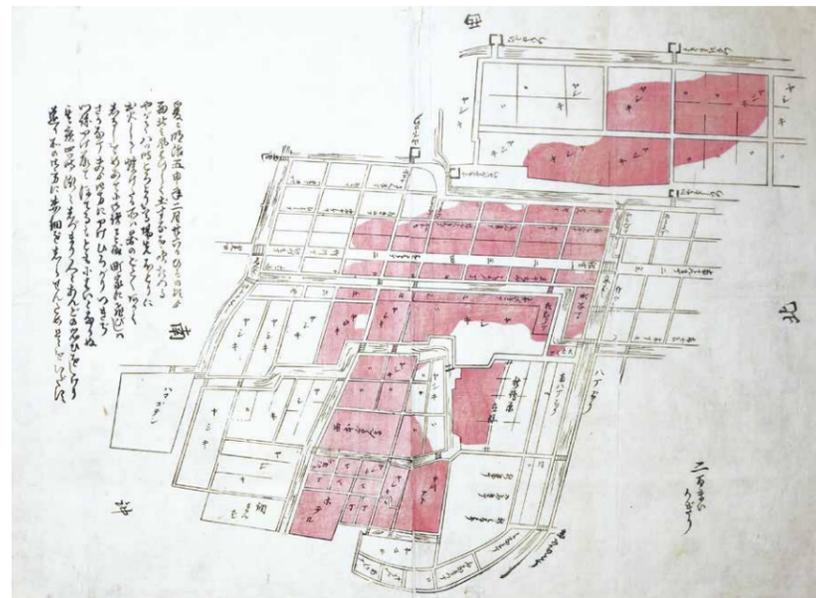


03 Ginza Bricktown

In 1872, a huge fire broke out in the area from today's Otemachi to Ginza Kyobashi, inflicting devastating damage. Shortly after this conflagration, the Meiji government issued a proclamation to make Tokyo a fire-resilient city by establishing a plan to transform Ginza into a brick town, which will serve as a symbol of westernization. With Tokyo prefecture as the project developer, and the Ministry of Finance as the administrative agency, a project was advanced to construct a brick town in the area that was consumed by fire. Construction was completed in 1877. The

Ginza Bricktown plan presented ways to create new spaces, such as construction of roads that can accommodate the passage of horse-driven carriages, installation of gaslights and planting of roadside trees, and regulations on the height of buildings in line with road width. This gave birth to Japan's first western streetscape. At the time of its completion, there were many empty buildings, but it gradually gained popularity as a town symbolizing Japan's westernization, establishing its position as a new commercial district.



Scope of damage by fire
Woodblock print newspaper *Meiji 5-nen 2-gatsu 26-nichi Ginza taika* (Ginza conflagration, February 26, 1872) From the collection of Cultural Projects Office, Sayegusa.
In 1872, a huge fire broke out in the area from the current Otemachi to Ginza Kyobashi, consuming 34 towns and 2,926 houses. Although buildings made of brick were beginning to appear in Tokyo, much of the city remained unchanged with narrow roads and wooden buildings, and large fires were breaking out almost every year.



Road with sidewalk (circa 1877)
From the collection of the New York Public Library.
In Ginza Bricktown, there were three grades of roads, and the height of buildings along the roads was regulated according to the road's grade. With the start of operations of horse-drawn carriages in the built-up area of Tokyo, the separation of roads into streets for vehicles and sidewalks for pedestrians was also planned, and trees were planted between them.



Townscape of Ginza Bricktown *Tokyo Ginza-dori renga ishi zukuri shinzu* (Illustration depicting Tokyo's Ginza-dori Avenue lined with brick and stone buildings) 1888. From the collection of Chuo City Kyobashi Library.
Efforts were made for uniformity in the street design, with buildings along the street having overhanging balconies on the second floor supported by columns, which formed an arcade for pedestrians. At first it was planned to make all of the buildings in the area out of brick, but as brick-making was a new technology that was expensive, only about 40 percent of the buildings were made of brick or stone. The remainder were stucco finished buildings (to enhance fire resistance), clay-walled warehouse-style buildings, and wooden buildings. From the 1880s to around 1920, almost all of the trees lining the streets of Ginza were willows.



Ginza-dori Avenue (circa 1879)

Gas lamps of Ginza and Nihombashi
Tokyo meisho zue: Ginza-dori renga zukuri (Famous Places in Tokyo: Brick buildings along Ginza street). From the collection of the Postal Museum Japan.
Gas lamp installation by the city of Tokyo began at the Tokyo Chamber of Commerce along Ginza-dori Avenue in 1874. Following this, as the gas business was sold to the private sector, this came under the operations of Tokyo Gas (currently Tokyo Gas Co., Ltd.) in 1885.



Ginza-dori Avenue today
From the Meiji era up to the current day, Ginza has thrived as a shopping and entertainment district. On August 2, 1970, Ginza-dori was the first in Japan to hold a "pedestrian paradise," in which streets are temporarily closed for pedestrian-only use. This is currently done every weekend and on holidays, with the streets bustling with visitors.