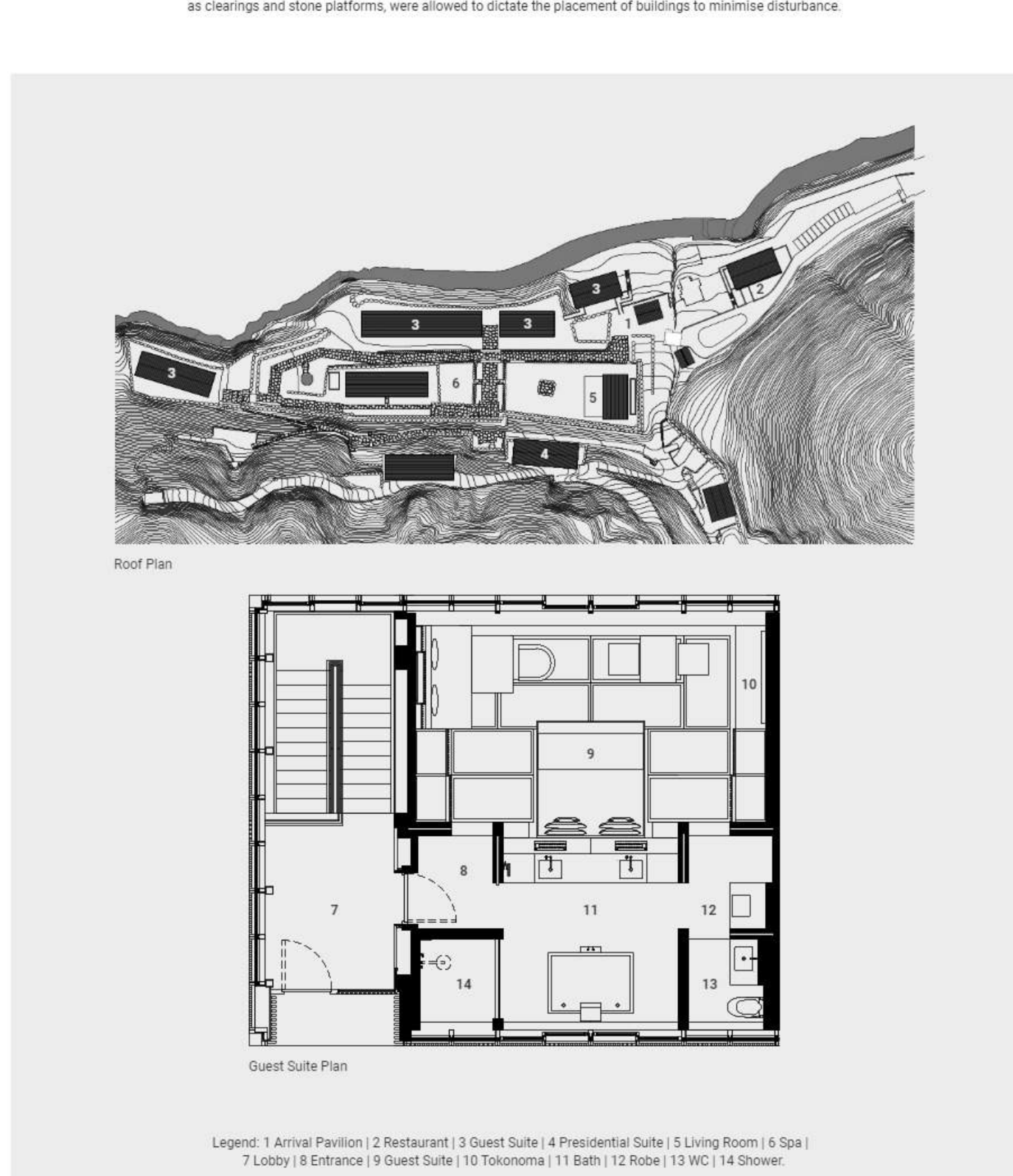
KHA's wealth of experience with the hotel typology enables the practice to focus on creating unique and exciting places that emerge from their locational and cultural context. The result is emotive works of architecture as seen in Aman Kyoto, which can meaningfully connect with visitors through the ages.

kerryhillarchitects.com
toyosekkei.co.jp



An Atmosphere And A Feeling

The prevalence of ambiguous boundaries gives Aman Kyoto its richness and timelessness. Guest rooms were designed to allow cross ventilation and visual connection with the landscape through careful planning and detailing. Traditional low Japanese seating is juxtaposed with an adjacent Western table and chair setting. Every element of the architecture, from the washi lantern light fixtures to the furniture, has been designed and composed by Kerry Hill Architects to feel Japanese. This open-ended dialogue aligns with the journey of discovery intended for the guests.



Legend: 1 Arrival Pavilion | 2 Restaurant | 3 Guest Suite | 4 Presidential Suite | 5 Living Room | 6 Spa | 7 Lobby | 8 Entrance | 9 Guest Suite | 10 Tokonoma | 11 Bath | 12 Robe | 13 WC | 14 Shower.



The Living Room pavilion forms the social hub of Aman Kyoto. A sunken fire pit in a large timber dining terrace addresses the main garden.