

THE GARDENS

These comments on our gardens are based primarily on a conversation Marcia Iwasaki and I had with Elizabeth ten Groetenhaus in May of 1982. I also recommend you look at A Japanese Touch for Your Garden. I've xeroxed the introduction to that volume because it is helpful; it is appended to these notes.

Unlike Western gardens, Japanese gardens are designed in concert with the house interior and, in fact, the two are conceived of as one unified whole. "Japanese gardens are designed in concert with the room interiors, giving full consideration to sight lines from the rooms, the corridor, or a special viewing platform."

Our (house) garden is a tsuboniwa (tsubo is a unit of measurement; niwa means garden.) or enclosed garden. It was designed by Mr. Yasui who oversaw the entire construction of the house and who is not a landscape architect. It has, therefore, a certain "amateurish" quality, but "it works." As a garden it contains the basic elements common to Japanese gardens:

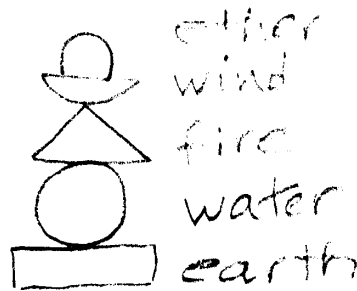
gravel: The gravel was brought from Kyoto. Traditionally, gravel is used to convey the cooling effects of water, a river or just water in general.

rocks: Rocks are most important in landscape architecture. The rocks are chosen for their color, texture and shape. One never uses rocks formed from volcanic action because they would be too smooth and bland. One always uses rocks of metamorphic origin. A grouping of three - such as one sees to the left of the garden - is typical and often signifies the trinity of heaven, earth and man. (This same trinity shows up in flower arrangements, too). Another common symbol is the Buddhist trinity of the Buddha flanked by two Bodhisattvas. The small rock off by itself to the left would be a rock in the midst of the stream. The others are the rocks which make up the stepping stones of the path. Those large ones by the lantern are for kneeling to light the lantern.

greenery: We cannot have moss here because it can't live inside. That is a serious flaw. Ideally, we would have moss during the spring and summer and pine needles during the fall and winter. The plants would be evergreens. There might be one flowering plant - for example, a cherry tree - or one small maple which would help suggest the different seasons in a subtle way. Because our garden has only the pine needles and those plants we could substitute, it has a rather melancholy feel to it, suggestive of old age and winter.

In general, a garden aims to suggest a distant landscape within a small enclosed space. The water, the rocks which might be islands in the water, the greenery all help to create this feeling and inspire the contemplative mood appropriate to gardens. The garden is for contemplation, not for playing, and its elements are also chosen to create a cooling feeling because Japanese are apt to open their shoji and sit on the veranda on a hot day and look at the garden.

The lantern in the garden is a borrowed element from the prototypical tea garden where it would serve to light the guests way at night. But it's appropriate to have it here in a domestic garden where, in general, one is free to add whatever one wants. Its shape is symbolic and suggests the five elements of the Buddhist cosmos:



The stepping stones leading to the house are for the guests at the tea ceremony. Note that they vary in size and texture including one stretch of concrete into which the designer has stuck some of the roof tile from the house.

The outer garden in the intro space exhibit.:

This garden, also designed by Mr. Yasui, was originally planned as the entrance to the street but had to be moved. It shares the same basic elements as the tsuboniwa but is at the moment in need of more green plants, particularly by the base of the ugly water pump. This is the kind of outer garden one would find at a tea house. Guests enter here, stoop to wash their hands and rinse out their mouths and proceed into the inner garden and tea house. It is very unusual to have such a garden at a private home.