



Found in Translation:

Seeking nature in a Japanese garden

Kristin Faurest, director,
International Japanese Garden Training Center, Portland
Japanese Garden

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What's 'designing with nature' in Japan?*



*Spoiler: we won't get to the bottom of this in a 45 minute lecture



When you look at Japanese traditional architecture, you have to look at Japanese culture and its relationship with nature. You can actually live in a harmonious, close contact with nature - this is very unique to Japan. - Tadao Ando, architect



I understand that in the European countries the forest is rather a dangerous place, and that you have to be brave enough to enter it. Maybe my understanding of a forest from the point of view of Japanese culture is closer to human life.

--Sou Fujimoto, architect

Japan is mountainous and volcanic, sitting on a fault zone with frequent earthquakes and tsunamis. The excessive construction of rice fields in mountain terrain led in many cases to the devastation of the natural environment.

It may be argued that Japan's 'harmony with nature' was largely a cultural construction that occurred in the cities and that was enforced and deepened by cultural phenomena such as screen paintings and court poetry.

--Haruo Shirane,

Japan and the Culture of the Four Seasons



Designing paradise

East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.

--Rudyard Kipling

Shintoism

Importance of empty space

Divinity dwells everywhere through *kami*

Delineation of sacred space by *torii* gates

Importance of purification rituals

Rice-growing cycle as basis for celebrations



“When the **Buddha** preached he stood under a tree. When the Shinto gods come down from heaven, they take up residence in trees. So is it not essential that human habitation should be surrounded by trees?”

Sakuteiki
Record of Garden Making
11th century



Ise Grand Shrine (Ise Jingu), c. 7th century

Mie prefecture, Kansai region, dedicated Amaterasu, the sun goddess
Rebuilt every 20 years for more than 1,300 years: ancient 'natural' cycle of sorts



Kamigamo Shrine

Northeast Kyoto, 7th century

Nature depicted symbolically: Representing sacred mountains

Dedicated to the veneration of the *kami* of thunder

Sakuteiki

VISIONS OF THE JAPANESE GARDEN

A Modern Translation of Japan's Gardening Classic



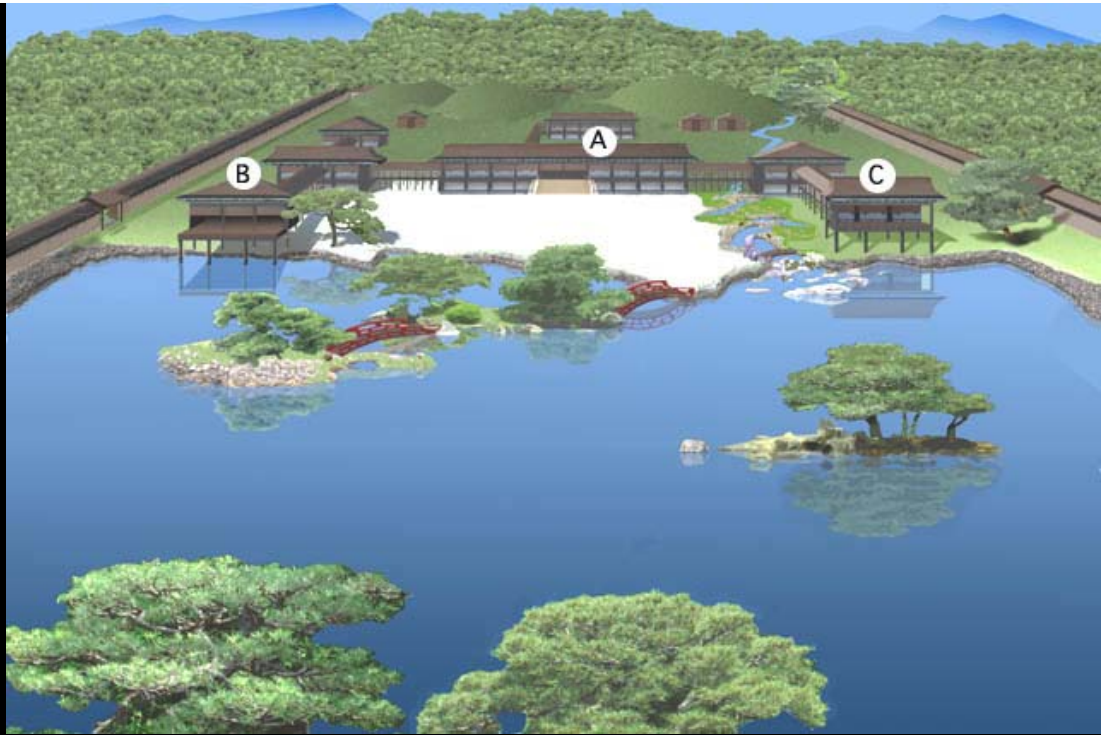
Jirō Takei & Marc P. Keane

Sakuteiki: a
treatise on
designing with
nature

Follow the request of the stones

Mountain-water of living nature

Heian period (794



Yarimizu

Poetic odes to nature

Pond and islands garden form

Geomancy

Pure Land Buddhism: depicting paradise, mythical landscapes¹²



Byodo-in, Phoenix Hall

11th century, Heian period, Uji, Kyoto prefecture

Classic Pure Land Buddhist garden, architecture of Chinese influence

Visualization of paradise in the garden leads to enlightenment



Byodo-in

Water composes and connects garden elements
Grassy banks possibly once had cobble beaches
Pond was once a diverted inlet of the Uji river



Motsu-ji

1117, Heian period, Iwate Prefecture, Tohoku region
Representation of nature to scale: Rocks evoke the feel of the local coast 15

Kamakura period (1195–1333) :

- **Development of landscape painting**
- **Evolution of tea ceremony as ritual**
- **Arrival of Zen Buddhism from China, leading to Zen-influenced garden design**



Saiho-ji: Kamakura period, Kyoto

Rebuilt c. 1330s, Musō Soseki



Saiho-ji:

The path defines the space and experience of the garden



Saiho-ji:

The act of creating and stewarding a garden takes on a key role as a form of Zen meditation



Tenryū-ji

Created by Musō Soseki, 1330s, Kamakura period, Kyoto
Heian-style pond garden representing idealization of past



Tenryu-ji

Use of *shakkei* to create a sense of a larger space



Tenryu-ji:

**Pond and dry waterfall with strong vertical lines
Patterns and shapes seen in nature inspire forms in the garden**

Muromachi Period (1336–1573) :

- Increasing role of shoguns as patrons of the arts
- View of the Heian period (794-1195) as golden age
- Emergence of *karesansui* and the “pond-spring-strolling garden” as significant new garden forms
- Growth of the tea ceremony as formal ritual/aesthetic



Kinkaku-ji

**Use of layers and scale to create impression of space
Small-scale rocks and plantings in foreground blend into the
background, visually extending the garden's boundaries**

Ginkaku-ji (Silver Pavilion)

Kyoto, c. 1480

Pond area with picturesque landscape scenes inspired by literature

Foreground area called the 'sea of silver sand,' formed of Shirakawa sand





Ryoan-ji, c. end of 15th century

Landscape represented by rocks and gravel

Strong sense of enclosure, highly abstract imagery of nature

Daisen-in
Kyoto, Muromachi, c. 1509

Three-dimensional
miniaturization of an
idealized landscape scene

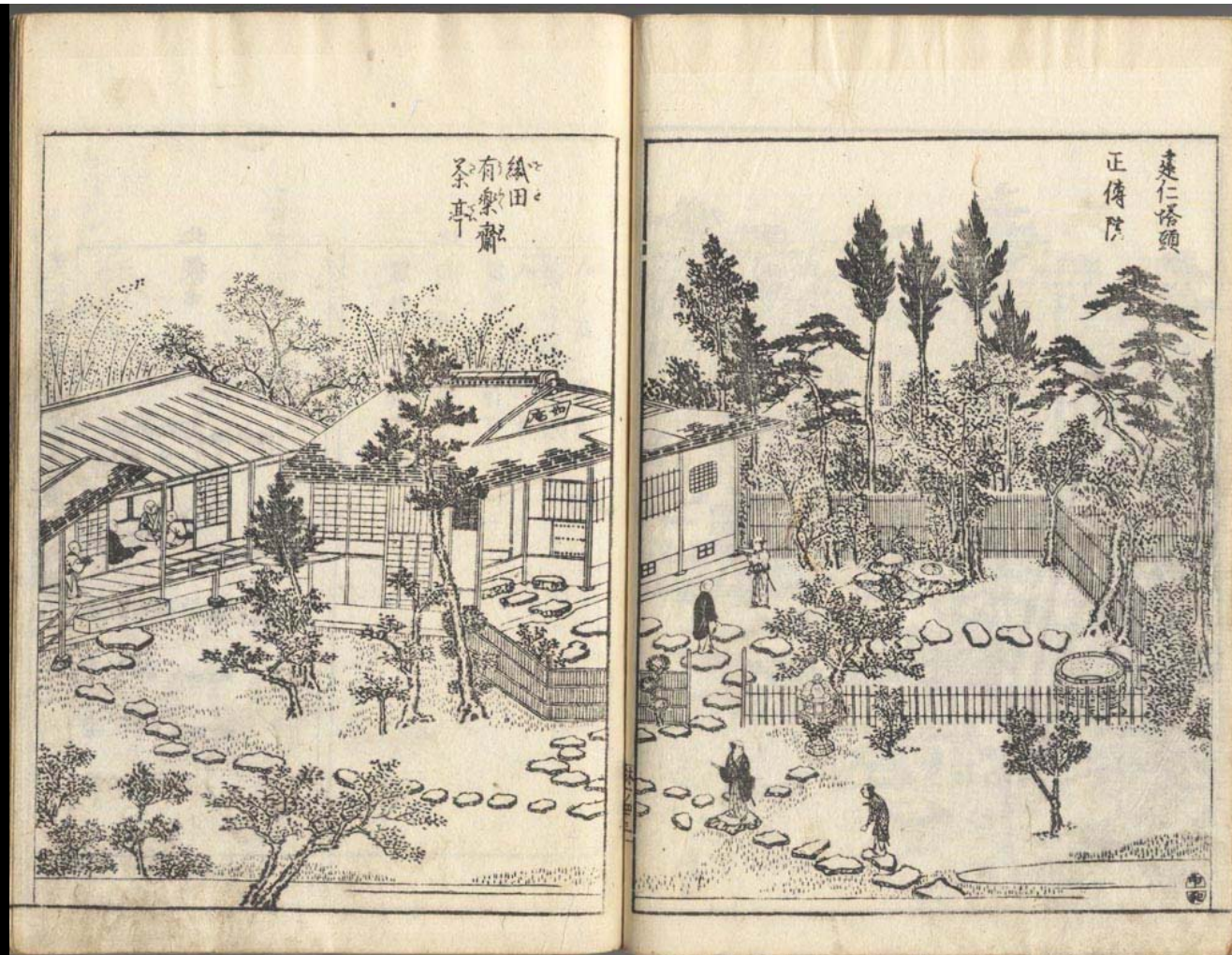




Daisen-in

Wildness and control, right angle and natural form

Plants are maintained to suggest the forms, patterns and proportions of nature in a compact, balanced way.



The tea garden

Depicted by Akisato Rito, 1799

Miyako rinsen meisho zue (Pictorial guide to Gardens of Kyoto)



Koto-in tea garden

**Nature evokes a rustic mountain retreat
Momoyama period, c. 1603, Kyoto**



Edo period (1615–1868)

- **Self-imposed isolation**
- **Emergence of stroll garden form, popular among the daimyo (warrior) class**
- **Construction of Imperial gardens in Kyoto: Katsura Villa, Sento Gosho, Shugakuin**



Sento Goshō, Kyoto

Early 1600s, Edo Period

Key techniques: growth and movement along the diagonal, hide-and-reveal, borrowed scenery



The wonder of daimyo teien is the way their beauty is rendered complete by the inclusion of the outside landscape as shakkei. Just imagine that scene. Grand, breathtaking, like a scroll unfurled.

-----Shinji Isoya, landscape scholar (Hama Rikyu, Tokyo)



The natural garden

A neoclassical 20th century garden form

Most closely related to the tea garden: nature to scale

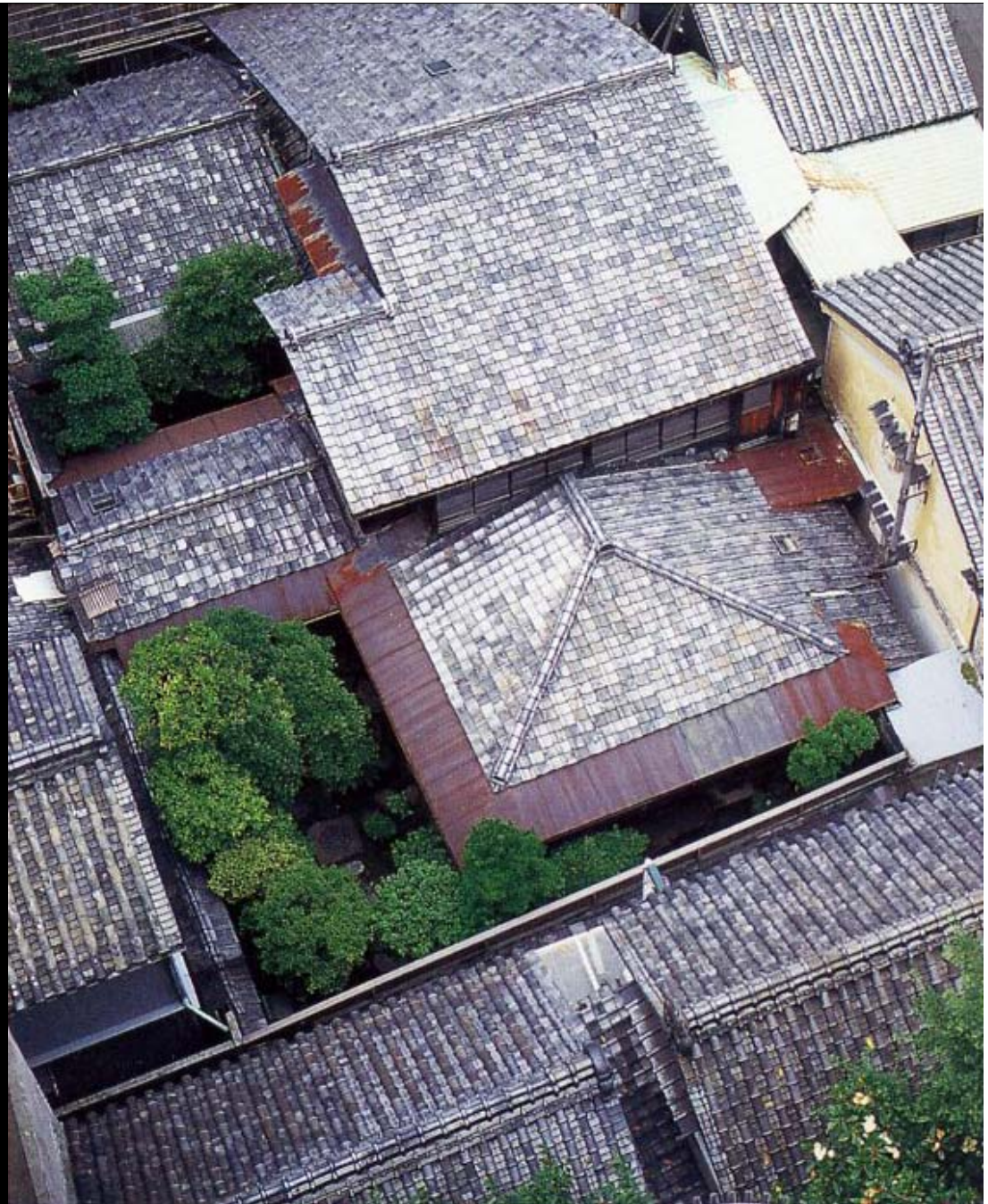




Tsubo-niwa

Urban interior gardens

Design innovation
born of necessity,
dating back to Heian
period



Tsubo-niwa

Void and accent:

**Use of empty space impacts
composition and balance,
creates sense of larger space**













Thank you for listening!

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Application for the Waza to Kokoro: Hands and Heart seminar, June 3-9, 2018, is open:

Japanese garden.org/thecenter

thecenter@japanese garden.org



International Japanese Garden Training Center

Selected references:

Bring, Mitchell and Josse Wayembergh: *Japanese Gardens: Design and Meaning*

Keane, Marc: *Japanese Garden Design*

Kuitert, Wybe: *Themes in the History of Japanese Garden Art*

Nitschke, Gunter: *Japanese Gardens: Right Angle and Natural Form*

Images:

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=49496578>

Jonathan Ley, Julia Taylor, and Tyler Quinn

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