

Katsura Monastery Garden Background

Lewiston-Auburn House and Garden Tour, in Lewiston, Maine, July 2008

Welcome to the Katsura Monastery Garden. The garden was designed to be a place of repose and meditation. The garden is also designed to be observed, in a meditative frame of mind, much like the abbot's garden of a Japanese monastery, rather than to be walked in. Because of its miniature scale from the driveway back to the Japanese maple tree, a full appreciation of the garden's features is obscured if people walk the paths and when one actually walks the paths. One should enjoy it from the driveway, upper deck, or the perimeter. The lower deck in front of the "fence" is a place for meditation on which one only kneels or sits for meditation. The garden's features and the fence and gates should be considered personal sculpture creations of the owner of a private home, his works of art broadly speaking. The fence design is copyrighted.

Background for the Katsura Villa

The Katsura Villa is a much-admired 17th Century palace of the Japanese imperial family, located in Kyoto, Japan, the former seat of the emperor. The building, its gardens, and monastery abbots' gardens from this period of Japanese history inspired the creation of the Katsura Monastery Garden, begun in the summer of 2004 and ongoing now. While there is a Katsura Villa, there is no historical Katsura Monastery.

Japanese Garden Design Principles

Japanese garden design follows consistent principles, including these:

- The overall design is intended to create a sense of serene harmony, much like a painting of a forest scene in nature. Everything is intended to look as if it came to be there naturally over time and will be there forever. Actually, everything is carefully placed or planted to achieve these intended objectives.
- Small things symbolize large things. For example: a mountain is symbolized by a small hill, a waterfall by a large vertical stone or stone cleft; water by colored gravel or sand; islands by stones; or trees by low-scale vegetation or miniatures. Stones in a large bed of sand, for example, symbolize islands in a sea. The term "rock" is not used.
- Contrasting textures, sizes, and shapes are very important, as are varying perspectives (and for the designer, patience and money!). There is usually very little color, apart from occasional seasonal blossoms. Greens, blues, and light earth tones prevail.
- Generally nothing is any straighter than it would be in nature. Although hedges are used as boundaries, rows are generally avoided unless a specific result is sought. Pathways and stone walks generally curve or turn so as to create additional interest and focal points as one walks along.
- Since with each curve of a path a new focal point is provided, there is always a sense of meeting the unexpected.
- In accordance with religious beliefs of Shinto, Japan's earliest religion, any major (or indeed perhaps a minor) feature has its own spirit, a *kami*, whether a large rock or a singular pine

tree. Sacred places are marked off with twine and slips of cloth suspended from the twine to indicate the presence of spirits or to make offerings to them.

- Where possible, distant land features such as mountains are incorporated into the design as "borrowed scenery."
- Stones are imbedded in the earth so as to appear a part of it, there from the beginning of time to the end of time. Generally, one third of a stone is imbedded. Nothing just "sits" on the land.
- Stones and sometimes other features are generally grouped "naturally" in odd numbers, especially three.
- The gardens are viewed from the deck or porch of a building, such as a porch of an abbot's residence in a monastery, a palace, a villa, or a private home. Architecture is very simple, using stone, wood, bamboo, paper, thatch, tiles, shingles, twine, and rope. The lines of buildings are very straight and modular. A standard tatami mat 3' by 6' is used to determine room size; for example, a three-mat, 6' by 9' room would have two mats side by side and one across the end. There are sliding doors with paper-like inserts, but no windows. Wide low eaves of tile, thatch, or shingle provide protection, even over walls and fences. Everything is rectangular; triangular braces like those used in Western architecture generally are not used. Pegs and rope are used to join materials.

Katsura Monastery Garden Design Principles

- The garden has two sections. The section in front of the large Japanese maple and the rhododendrons to its left are miniature in scale. The garden and gate behind them are at full scale. A transition from small to large is intended to come from shrubs behind the oval grass feature in the middle of the garden.
- The miniature garden features several "mountains," ponds, and connecting streams of blue slate chips. The mountains all have a waterfall feature at the highest point and a stream of water (chips) flowing down over a rock cascade. The streams form ponds at the bases of the mountains and connect with each other.
- The rectangular stone and sand garden ("islands in a sea") at the rear left of the garden is set down, so to speak, in the transitional section of the garden. It is based on the late-14th Century Ryoan-ji monastery garden. If it were full-sized, it would have behind it a beige plaster wall with an eave, rather than a hedge, and would be its own garden, seen from a porch or deck. Such a stone and sand garden is historically fairly common and much admired in Japanese garden design.
- The Katsura Monastery Garden reflects Japan's dual Shinto and Buddhist religious traditions. In the center oval are a statue of the Buddha in contemplation but also three stones in which dwell the garden's *kami*, the Shinto spirits of the garden. The twine and cloth strips represent symbolic sacrifices to the kami.
- The walkways are of multi-colored gravel to set them apart from the blue slate chips used for water features.
- Beyond the rhododendron and large Japanese red maple is a gate based on a Japanese imperial palace gate (Katsura Villa, 1658). In time it will have interwoven doors featuring mortise and tenon construction. The roof is half the height of the posts and as long as the

gate is tall.

- The fence and gate at the house-end of the garden are intended to accomplish several purposes.
- a. One is to close off the garden at the house end with a backdrop for the garden's features, instead of leaving the viewer with only a white Maine farmhouse as the backdrop --not good borrowed scenery!
- b. They also close the garden off from the outer world. Together with the hedges and the "Maine Woods" trees around the perimeter, they create a quiet private hidden sanctuary.
- c. The low deck at the left end of the fence is the "Moon-Viewing Platform," based on a custom of the imperial court, which might view the moon and write haiku on such a platform. The Moon-Viewing Platform also serves as a place to sit or kneel for prayer and meditation. If one sits facing the shelves, one can pray and meditate in the Buddhist tradition. If one faces the garden, one can pray and meditate in the Shinto tradition.
- All the features in Katsura Monastery Garden are named in Japanese for friends who helped with the building and with ideas used for the garden.

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