

DOMUS

A new museum for Albert Khan designed by Kengo Kuma

The Japanese architect's firm together with Michel Desvigne designs a poetic place where engawa, the space that connects interiors to the garden, plays an important role.



- Author [Cecilia Fabiani](#)
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- Architect Kengo Kuma & Associates
- Program Museum
- Completion 2022
- Landscape Designer Michel Desvigne

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Although the competition took place eight years ago, the winning entry by the Parisian studio Kengo Kuma & Associates – with the consultancy of Michel Desvigne for the landscaping – came to conclusion just a few months ago, due to the pandemic. The challenge was stimulating: a new museum for the Albert Kahn (1860-1940) collection of photographs and film. This meant constructing one new building, restoring the original museum, and renewing eight outbuildings standing on 4.2 hectares of grounds.

Kuma designed an unexpected gem screened from the road by strips of aluminium that fold back diagonally to form an entrance, an invitation to leave the city behind and immerse oneself in the expanded space of Kahn's realm. His collection is based on the utopian desire to document the culture of countries around the world in order to promote comprehension between peoples and foster peace. Pictures and films were collected by Kahn and photographers who travelled the planet for this purpose for years to recount the differences between Japanese and English gardens, for instance, which he replicated on his land.



Kengo Kuma & Associates, Albert Kahn Musée et Jardins, Paris, 2022. Photo Think utopia

Immersed in the greenery is a new 2,600-square-metre building for two galleries, one for a permanent exhibition and one for temporary shows. The upper floor offers a yet-unfinished restaurant with a mirror wall that reflects the garden from both sides, and a documentation room. To the rear, the space opens onto a corridor that is at once closed and not closed, like a screen through which to admire the surroundings. Irregularly positioned horizontal strips of wood and aluminium create a play of light and shadow through which nature filters. Floors and ceilings are wood in the galleries, and wood and bamboo in the old museum, which was gutted to become an auditorium.



Kengo Kuma & Associates, Albert Kahn Musée et Jardins, Paris, 2022. Photo Michel Denance

Reflections, quivering surfaces and uneven patterns accompany the visitor through the rooms, through the renovated space of the original building, through the park with its different gardens, and among the restored outbuildings. The large greenhouse for exhibitions and recreation has received side terraces. A few outbuildings have been repurposed as toilets, a tool shed and a workers' station. It takes two or three hours to stroll around the complex in its entirety like a *flâneur*. Everything here feels softened, even time. In addition to the many photographs, contemplation of the gardens and architecture comes natural. All converges in a unique utopia devoid of precise bounds. Seen from a distance, the aluminium roof shimmers and reflects the light of the sky.