

Japanese Gardens

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Source:

**An excerpt from the original text
Sense of Place in the Japanese and Persian Gardens, Faryar Javaherian, May 2004
Photos courtesy of Memar Magazine 2004*

Throughout history, gardening and especially the design of gardens have been the most wonderful of all human activities. It could be said that aesthetics has guided human beings toward helping them embrace nature. The Japanese culture and history admired nature and tried to recreate it in their gardens. The beliefs of Zen Buddhism and Shintoism had a great impact on the relation of Japanese mentality and the natural landscape, which is evident in the design of their gardens. The Japanese Garden has been one of the strongest garden design sources, numerous other gardens have in some way been derived from it. The Chinese, British, and American natural gardens follow the Japanese pattern. These gardens express a specific outlook towards nature and the world, creating a balance in the sentiments that cause joy in mankind.

For the Japanese, the mountains are the most sacred element of nature and in their garden design it is the most important element, which is constantly seen throughout the seasons. The first Japanese stone garden was created in the mountainous area of Yamato (Nara) in 600 A.D. However, in 794 this garden capital was moved to Kyoto because of its many rivers and poetic landscape.

Japanese gardens have a unique beauty that comes from the combination of two essential aspects; first are the natural elements of plant, sand, water and stone, and second is the natural landscape of Japan that changes completely in every season. Sakuteiki is the historic book of rules of Japanese garden design. It states how much land, water, and architecture should be used in a garden, however the designer can change the ratio of elements based on personal ideas. The Japanese garden is a completely mental space and



Bosen Teahouse, Kohoan Garden, Kyoto



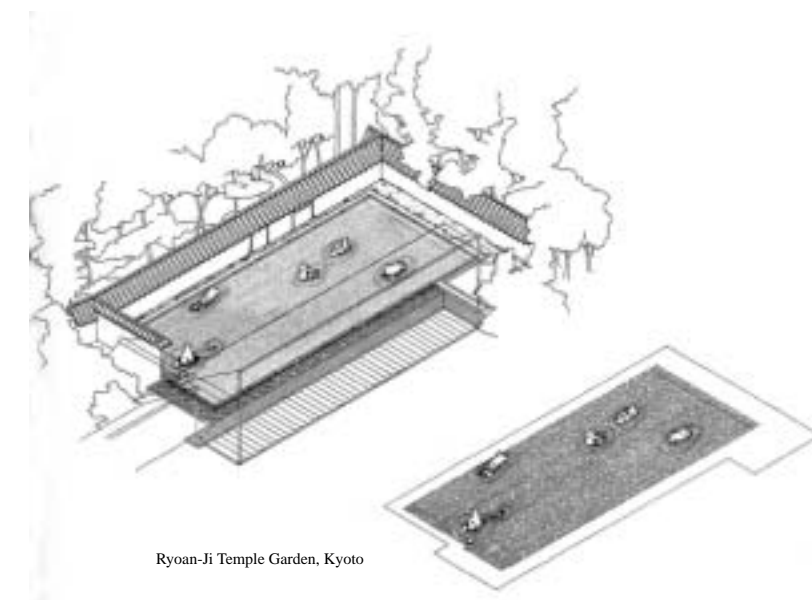
Private garden in Tokyo with Syo style, Edo Era Garden with stone lantern, well and gata stones, Moon-viewing platform in Katsura Palace, Kyoto

affects the concentration of the viewer, along with being the source of inspiration to many poets and artists. The golden age of Japanese garden design was called Munomechi and happened from 1333 A.D. to 1568 A.D.

There are 16 design elements in the Japanese Garden, they can be used interchangeably and according to the design concept. The first and most important element is the large stone hill that is created at the center of the garden. Around it are placed stone hills of various sizes, sandy shores, and a central water pond known as the heart of the garden. In the architecture of these gardens, folding curtains made of paper are used as doors that separate the interior from the exterior, creating an intimate link between the two. The interior space is designed according to the exterior garden, so that the best view is seen while being seated inside. This is done to represent the close relationship between humans and nature. For example, in the Katsura Palace the doors are half the height of a human and one is forced to bend over while entering.

In Japanese gardens, the pathways are completely organic. They are so delicate and twisted that walking may become a form of art in itself. Colors are kept to a minimum and depend on the season, for example in spring, the cherry trees fill the garden with white blossoms. Other distinct elements of a Japanese garden are: a stone lantern, special trees, fishing hut, wooden pathways, stone bridges, a washing basin used for tea ceremonies, and a platform for observing the moon. The special tea drinking ceremony that happens in Japanese Gardens is called Sadu and the goal of this event is to reach a state of spiritual relaxation. To reach the teahouse, one must take the special path called Roji (or Chaniwa). The teahouses were created for the kings and princes to meditate and relax when returning home from war.

The Japanese Garden is the only garden that provides the human with a closer connection to God through the act of meditation and spiritual prayer.



Ryoan-Ji Temple Garden, Kyoto



Ryoan-Ji Temple Garden in Kyoto, entrance to Edo Era Garden in Kyoto, greenery in Hotoji Temple Garden in Kyoto