

Formal to Natural Garden Design

Continuing Education

2022



SEATTLE JAPANESE GARDEN

This Page Intentionally Left Blank

FROM FORMAL TO NATURAL: DESIGN STYLES IN THE SEATTLE JAPANESE GARDEN

Kiyoshi Inoshita, creator of the overall “design concept” for the Seattle Japanese Garden, set out his vision statement for its landscaping in 1959:

I designed this garden based on Japanese nature and culture influenced by regional folk arts. As a teahouse already exists at the center and a clubhouse is planned... my purpose is to transform the surrounding nature as a distinctive garden meant to be enjoyed while strolling, to present to Americans an experience of Japanese aesthetics.

The stroll along the Garden’s central pond would pass through a diversity of scenes, connected by the water flowing through them.

Using Inoshita’s design concept, Juki Iida created its “actualized design”, the sculpting of the land and the installation of plants and hardscape. After his initial site visit in 1959, Iida returned with Nobumasa Kitamura in March 1960 to oversee its construction: Kitamura working in the Garden’s northern and middle areas, and Iida focusing on its southwestern mountain and teahouse areas.

In this class, we will consider the design styles of several Garden areas: three styles that are traditional in Japan—*shin*, *sō* and *gyō* — and a new style associated with Iida — *zōkibayashi*.

Shin—

When a person in the process of creation has an exact idea of what they want to make—precisely what the size, shape, color, texture, finish, and so on shall be—and bring[s] all their physical and sensory skills to bear to accomplish that, the object created is in the shin mode... Shin is about a person willing something to be as they had imagined it would be... about acquitting complete control over the creative process... about human mastery over the world.

Sō—

When, however, a person in the process of creation understands that they are offering only a partial guiding hand and that the preexisting nature of the materials they are using and the natural proclivities of the creative process also play a large role in forming the object to be, that thing will end up in the sō mode... Sō is about sharing that creation with other elements of the natural world... about relinquishing that control... about seeing humans as an integral but small part of the world.

Gyō—

The gyō aesthetic... is a medium between its more rigorous siblings, or a combination of both of them.

Keane document, 2021

Zōkibayashi—*Woodlands, preserved or created by the designer.*

Iida document, 1973

As we walk through these Garden areas (south, east, north, and southwest), consider the following questions:

- How do you feel being in this area?
- Do the plants in this area look pruned & highly controlled, or are they left to their natural growth forms?
- What plants are characteristic of the area?
- Do hardscape elements complement or contrast with the appearance of the plants?
- Which of the styles (*shin*, *gyō*, *sō* and *zōkibayashi*) are present this area? Does one style predominate?
- Does the area conform to the designers' intentions, or has it changed considerably over time?

South End Area of the Seattle Japanese Garden

Shin, Gyō, and Sō

Viewing the garden through the concept of formal, semi-formal, and informal, it is interesting to keep in mind Juki Iida's vision of a *Zōki* Garden, and how the concepts are realized today.

We will explore the south area and our points of interest will be:

Entry and Gatehouse Village - Area A

The TCR room and attached courtyard - Area B

The Northeast portion - Area B

The dry riverbed, rocks, and plants - Area C



The south entry, or "Gatehouse Village"

Please consider the following:

- Do the structures complement or compete with the plantings?
- Are the hardscapes in scale with the surroundings?
- Can the smooth edges of the 'shedding worries' stone be formal?
- Do the stone elements appear to be formal, semi-formal, or informal?



Tateuchi Conference Room and attached courtyard



Dry riverbed, rocks and plants

Consider the following:

- Do the stone elements appear to be formal, semi-formal, or informal?
- How are the similar plants- i.e. *Acer palmatum* pruned to look differently? Is one more formal than the other?
- Observe the ground covers, are they *Shin*, *Gyō*, or *Sō*?
- There is also a *Teppo-Gaki* Bamboo Fence by the TCR room-is it formal? If this fencing were made out of live bamboo would that change your opinion?
- Is the dry riverbed, *kare sansui*, informal? If it were running water, how would you define it?

Yamasaki was responsible for setting the grouping of stones seen from the entrance. This powerful arrangement of three rocks was not typical of other gardens created by Iida.

Koichi Kobayashi, landscape designer, named this composition “The Welcome Rock”



Welcome Rock, Laceleaf Maple, Pine

The 11th Century *Sakuteiki*, called the making of a garden “the art of setting stones,” *ishi wo taten koto*. Mr. Yamasaki spent a great deal of time and thought in setting each and every stone in this garden. Stones have significance in the garden, and are placed in odd numbers. A series of three stones may represent the Buddha trinity. The stones’ size needs to be to scale and look natural.

Consider the following: Imagine the garden with a Pennsylvania Bluestone rock, or a red rock from Arizona- how would that look?

THE EAST AREA OF THE JAPANESE GARDEN

THE ORIGINAL ENTRY GATE

INTERSECTION OF AREAS H, I, K, L

...an outer gate is functional. When the doors are closed, no one can enter. The outer gate also expresses through its design the social standing and attitudes of the people within. but there is something else...when the doors are opened the gate acts as a lens, capturing a rectangular image of the garden that seems to hang within the gate like a painting in its frame...

-Marc Keane

... Japanese gardens usually have a formal entry...as was planned by the East gate. our garden's south entry is not formal....

-Jim Thomas, head Gardener, 1989-2005 Guide Training Tour

As we stand by the entry of the original gate, and view the garden, imagine this is where you first entered the garden, as originally planned. Consider the following questions:



East Gate

- How would entering the garden here be different from the south entry experience?
- How do you feel being in this area?
- Do you sense a natural presence, and/or the “hand of man?”

Design Elements:

Plants: Camellia, Japanese maple, Boxwood, Heavenly Bamboo

Hardscapes: Wooden roofed gate with closed and locked doors, with “sleeve or panel fences”



View from the East Gate

Geometric entry path with closely spaced natural pebbles in concrete

Upright water basin on rock – *Chouzubachi*

Three graveled path choices

Bamboo fencing style along the path - *Yotsume-gaki*

Tsuga Ballard Lantern

Bench with stones at its feet

Design Elements:

Plants: Upright Shore Pines, deciduous and evergreen shrubs, *tanomono* pruning, naturalistic, low-growing ground cover.

Natural features: Pond, sky, reflection, expansive view of the garden

ALONG THE EAST PATH *sō* to *shin*?

Continuing north from the *kare sansui* and streams, (*sō*),

- Does the visitor enter a more controlled area of the garden?

Design Elements:

Plants: “Wind-swept” pines (*gyō?*), *okarikomi* pruning style of *Ilex crenata* below the willow, mimicking the azaleas above the rock wall. (*shin*?)

Hardscapes: *Suham*, *Mt*, *Sumeru* stone, East gate, *Dōbashi* (rustic earthen bridge)

After the willow, the visitor enters a new area of the garden...the fishing village....

North End Areas of the Seattle Japanese Garden

Visualize the famous landscapes of our country and come to understand their most interesting points. Re-create the essence of those scenes in the garden, but do so interpretatively, not strictly. Sakuteiki, 2001.

I designed this garden based on Japanese nature and culture influenced by regional folk arts’
‘At the north side of the upper lake there is an implied village and clubhouse with a prominent stone wall’.
‘From the port of this village site, the lake water streams out of the garden to the distant ocean.

Inoshita document 1959

As we walk toward **the North End, Areas N&P**, consider the following:

- Do these views tell Inoshita’s story?
- What features follow a Shin or formal design?
- How are the plants pruned?
- This is an “implied village” where are the houses?
- What does the rock wall represent?
- Should there be ferns growing in the wall?



Distance view from ZigZag Bridge



Rock Wall with Azaleas

Design Elements:

Plants: Azaleas, grass, ferns, pine trees, Japanese maples

Hardscape: cut stones, stacked rocks, stepping stones, granite steps, vertical lantern, and right angle turns in the path.



Wide View of the North End

As we look up and around Area O&S, consider the following:

- Does this area have Shin or Sō or Gyō plantings?
- Are the plants pruned or unpruned on the hillside?
- If you wanted to make this area more formal, how would you do it?
- Will the new plan to build a pavilion here change the formality or informality of the area?

Design Elements:

Plants: tall Korean, Pines, spruce tree, evergreen oak, willow

Hardscape: Kobe Lantern, pathway to lantern



Wisteria, Dock, Lantern

As we look toward the Fishing Village Area K, consider the following:

- Is it evident that it is a fishing village?
- Are there particular plants that are follow the Shin design?
- Does the Wisteria vine look formal? Why?
- Do you see the stream exiting to the ocean?



Yamasaki Black Pine

As we look at the pine and its surrounding:

- Does the scene feel or look formal or informal?
- How does it relate to the Fishing Village ?

From the Sakuteiki *The trees need not to be too tall, but they should be old, splendid in form, and laden with deep green needles*

THE SOUTHWEST AREAS: “A PLACE OF TRANQUIL BEAUTY”

Kiyoshi Inoshita described the overall “design concept” for the Seattle Japanese Garden in a 1959 document titled *An Explanation of the Design of the Japanese Garden in the Washington Arboretum*. In it, he called for a special area of the Garden comprised of three distinct yet meaningfully interconnected areas. His vision statement included this lyrical description of the three areas:

[The Southwest side of the garden should be] a mountainous region where conifers grow thick as in a deep forest. From within the forest, an existing stream and prospective short stream flow out. Where the two streams meet, the teahouse stands. Make this scenic spot a place of yusui kanga or tranquil beauty.

THE MOUNTAIN & WATERFALL (viewed from the east)

Areas Y & X

As we view this mountain area from the east and below, consider the following questions:

- How do you feel being in this area?
- Do the plants in this area look pruned & highly controlled, or are they left to their natural growth forms?
- What plants are characteristic of the area?
- Do hardscape elements compliment or contrast with the appearance of the plants?
- Which of the styles (*shin*, *gyō*, *sō* and *zōkibayashi*) are present this area? Does one style predominate?
- Does the area conform to the designers’ intentions, or has it changed considerably over time?



Area Y—the base of the mountain, viewed from the east and below: an expanse of moss

With time, the bare ground becomes a velvet carpet.

Marc Peter Keane document, 2017. He was not involved in designing the SJG.

Design Elements:

Plants: Japanese maples, moss, ferns, wheel tree, rhododendrons, deciduous & evergreen azaleas, salal, trunks of tall conifers, and a rarity in the garden: trillium—why?

Hardscape: Gravel path with stone risers, stones along the stream, low rope fence, partially hidden “mountain pagoda.”

Consider the following:

- How does open space function as an introduction to the wooded area?
- As we leave the more open moss meadow and move uphill, we enter the *zōkibayashi*, and our mood begins to shift. What materials, light and sounds cause that?

Area Y—The Waterfall

Originating in the mountains, a stream becomes a waterfall...then a brook, rinsing the feet of a teahouse.

(Inoshita document, 1959)

In setting the great stone for the waterfall, I wanted it to be as natural as possible, not according to formal garden-making principles.

[Thirteen years after planting] the area around the waterfall was densely overgrown. . . . We started to prune between the waterfall and the teahouse. (Iida document, 1974)

It is much more difficult to preserve a Japanese garden than to build one.

(Iida document, 1971)



Design Elements:

Plants: Ferns, moss, rhododendrons, azaleas, huckleberry, pieris, salal, tall conifers, false lily of the valley.

Hardscape: Partly hidden “mountain pagoda,” waterfall, large stepping stones in water.

Consider the following: How does crossing through the water, possibly touching it, differ from crossing a bridge?

THE SOUTHWEST AREAS: “A PLACE OF TRANQUIL BEAUTY”

THE TEAHOUSE & ROJI

Area X

Originating in the mountains, a stream becomes a waterfall...then a brook, rinsing the feet of a teahouse.

Inoshita document, 1959

In the tea garden we planted mainly Japanese cedar and maple trees, kichijisō/Gautheria shallon and moss ground covers. One can hear the gentle sound of the waterfall from the teahouse.... We fenced the teahouse garden with [boxwood and] mixed low shrubs.

Iida document, 1974

As we walk by the *roji*, viewing it from the south and the west, consider the following questions:

- How do you feel being in this area?
- Do the plants in this area look pruned & highly controlled, or are they left to their natural growth forms?
- What plants are characteristic of the area?
- Do hardscape elements compliment or contrast with the appearance of the plants?
- Which of the styles (*shin*, *gyō*, *sō* and *zōkibayashi*) are present this area? Does one style predominate?
- Do any plants seem to contradict the idea that the teahouse is nestled in the mountains? Why would Iida have planted them?
- Does the area conform to the designers' intentions, or has it changed over time?



The Teahouse and the inner *roji*, viewed from the south

Design Elements:

Plants: Japanese maples, moss, ferns, hinoki cypress, heavenly bamboo, pieris, boxwood hedge, salal (*Gautheria shallon*).

Hardscape: Teahouse, rustic bamboo fence & gate, concrete patio edged with small, rounded rocks, stepping stones, water basin, “teahouse lantern.”

Consider the following:

- Are you surprised at the boxwood hedge? Why do you suppose it was planted? How does that affect the design’s style?
- What textures do you notice in the teahouse garden? How do they affect its style?

The outer *roji*, viewed from the west



Design Elements:

Plants: Rounded moss-covered earth, Japanese maples, Japanese cedars, hinoki cypress, rhododendrons, azaleas, mixed hedge, deciduous “overstory” of trees outside the Garden.

Hardscape: *Machai*, teahouse, stepping stone path, concrete path, rustic bamboo fence & gate, “outer tea garden lantern.” The structure of the teahouse & its clipped boxwood enclosure contrast with the natural plantings. As the Japanese tea ceremony evolved from the original, very formal, Chinese style, so also Japanese teahouses evolved, favoring rusticity by using mud walls & unfinished wood framing. So, we see our teahouse’s lightly finished post & lintel construction of Japanese cedar & western red cedar framing the plaster wall. Still, we can contrast the informality of these semi-finished posts with the truly natural bark of the garden’s live trees.

Consider the following:

- To maintain a “natural-looking” area for 60 years may require changes. Which plants might have needed replacing to keep the structure/plant relationship harmonious?
- What is the quality of light in this area? Do the Japanese cedars and hinoki cypress serve as a frame or block our views past the roji?

THE SOUTHWEST AREAS: “A PLACE OF TRANQUIL BEAUTY”

[The Southwest side of the garden should be] a mountainous region where conifers grow thick as in a deep forest. From within the forest, an existing stream and prospective short stream flow out. Where the two streams meet, the teahouse stands. Make this scenic spot a place of yusui kanga or tranquil beauty.

Inoshita document, 1959

THE FOREST (the mountain, viewed along the service road) Areas ZZE, ZZW & Z

The mountainous area at the south[west] end suggests mountain peaks where hills rise and fall... The mountain is a deep forest where evergreen firs, cypress [hinoki/Chamaecyparis obtusa], pines, hemlock, etcetera, grow among the existing trees.

Inoshita document, 1959

As we walk through this area of Forest, consider the following questions:

- How do you feel being in this area?
- Do the plants in this area look pruned & highly controlled, or are they left to their natural growth forms?
- What plants are characteristic of the area?
- Do hardscape elements compliment or contrast with the appearance of the plants?
- Which of the styles (*shin*, *gyō*, *sō* and *zōkibayashi*) are present this area? Does one style predominate?
- Does the area conform to the designers' intentions, or has it changed considerably over time?



Area ZZE: The Forest: a towering overstory of tall conifer trunks, viewed from the west

When realizing the plan, honor the existing land definitions and plans as much as possible. To heap up the soils on the mountain area, be careful not to harm existing trees. If not possible, transplant trees.

Inoshita document, 1959

There were many varieties of evergreen conifers and deciduous trees [available to buy from nurseries] that I felt would work suitably, but they were all very well-behaved and none were taller than 3 meters [9 feet].

Iida document, 1980

Design Elements:

Plants: Rounded, moss-covered earth and tall conifers with their lower branches removed, shorter/younger conifers, ferns, sacred cleyera (*sakaki*).

Hardscape: Very wide gravel path/road, low bamboo fence, glimpses of the “mountain pagoda.” How does the surface we’re standing on fit the scene?

Consider the following:

- Do the teahouse & *roji* feel close or far away? Is the forest still somewhat open here?
- What elements are different from the waterfall path going up the mountain and around the teahouse—sounds, light, temperature?



Area Z—The Forest: the stream near its origin, viewed from the southwest

Design Elements:

- **Plants:** Ferns, moss, Japanese maples with sinuous trunks, huckleberry, rhododendrons, tall conifers.
- **Hardscape:** Mossy stones along the stream.

Question: As we descend southward, approaching the sharp bend in the path, how does the landscape change?