

# High times in Yokohama

■ By John Wright  
in Tokyo

**S**HOW the average group of Japanese a tall building or some other high vantage point, charge a big fee for a summit view and it's odds-on they'll be scrabbling for a place in the queue to get up it.

The Japanese, it has been said, cannot resist a bird's-eye look at their crowded world — and they don't seem to mind paying for the privilege.

So when Japan's tallest structure, Yokohama's Landmark Tower, was opened to the public some weeks ago, no one was surprised to find there was a 1000 yen (\$14) charge for the elevator ride to the top.

Some lift ride it was, too — 69 floors in 40 seconds at 45km/h. It's the world's fastest elevator, according to Landmark Tower builder Mitsubishi Estate Co. And at the top, an unparalleled if uninspiring view of one of the world's great urban sprawls, lopped only by the Pacific Ocean to the east and capped far beyond the western haze by the distant, pimply cone of Mt Fuji.

The queues for the ride to the top of the 296m Landmark Tower were huge on opening day, and the public interest remains unabated. There are good reasons for that.

There are far better and cheaper views to be had in Japan, and even the world's fastest elevator ride is, after all, just a ride in a box without windows. Worse still, it comes complete with a high-pitched and totally unnecessary running commentary from the obligatory elevator girl.

But the building is something

else, a structure so colossal in size and impressive in design that it's impossible to look at, approach or enter without awe.

Landmark Tower is the centrepiece of an ambitious, long-term project to put the waterfront area in the old port of Yokohama, just south of Tokyo, on the map as an independent business, cultural and recreational city of the future.

Minato Mirai 21, or Future 21st City, is what town planners call the project, which was conceived almost 30 years ago and which is now taking shape as one of Japan's most striking urban revitalisation schemes.

Situated on about 180ha of largely reclaimed land on the shores of Tokyo Bay, Minato Mirai 21 has a long way to go in terms of its total planned development. But already it has two hotels, a convention centre, two museums, an amusement park with a gigantic ferris wheel and landscaped walks and gardens.

The final plan incorporates a city-sized business centre, hospital, exhibition hall, shopping malls and other facilities designed to make Yokohama a model for city life in a future decentralised Japan.

**L**ANDMARK Tower, the most visible structure in an already strikingly built-up landscape, is almost mind-boggling in its dimensions, even to the long-time city-dweller. At ground level, it is intimidating.

Designed by American Hugh Stubbins, the steel and concrete structure was put up in just over three years at a cost of 270 billion yen (\$3.8 billion).

It has 70 floors above ground, four below and a five-storey shopping plaza at its base. The building contains 102,000 tonnes of steel and other metals and 310,000 tonnes of concrete.

Its exterior design contains elements of the traditional Japanese castle and early torii gate styles, which give the building a distinctly Eastern appearance.

Built around a central core which houses elevator and service wells, its main elements are 162,000sq m of office space on 48 floors, a 600-room hotel and 72,600sq m of retail space. Facilities include a 360-degree view observation deck, a fitness centre and pool, executive suites, restaurants and banqueting halls, a business support floor and parking for 1400 cars.

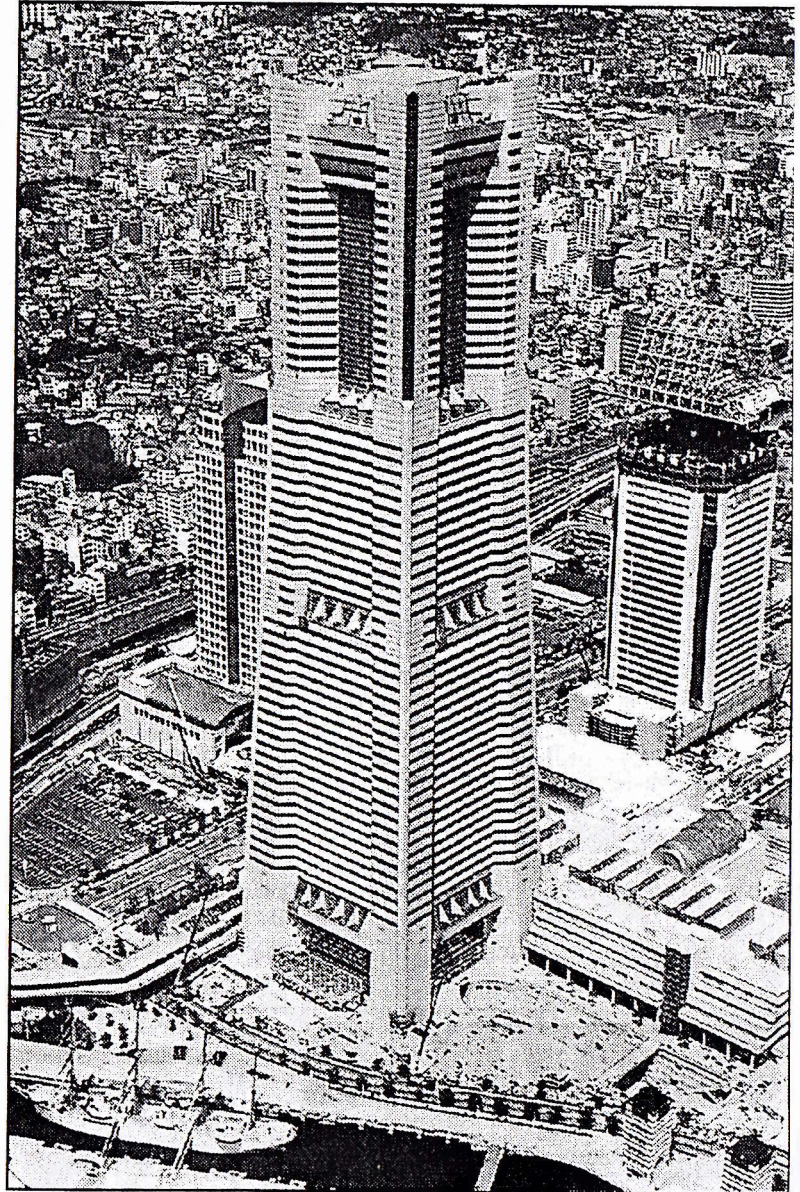
In a region susceptible to strong earthquakes — Yokohama was almost completely destroyed in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 — safety was the main consideration. The structure's safety features were designed, as one local newspaper put it, to make sure it remains a centrepiece of Minato Mirai 21.

Technology developed by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd uses sensor-activated pendulums linked to tuned active dampers which absorb lateral movement and thus counteract building sway caused by high winds — the biggest problem according to the builders.

The anti-earthquake elements include a tubular steel framework which provides greater strength and flexibility than standard angle-steel materials. Up to the 42nd floor, the steel is 1.33 times stronger than standard skyscraper construction material.

Resistance to earthquakes, as for strong winds, is handled by a computer counterbalance system which controls the tower's movement. The building design also provides greater stability than in many standard high-rise buildings.

Other safety features include a design which inhibits the possible spread of fire in any accident.



Landmark: Japan's tallest building dominates the old port