

A TOUR OF THE SEATTLE JAPANESE GARDEN

By Peter Putnicki and Jessa Gardner

Peter Putnicki has been the Senior Gardener at the garden since 2015 He has been involved in professional horticulture, for over 20 years; and has participated in dozens of workshops, seminars, and programs revolving around the art and craft of Japanese Gardens.

Jessa Gardner has been the Cultural Programs Manager at the garden since 2016. She studied abroad in rural Japan and minored in Japanese language and culture at Kalamazoo College. Her inspiration for her work is to share the story of the garden and help visitors build a nuanced understanding of Japanese culture.

(0) ENTRY COURTYARD, TATEUCHI COMMUNITY ROOM, AND GATEHOUSE

The entry courtyard welcomes visitors to the Seattle Japanese Garden. The tradition of large, open courtyards dates back to Heian period architecture, where such spaces were constructed and maintained for court functions and ceremony. Our garden features a modern variation on this theme, with mixed paving and a refined design. The plant material is intentionally simple, with repeating textures of grasses, evergreen Japanese holly and one specimen pine to keep the lines and vision of the entry garden clear.

The Gatehouse and the Tateuchi Community Room were designed by local architect Bob Hoshide and reflect the influence of traditional Japanese architecture on modern design styles. The entry gate was designed and built by artist Gerard Tsutakawa, a second-generation sculptor whose work is featured at Kubota Garden and Safeco Field, as well as many other local, national and international installations.

On the outside wall of the Tateuchi Community Room, you will notice a plaque that was created when the Garden was built in 1960. This plaque celebrates the Garden's history with the Arboretum, the University of Washington, and the local Japanese artisans who helped to make this garden the cultural institution it is today. For many years this plaque was neglected, until 2015 when it was found and refurbished. In 2016 the sign was rededicated and hung in the Courtyard where the public can see it.

"The Seattle Japanese Garden takes its inspiration from the expansive landscapes of the Edo period Strolling Gardens. Although smaller in scale, the existing south entrance responds to that larger landscape. It is located in a natural depression that follows the contours of the land as it flows stream-like northward into the Garden.

The design for the gatehouse maintains this location, creating an asymmetrical grouping of walls and small structures that reinforces this flow into the Garden. The procession into the Garden is accentuated by the pathway to the entry courtyard which uses changes in direction to capture and frame views...

The colors and textures of the materials used at the Gatehouse pay careful respect to the materials of the Teahouse. Careful detailing pays homage to this and other traditional structures, while taking into account contemporary construction techniques as well as the important issues of maintenance and security."

The Garden's principal designers, Juki Iida and Kiyoshi Inoshita envisioned and described the Garden through unique but connected geographic regions.

We still use this original description when talking about the Garden today. The Garden was intended to evoke and reflect the beauty of nature and the skill and dedication of the craft of Japanese gardening. It is dynamic, evolving and ever changing, while always keeping true to the original spirit of the Garden...

(1) OPEN WOODLAND/MIXED FOREST

After entering the garden, the initial view is of an open woodland. Conifers and deciduous trees and shrubs of varied heights and textures create a naturalistic scene. Pruning and maintenance of this material emphasizes the natural form. Trunk and branch lines are clearly delineated, and profiles are organic and reflective of plants in the wild.

To the west (left) of the entrance is a small, semi-contained garden. A Todo-Gata lantern stands along the edge of the open space. This Garden features a large, picturesque Japanese Lace-leaf maple and camellia sinensis, the plant that is harvested to make tea. This Lace-leaf maple is very popular with our visitors, and is a good place to pause your tour and wait for any late-comers to catch up.

To the east (right) of the entrance there is the beginning of a dry stream, flanked by stone and low groundcovers of moss, two types of bamboo and dwarf mondo grass. The dry stream is flanked by large boulders, imparting a sense of stability and tying the landscape to the land. “Dry” features are a very famous part of Japanese gardens –there are even entire “dry” or “zen” gardens. However, ours is a more classical garden and this stream is the only dry element. Camellias, maples and azaleas gracefully blend various textures and forms while large boxwood trees in the background tie into the exterior trees in the Arboretum.

While the lanterns in our garden are purely decorative, the placement of lanterns should always reflect their practical use.

A four-legged lantern known as a Yukimi-Doro (Snow-viewing Lantern) is perched on the side of the dry-stream. Lanterns like this are typically placed so that one leg extends into a water feature allowing reflection of the lamp in the water. Here, the placement echoes that idea in the absence of actual water.

As visitors begin to enter the Garden, the path narrows, focusing the attention, while the natural feeling curves encourage the anticipation of something around the next corner. Modeled on the idea of an Edo-era “stroll garden”, the Seattle Japanese Garden is intended as an immersive experience. Historically, this style of garden would belong to a samurai warlord or “daimyo” for their personal enjoyment of nature throughout all four seasons. The visitor is drawn into the composition to explore and experience the space. The traditional “hide and reveal” techniques of Garden design and maintenance hint and entice, with careful arrangement of negative and positive space creating a depth and volume. This is clearly evident as we enter the woodland area of the garden.

Notable plants in the entry area...

The largest specimens of *acer palmatum*, *Dissectum* (Japanese Lace-leaf maple) in the Garden are in the open woodland/mixed forest area, as well as several unusual conifers including *Thujopsis dolobrata* (Hiba cedar). There are also several very large camellias and rhododendrons, a legacy of the Garden’s history within the Arboretum collection. There are two specimen pines, (*p. densiflora*, beyond the dry-stream, and *p. contorta*) framing the dramatic rock display just inside the Garden.

Both the height of the trees and the steep rise and fall of the surrounding land contribute to the upland forest feeling of the northern area of the Garden. The pruning and maintenance of the plant material in this area reflects that image. Natural forms and proportions are encouraged, highlighting the branch structure and variety of textures of the mixed plantings. Some shrubs are encouraged to form low, relaxed mounds to ensure a balance of lower and upper story growth while helping to create an illusion of distance and age.

Proceeding further in to the Garden, the visitor will notice the shift in topography. A hill rises to the west, with an open ground plane and strong upright tree trunks. This area of the forest creates a sense of depth and evokes the serenity of the deep woods. A stream runs down the hill, flanked by stone and ferns, and peeks out between the shade of the large trees. To the east there is a bench with informal stone pavers, widely spaced without uniform margins. In Japanese Garden construction, levels of formality are codified, and may be chosen to reflect the narrative of the site, hence the purposely uneven pavers in this more natural and “wild” area of the garden. In many Gardens, the shift from rustic to semi-formal to formal indicate and mark a passage, from one type of space to another. Next to the bench you will notice an unusual specimen of maple –the acer griseum, aptly named ‘paper-bark maple’.

Further along the path splits, a juncture marked by a large Kasuga-type lantern (also known as Todo-Gata, or tower lanterns.) This lantern is based on the lanterns of the Kasuga shrine in Nara, Japan, which is famous for the tame deer who will eat out of visitor’s hands. Our lantern features depictions of deer and lotus, important images in both Shinto and Buddhism, the two major religions of Japan.

The bridge to the west of the juncture was originally constructed by the WPA during the 1930’s to span an arm of what is now known as Arboretum Creek, part of the natural drainage of Lake Washington. The creek was the original water source for the Japanese Garden pond, and the original garden designers left the bridge intact in honor of its historical legacy.

An odd bit of history for a Japanese Garden –the bridge in the woodland area of the Garden is actually a product of the Works Progress Administration, part of Roosevelt’s famous New Deal in the 1930’s, and it predates the creation of the garden by 30 years!

If you cross the WPA bridge and continue along the lower path to the east, the topography levels out and the stream meanders through an open field strewn with boulders at the base of the increasingly rocky mountain, visible rising up to the waterfall in the background. To the west, large tree trunks hoist a canopy that blends seamlessly into the forest of the Arboretum.

The stream combines with the waterfall below a rippling current of stone, into the headwaters of the Garden pond, now becoming visible. Large rocks and irises meet here, a meeting of the mountain and the shore, reminiscent of an alpine lake. Trees and shrubs on the flat ground are lower and more open in character, showing the first hints of the lake.

A small land table rises between the headwaters of the lake and the path, rising from the shoreline to a small, secluded glen, framed by large rhododendrons, Japanese holly and boxwoods. More boxwood, Japanese holly and other shrubs, trimmed into low mounds as well as hosta and other ground covers soften the open ground plain as the trees become smaller and more intentionally trained. Sitting on the bench in this glen, a view of the Garden begins to emerge.

From the South to the North: the trees, rocks, and falling water of the mountain with the roof of the teahouse becoming visible behind its hedge beyond the low azaleas. Next, through the trees, the lake and the moon viewing platform can be seen, with the meadow rising up in the background. Paving stones beneath the bench reflect transition from open stepping stones to an arrangement with more regular margins and rectilinear shape.

Three large Gingko trees (*gingko biloba*) stand above the glen. These unusual trees are remnants of an ancient, primitive tree type that date back millions of years. They were at one time common worldwide, but by the early twentieth century, their native range was limited to a few scattered pockets in China. They have been cultivated for centuries in East Asia where the nuts are considered a delicacy. They have a spectacular fall color, and the unusual fan-shaped leaves have a long history in Japanese art.

(2) POND/ShORELINE

Past the Gingko trees, the canopy opens up and the south pond emerges into view. The shoreline is lined with large, angular stone, reminiscent of a lake in the deep mountains or a rocky sea shore. The sculpted, wind-swept pines along the shore and clipped azaleas introduce the more formal, typical elements of Japanese stroll gardens. Pines beside water also contribute to the image of seashore and mountains. There shore pines are painstakingly pruned twice a year to control shape and size as well as to accentuate the natural forms and textures of the trees.

Japanese Gardens reflect nature in shorthand, an abbreviated version of scenes of natural beauty, stripped down to the vital elements...

Jutting out into the lake is a rocky cape. This design is modeled after the famous Garden at the Katsura Imperial Villa in Kyoto; which was, in turn, modeled on a natural promontory in Japan. Nature informed design, and design has been adapted to many different Gardens. A small lantern stands at the far end of the cape.

At this point, long views across the pond reveal the compositional and narrative intent of the Garden. Here, from south to north, we can view the tree covered mountain, the Tea House nestled into the canopy, and the gentle slope into the reflective expanse of the water. Across and mirrored in the water surface, the moon viewing platform with the gently rolling expanse of the flowering orchard is seen below the dark, lush background of the mature cryptomeria and redwood forest. The space is visually elongated by the variety of heights and careful manipulation of the perspective.

Walking southward along the path from the protruding cape towards the East Gate, you will notice a large Kasuga lantern on the left commemorating Carl McNeilan Ballard, president of the Arboretum Foundation during the Gardens construction in 1960. This lantern was donated by with wife after his death, and is decorated with a Paulownia leaf design –like the Paulownia tree outside the Garden gates.

Beside this lantern, an earthen bridge (dobashi) crosses over to one of two islands in the pond. The pine trees that dominate this island are pruned to reflect the angular shape of the large rocks of this island, in contrast to the rounded, mounded form of the pines on the low island to the north.

Visitors may feed the koi in the garden from only two locations –the Moon Viewing Platform and the Zigzag bridge. The pond around these areas is deep, allowing the fish to safely congregate without becoming a tasty snack for predatory birds, such as herons or hawks!

From the island to the east is a wooden plank bridge with a typical “zig-zag” shape. This type of low wooden bridge is associated with marshes and irises. Here is where visitors are encouraged to feed the Koi. The koi at the Seattle Japanese Garden are a favorite of visitors who enjoy the flashes of color and dynamic energy. Our koi population has naturalized to the pond, after being stocked in the 1980’s successive generations have survived and grown. The fish live up to 60 years, and survive year-round on a natural diet of small insect larvae, algae, etc. During the summer months, small portions of Koi kibble are available for guests to purchase to feed the fish as well.

The East Gate was designed as the original entrance to the Garden. Using traditional wood joinery techniques, the elegant but simple lines and dark wood blend into the Garden. From the East Gate, the Garden can be seen as a long, expansive view, with the more formal north and the more natural south ends of the Garden integrating in one long continuous scene. The upright pines opposite the gate help to bring perspective and frame the scenery beyond.

A grove of small trees and shrubs rise up to the East of the path proceeding North. The low azaleas along the path are trained in a form known as **karikomi**. This involves careful hand pruning of the structural branches and careful clipping of the fine new growth several times a year. In the spring, these plants are awash in vibrant color. Massed mounds of clipped evergreen shrubs are a signature look of Japanese gardens. Evocative of rolling hills, mossy boulders or distant forest canopies, these elements add depth, structure and a sense of fullness to the Garden.

The term karikomi can be translated as “sheared back”, and refers to the technique of regularly clipping evergreen shrubs into these forms. Okarikomi refers to massed plantings of sheared shrubs. The term dates back to the mid-16th century, but the style and aesthetic is, undoubtedly, much older.

Karikomi should always be viewed and maintained with respect to the relationship of the pieces in the garden. Scale of individual pieces, as well as the composition as a whole is of utmost importance. Individual tastes vary, some gardens feature informal organic shapes, with variations in height and width; while other gardens feature very structured, uniformly shaped material.

A large weeping willow (salix babylonica) helps to separate the Harbor from the rest of the Garden. This is the last of several willows that once ringed the pond. This tree features brilliant color in spring, and the gentle movement of the graceful branches make it a particular favorite of many visitors.

(3) VILLAGE/ HARBOR

A large natural wood arbor supports a massive wisteria vine. Filled with purple flowers in the spring, the arbor offers shade and spectacular views of the pond, islands and pines. Below the wooden bridge is the outlet where the pond begins the filtration and re-circulation process. The sound of running water adds to the impression of coolness. The obvious man-made and manipulated structures and planting in this area indicate the Human-Natural interaction that is at the heart of Garden design.

With the square cut pond edging and the more formal paving and stairs, the human aspect of the Garden is evident. Even in this case, though, the subtlety and refinement is retained. The human touch and intention is suggested, and the visitor is encouraged to incorporate the images with their own experiences and ideas. A small stone lantern with a large, stone ring in its base perches on the corner of the Harbor –this is an Omokage-Gata lantern. Characteristically perched on a stone ring, its name means "face-style" lantern.

The concept of Shakkei, or "borrowed scenery" is illustrated here; trees in the Garden meld seamlessly with trees in the surrounding woodland, expanding the view beyond the Garden itself. Uneven profiles and textures of trees in the background are reflected in the variety of forms and shapes of trees in the garden.

From the base of the rough stone wall, topped by trimmed azaleas, a full view is revealed. Here, from the sparkling water in the foreground, to the sculpted pines and islands, the bridges and Moon-viewing platform, to the rising mountain and towering trees of the background, the Garden is seen in a deep perspective.

This view is pronounced from the top of the stairs, where a wide gravel clearing provides a commanding view. Notice the details of perspective, how the distances seem to stretch out, the way the tea house peeks into view, how the paths and shore-line twist and turn in and out of view. This is an excellent place to pause your tour and allow visitors to enjoy this stunning view of the garden for a few minutes.

(4) NORTH HILL

Climbing up the north hillside, rustic stairs wind a narrow mountain path up to a large lantern. This Taihei-Gata lantern was a gift from Seattle's sister city, Kobe Japan and the plaque at the base reads: "May the light shine everlastingly on the friendship between Kobe and Seattle." The distinctive element on the side of the firebox is a cross. Historically, Christianity flourished around Kobe until Tokugawa Ieyasu suppressed foreign religion, foreigners, and enforced seclusion after 1598. Beyond this lantern, the dense, wild planting beyond the fence helps to both separate the Garden from the woodlands behind as well as provide a continuity of nearly seamless growth.

The North hill is home to large maples and camellias, as well as several different species of pines. Here, we are able to see some of the variety of the pine genus. Large, pendulous *pinus armandi* X *p. koreansis* (hybrid between weeping and Korean pine) as well as a more typical Korean pine, Bishop pine, (*p. muricata*) and low

growing Mugo pines share space on the hillside. Immediately along the path, Japanese White Pine (p.parvaflora) and Japanese Red Pine (pinus densiflora) showcase the varied form and texture of pines in the Garden –encourage your visitors to touch the pines and notice the differences.

The white pine has soft, dense, almost feathery needles, while the red pines needles are thinner and slightly more rigid. Further down the path, a spectacular Japanese Black Pine (p. thumbergii) has very stiff, sharp needles. This particular tree is a wonderful example of the species, with thick, gnarled bark, dark, stiff needles and an outstanding form. It was originally grown and maintained by Dick Yamasaki, a local Gardener who installed the stonework as part of the original construction of the Garden in 1960.

(5) ORCHARD

Rising behind the shrub lined East shore is a broad open meadow accented by flowering cherries, plum and crab-apple trees. This intentional re-creation of a rustic yet domestic scene invites the visitor to experience the feelings and explore another aspect of human-natural interaction. Evocative of scenery familiar to rural Japan as well as the Northwest, there is a familiarity and comfort in this part of the Garden.

A simple wooden structure called an “azumaya” nestles beneath the massive evergreen oaks (possibly the largest in the State) at the edge of the dense forest of cryptomeria and redwood along the East fence line. Naturalistic stairs and a carefully constructed stone path winding through the shady moss lead visitors to this structure where the whole Garden is again laid out to view. The shift of perspective and the “borrowed scenery” (*shakkei*) of the Arboretum also illustrate the seasonal changes in the Garden.

The azumaya in our garden is a popular place to relax and enjoy the view! Although it has no traditional associations with romance, couples are especially fond of it as a secluded place to sit together and view the garden.

A special collection of flowering plants complement this impression. Five of the seven Japanese “flowers of autumn” including Hagi (*Ispedeza bicolor*), Obana (*miscanthus sieisis*), Nadeshiko (*dianthus sp.*), Ominaeshi (*patrenia scabiosifolia*), and Fujibakama (*eupatorium purpureum*), are planted beside the Azumaya. The flowers of autumn are a famous Japanese literary reference to an 8th century haiku by poet Yamanoue Okura, from a book of his collected works the Manyoshu (“A Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves”)

As we continue down the path from the azumaya, another Tachi-Yukimi-Doro (snow-viewing) lantern stands out, lone and reflecting itself in the water.

At the base of the rolling hills of the orchard, the Moon Viewing Platform extends out into the pond. The reflection of the moon in the water, or the reflection of the Garden beyond lend a special depth and fullness to the experience of this feature.

A beautiful Japanese red pine leans slightly over the platform, with a delicate texture and form, it’s easy to see why Red pines (Aka-matsu) are often viewed as feminine counterparts to the “masculine” Black pines (Kuro-matsu).

A flowering Cherry (*prunus shirotae*) stands at the edge of the path past the Orchard. This is a cutting taken from a tree that was planted by Crown Prince, now Emperor of Japan Akihito on a visit to the new planted Seattle Japanese Garden in 1960. Opposite on the path is a weeping white birch (*betula pendula*), planted by the Crown Princess, now Empress Michiko

(6) THE TEA GARDEN, OR "ROJI"

Chado, or "The Way of Tea", is a centuries old tradition and practice of serving tea. Practitioners focus on the simple and elegant, on refinement and an almost austere aesthetic that changes to reflect each season of the year. Every movement and action involved in the preparation, serving and drinking of tea is practiced with intention and purpose. The Tea Garden and Teahouse reflect this traditional practice.

Due to the delicate nature of the moss plantings inside the roji, most tours of the garden do not include entry into this special area of the garden.

Guests who would like to see it should purchase tea ceremony tickets at the Gatehouse

Originally built as a gift from the city of Tokyo in 1959, and re-built after a fire in 1981, our Tea House was named Shoseian, Arbor of Murmuring Pines, by Sen Soshitsu, 15th Grand Master of the Urasenke Foundation Tea school. In use today by three local tea organizations, introductory lessons in Chado, including a tea tasting, are offered to the public on a weekly basis for a fee of \$10 per person.

The Teahouse's construction is an example of the simple, refined elegance associated with tea culture. The plain, unpainted wood and stucco are natural elements, manipulated and carefully arranged with skill and a clear intention of their use as well as beauty. The structure is composed of three rooms: the host's entrance, the preparation room and a six-mat Guest Room. The unadorned paper-screened walls of the Guest room are free from visual distractions, save for a small recessed alcove (*tokonama*) where a seasonally appropriate floral display and simple Calligraphy scroll are displayed. Outside the Teahouse itself is a small, covered waiting area called a *machiai*, where guests can sit and await the host's summons into the Teahouse.

The Tea Garden is referred to as a *roji*, or "dewy path". The particular name of this type of Garden poetically indicates its function. The tea garden is, in its essence a path or passage; a way to connect the outside world to the refined elegance of the tea practice. Natural, rough stepping stones wend their way through the deep, lush moss and slowly, carefully bring the guests into the Teahouse. Guests are intended to focus on nature and humility as they enter the teahouse, and the *roji* is designed to help encourage this intention.

Tea ceremonies are hosted every weekend by three local tea groups on a rotating schedule.

Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$7 for children.

The most updated schedule can be found on our website, www.seattlejapanesegarden.org.

The plantings here are simple: a canopy of delicate maples, open, relaxed looking pieris and euonomus, a single elegant pine and a few other shrubs are situated into a deep carpet of moss all surrounded by a fence like hedge. The scene evokes of a mountain hermitage, or a rustic cabin where all the worlds troubles can be left behind. Three lanterns are tucked into the roji, a small Kaisuga lantern gifted by our sister city Kobe, a cylindrical Maruashimoto lantern and an Oribe lantern that looks over the tsukubai water basin east of the Teahouse veranda.

(7) MOUNTAIN

The mountain, rocky and tree clad is visible from almost every part of the Garden. Here we are encouraged to explore more closely and pay attention to the small details of the landscape. Carefully winding up and down the rocky paths, we are brought to the splashing source of the waterfall. An eight-ton boulder was set carefully at the apex of the mountain, with other stones set in with consideration towards this first stone's "intention". This concept, of seeking to harmonize the relationship of stones to their setting is crucial to Japanese gardens.

An eleven-story pagoda is tucked into the forest atop the Mountain. As a traditionally religious artifact, this tiered stone structure has almost been hidden into the landscape. This demonstrates the subtle and refined art of the Garden builders –nothing is forced on the viewer, the Garden invites the visitor to find their own experience, to see the Garden through their unique perspective while appreciating the craft and intention of those who have set this before them. Beside the cascading mountain stream, a low rectilinear karui-gata lantern is reminiscent of a way marker on a path. Tucked into the dense growth, it feels like it has been part of the landscape forever.

Steep and winding paths crisscross the flowing water. Over rocks and bridges, the Garden invites the visitor to become part of the carefully arranged scenery. As the path reaches the stone bridge, and meanders back to the entrance, the fullness of the Garden can be felt, the space recently experienced and the yet to be discovered details that may unfold.