About The Japanese Garden at the University of Washington

By Juki Iida

translation by Shizue Prochaska and Julie E. Coryell

Juki Iida was an internationally known Japanese landscape architect. Invited by the Tokyo Metropolitan District Parks Department to work with K. Inoshita, he contributed to the design and supervised all phases of the construction of the Japanese Garden, 1959—00. He wrote this article for NIWA, a Japanese gardening magazine, in 1974.
Shizue Prochaska and Julie E. Coryell are both garden guides and dedicated garden volunteers. They work diligently to preserve and share the history of the Seattle Japanese Garden.

Gai Yō, Introduction

This garden was constructed thirteen years ago between 1959 and 1960. I learned that the University of Washington made the initial request to build a garden. Consul General Yoshiharu Takeno in Seattle contacted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which in turn, conveyed the request to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government.

When I was asked to assist in this project, two points struck me. First, how could rocks, plants, and other materials for a large-scale Japanese garden be obtained outside of Japan? Second, how could people of European descent and second-generation gardeners [of Japanese descent] build such a garden? Never having experienced such a project and thinking it could be a great opportunity to learn, I was happy to undertake the work.

Sekkei, Planning

With the leadership of [master landscape designer *Sensei*] Kiyoshi Inoshita, the design team included [Tokyo Metropolitan Park Department Director] Tatsuo Moriwaki, [Tokyo Metropolitan Park Department Engineer] Nobumasa Kitamura, Messrs. [*Shoshi*] Iwao Ishikawa, Naotomo Ueno, Chikara Itō, and myself. The year before [in 1958] discussion of building a Japanese garden in Seattle started around the time Park Director Moriwaki visited the United States and viewed the site personally. Using his firsthand report and photographs and other materials sent to us from Seattle, we formed the basic plan.

Genchi Chōsa, Site Research

In the autumn of 1959, I traveled to America to check the initial plan for the proposed garden site and to explore the availability of rocks, trees, shrubs, and other materials. The day after my arrival, I attended a meeting of the Arboretum Foundation members with the Acting Consul General and

[Cultural Affairs liaison James] Fukuda. There I explained the plan in detail. Everyone present appeared to be satisfied with the design. I was told that the garden was planned to be built for the centennial celebration of the Japan- America treaty [1858] but was delayed for various reasons. The Arboretum Foundation members left matters in my hands to build an authentic Japanese garden "not to be found" outside Japan.

Zōen Shikichi , Garden Site

The garden site covers about 6,000 plus *tsubo* [actually three and a half acres], stretching north to south fronting a public road to the east. It faces slopes of *zōkibayashi,* woodlands, to the northwest and south. There is a *numasawachi,* marsh, at the bottom of the slopes. I found the site ideal for building a Japanese garden and not likely to require extensive revision of the design. There is already a teahouse donated by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government on the south side of a small hill.

Zōen Gyōsha, Garden Workers

I was told that the local custom is for the designer and supervisor to recommend contractors. Because I had never been here before, and did not know any local contractors, their reputation or skill, I declined to do so. However, the Arboretum Foundation members insisted, so with the guidance of member Mr. [Kenneth] Sorrells and Mr. Fukuda from the Consulate General, we viewed gardens made by local contractors. For two days we toured Seattle gardens. The several places we visited were mostly large residences with gardens, which, beside being in the American-style, were reminiscent of Italian gardens with canals, or old French ones, with fountains surrounded by colored gravel, and so-called Japanese gardens. I had a hard time choosing, but finally I recommended Mr. William Yorozu as the prime contractor responsible for planting, Mr. Richard Yamasaki for stone setting, and Mr. Kei Ishimitsu for structures, including a garden gate, *azumaya,* shelter, and other buildings. [A clubhouse or pavilion was planned for the crowning view of the entire garden at the north end, but not built.]

The following day, I received a telephone call from the Arboretum Foundation informing me that the contracts with each contractor were signed. We all met at the Consulate General's office where I explained the plans, and then visited the site. The next day we started staking the layout of the hill, *ike,* pond, and height of the *taki,* waterfall.

Teiseki to Jyumoku, Stones and Plants

As for the gardens we saw, I found most were colorful and pretty, suitable for American but not Japanese garden design. William [Yorozu] took me around hunting for rocks but we could not find what I was looking for. On the evening of the third day as we were returning home along the

Snoqualmie River, I heard the sound of dynamite. I asked, "What's that?" Told they were making gravel, I climbed a mountain to see. It was a wonderful granite mountain. The granite resembled the [prized] patterned rocks of Kamiōshima, on Mount Tsukuba and looked well suited for a large garden. Located about 50 miles from Seattle, named Bandera and privately owned, the mountain had never been quarried for garden rocks. So it was simple to purchase 800 tons.

The next item of business was trees and shrubs for the garden. I had expected some difficulties but after we surveyed local nurseries we found there were plenty of evergreen conifers and deciduous trees such as maples. But the specific Japanese varieties of broadleaf evergreens such as *mochi no ki,* (holly, *Ilex integra*); *shii,* (Tanbark Oak, *Pasania* or *Lithocarpus edulis*); and *mokkoku,* (*Ternstroemia gymnanthera*) were scarce and where I did find them they were not thriving. Assuming there was a lack of soil compatibility I decided not to use them. As the rhododendron is the Washington State flower, and there are many varieties, I thought that they were very useful as long as I avoided gaudy ones. The nurseries stocked only small plants under seven inches, which made planting them harmoniously with the large-scale rocks difficult. Most of the trees were upright, requiring deep consideration in how to plant them appropriately. There were abundant choices for ground covers.

Now, for an unrelated subject, I had been asked to make a preliminary investigation for a teahouse and garden to be built within the Japanese Embassy, so I flew to Washington, D. C., for about seven days and finished it. By my return to Seattle, the stones for the garden had been paid for, so three of us went out to Bandera and marked the stones for shipment. I left instructions for the crew to transport most of the rocks and place them as planned and to finish as much of the work on the pond and grassy knoll as they could before my return the following spring.

Sakutei Honkōji, Garden Building

Back in Japan, we designers made some changes to the plan. On March 7, 1960, accompanied by Mr. Nobumasa Kitamura I returned to Seattle bearing 27 sheets of revised plans. With seventy percent of the grading and rough work complete, and most of the rocks already brought in, we were ready to place them. We divided the supervision. Mr. Kitamura worked around the *ike no shūhen*, shoreline, *nakajima,* middle island, and *suhama,* cobble beach, while I concentrated on the *takiguchi,* waterfall top, the *keiryū,* stream, and *yodomi,* pool feeding into the pond.

By sharing duties this way, with the combination of good contractors and machine power the rockwork went much faster than expected. We placed the 35-ton crane with a 60-foot long arm at the base of the hill and the drivers efficiently placed rocks of five to seven tons. The workers responded to minute requests. We were fortunate to have trucks, a dump truck, backhoe, tractor, bulldozer, and small crane on hand whenever needed. However, it was a nuisance using machinery to do even the smallest jobs that two or three men would be able to do manually.

Shoku Sai, Planting

As I mentioned before, all the plants were the size of starts and difficult to harmonize with the rocks. Sometimes we deliberately slanted the young straight trees. We pruned most of the lower branches of some trees located in the path of view lines. Of course, I had to admit that our work looked pretty strange, however, it was done with the future in mind. Fortunately we obtained spruce and yew trees seven-to-eight- feet high so we could plant them from the base of the waterfall up the hill around the *jūsansō-tō,* thirteen- story pagoda. [Although the Arboretum Foundation records the installation of a *jūissō-tō*, an eleven-story tower in the Korean-style, Iida uses the term *jūsansō-tō*. The variably odd-numbered tiered tower of East Asia derives from the Buddhist stupa, originally a burial mound. It is possible two tiers are missing.] We planted the shorter four-to-five-foot tall, red, black, shore, and white pines around the shoreline and on the middle island. I reminded people they would reach the desired height and shape in about ten years.

Shuyō Kyokubu, Main Features

To the south I raised the existing small hill ten feet and installed the waterfall ten feet below the new crest of the hill. In setting the great stone for the waterfall I wanted it to be as natural as possible, not according to formal garden-making principles. Making a *yokomi no taki,* the water drops about six feet to the side. To the left of the waterfall on the hilltop above stands the thirteen-story stone pagoda. From the bottom of the waterfall, the water gently descends as a creek. As it approaches the pond, the rocks are set more softly. The creek merges with spring water issuing from the foot of the hill, pools, and then runs into the pond. The City provides free water in a two-inch pipe, which connects to a small storage tank. From there, it flows over the waterfall. To keep the pond water clean, it flows day and night. I envy the abundance of water in this country. The overall drop is about 35 feet.

The pond covers 850 *tsubo* [about 1.5 acres]. The plan is a stroll garden in "somewhat Momoyama style." Where the creek enters the pond, large *sawa tobi ishi,* marsh stepping-stones connect the shores. A *yukimi- tōrō,* snow-viewing stone lantern stands nearby. A *yatsuhashi,* zigzag bridge and a *dobashi,* earthen bridge link the middle island to the shores. At the tip of the large *suhama,* cobble beach, stands a *misaki-tōrō,* cape lantern. There is a *tsukimidai,* moon-viewing platform, on the opposite shore. A *tachi yukimi-tōrō,* standing snow- viewing lantern, rises from the water between the zigzag bridge and the harbor to the north. We installed relatively few garden rocks around the pond, only to form the middle and detached islands, *hanarejima,* and the cobble beach. Elsewhere, we planted *shibafu,* lawn grass, to the water's edge. In the water we planted water lilies and reeds. Near the moon-viewing platform we made a bed of iris.

To create the atmosphere of a harbor town and boat landing, between the foot of the north slope and the pond we used sandstone pavers measuring two by seven-feet, and to represent a lighthouse, we placed an *omokage-gata tōrō,* face-style or reflection lantern. To protect the foot of the slope we created a seven-foot high rock wall and planted a chain of small shrubs on top of the wall.

Past a wisteria arbor, the pond water, like a river flowing into the big ocean, courses through stepping-stones and out of the garden. [Originally it flowed into Arboretum Creek and Lake Washington. However, in 2002, the City installed a recirculating system.]

To view the garden in one look, one would go to the north end at the top of the rockery above the boat landing and see the detached and middle islands, the small hill to the south, the *sakurayama,* cherry hill [orchard] to the west.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government donated the teahouse, complete with stone lantern and *mizubachi,* stone hand-washing basin. Inside the teahouse is a six-tatami mat-size *hongatte*-style room, where guests sit to the right side of the host. Adjacent to it, we created a large *ryūreiseki*, tea-serving area with seating on benches [under the teahouse roof]. The teahouse includes *hikae no ma,* waiting room for the host, *mizuya,* small kitchen and *nando,* closet. For the donated *koshikake machiai,* outside waiting hut with bench, we only placed stakes for the time being. We used washed rustic gravel from this region to cover the earthen floor of the *ryūreiseki*. We edged the driplines under the eaves with sandstone blocks filled with local black pebbles.

We made it so that guests enter the *rojimon,* gate. [*Roji* means dewy path, a Buddhist term.] Within the tea garden, we laid stepping-stones and cut pavers to guide the guests. We placed the natural stone hand- washing basin, a *kakehi,* bamboo waterspout, and an Oribe stone lantern, all presented by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. We planted in the tea garden mainly Japanese cedar and maple trees, *kichijisō,* (Japanese spurge, *Gaultheria*), and moss ground covers. One can hear the gentle sound of the waterfall from the teahouse. So that the general public cannot enter while the teahouse is in use, we fenced the tea garden with [boxwood and] mixed low shrubs.

For the cherry hill we planted 70 "Akebono" cherry tree starts presented by the *Nihonjinkai* Japanese Association. Five to six-feet tall, 18-feet apart, they do not look like much, but several years from now they will look more complete. Above the cherry hill, there is a plan to build a viewing shelter, *azumaya,* so I staked the site for the time being. Now, as there is talk that the Crown Prince and Princess might visit Seattle soon [they did on October 6, 1960], I selected places where they could plant cherry and birch trees. [As the cherry tree is the symbol of Japan, Crown Prince Akihito would plant a *Prunus serrulata Shirotae,"Mount Fuji*." Crown Princess Michiko would plant a birch, *Betula pendula,* the symbol of her family, the Shōdas.]

Shunkō Shiki, Dedication Ceremony

The construction completed, a grand ceremony was held on June 5, 1960. Fortunately, that morning a wooden plaque with the calligraphy *Wa Kei,* harmony and respect*,* brushed by Tokyo Metropolitan Governor Ryūtarō Azuma, arrived by air. Seattle Mayor Clinton mounted the plaque over the doorway of the teahouse, adding special meaning to the opening ceremony.

From the ceremonial stand at the boat landing, Arboretum Foundation President Edward Dunn congratulated the assembly: "Our long dream of twenty-three years has come true and now appears real before us." Mayor Clinton, Undersecretary of State Peterson, University of Washington President Odegaard, Consul General Takeno, and others, all gave congratulatory speeches. After their testimonials, I thanked the people who cooperated in making the Japanese Garden, and I apologized for repeating so many times: " Far more difficult than making a Japanese garden is maintaining it. I hope for years to come you will carry out my instructions and take loving care of it."

They told me that they sent invitations for the opening day to 2,500 guests. But the day before, the newspapers reported that anyone who wore Japanese kimono could come without invitation. Many came. The large park was *nigiyaka,* festive, and happily crowded.

Sono Go no Nihon Teien, The Japanese Garden Since Then

Since then, thirteen years later, because of the many invitations I received to return, I visited the United States with my wife from July 27, 1973, for fifteen days. We went to the Japanese Garden the day after we arrived. The plants had grown amazingly. The area around the waterfall was densely overgrown. The cherry and birch trees planted by Crown Prince Akihito and Crown Princess Michiko had grown very well. But the pruning of the plants was all wrong. I thought I must correct at least part of the pruning during my stay.

We attended the party that the president of the Arboretum Foundation, the Mayor of Seattle, and about 65 prominent people held for me. The president said that I had told them to wait ten years for the garden to grow and they were looking forward to meeting me here, now more than ten years ago. It was an honor to hear that. I was so glad to see them again. They gave me testimonials, souvenirs, and proposed me as an honorary [Arboretum Foundation] Board member.

I talked with members of the Seattle gardening community about the plight of the garden. Because there was not enough time to contract work, members of the association volunteered every day. We started to prune between the waterfall and the teahouse. The association [Arboretum Foundation] held a meeting for me to show them how to prune. When the Arboretum president and other board members visited the garden they were pleased with the changes. I specified nine

guidelines for managing a Japanese garden and gave Mr. Jimmy Fukuda the list. I requested that he circulate the list at the next meeting.

Now this garden is famous in Seattle. There is even an entrance fee of ten cents. In addition, Japanese gardening is booming in Seattle. The contractor took me around a few residences over two days. People so desire the stones of Bandera Mountain we used to make the Japanese Garden in Washington Park Arboretum that the contractor told me the stones might disappear in the not too distant future!

Iida Landscape Design Office
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[Although the stones from Bandera Mountain have not disappeared, high-elevation rocks have become very expensive. Lower elevation rocks remain popular in gardens around western Washington].

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