

The Japanese Garden and Impressions of Nature

Part Two: Diverse Developments

By Amasaki Hiromasa

Dry-stone gardens symbolically expressing elements of nature in stone appeared during the latter part of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century. Toward the end of the 16th century, when the splendor of Momoyama culture was at its height, Sen no Rikyu, the renowned tea master, perfected the highly understated and yet elegant aesthetics of tea, and a very particular style of garden was developed as an approach to the tea house or room where the ceremonies would take place. It was these two garden styles — the abstracted dry-stone garden and the restrained tea garden — which would greatly influence the Japanese garden in the ensuing years.

The Edo period spanning the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries was a period during which a number of garden styles were integrated. The dry-stone garden and tea garden that had come into being prior to this went through a number of diverse developments, and were both incorporated into the stroll garden, which also paid homage to the traditional lake gardens. The gardens of Katsura Rikyu that were laid out in the first half of the 17th century on the southwestern outskirts of Kyoto are representative of the early period of this style. Later on, however, the stroll garden itself became heir to gardens designed for the residences of feudal lords not only in their own domains but also in Edo where they



Photo 1: Ryoanji temple

were forced to reside for part of the year. This rather grander style of garden functioned as a banqueting facility and was highly representative of the age.

These gardens fell into decline with the coming of the Meiji Restoration at the end of the 19th century. And although the leaders of this new age were bent on absorbing western culture, they also turned to traditional aspects of culture in Japan for inspiration. It was in this intellectual climate that the Japanese garden developed along a new path with a strong sense of naturalism being the key note of its design.

It may be of some interest to look back over the more than five-hundred-year process of the development of garden design in Japan since the

emergence of the dry-stone garden, while also being aware of the stylistic trends in European garden design over the same period.

With Stones

The dry-stone gardens so greatly favored by the Zen temples in Kyoto were an attempt to symbolically express the vastness of nature within a small space by likening a single stone to a mountain or an island, and white gravel to water. Although it is possible to understand this way of expressing nature as a product of the conceptual thinking peculiar to Zen, it is also possible to recognize the influence of Chinese landscape paintings, which depict nature on a grand scale within the limited area of a scroll.

Although the dry-stone garden was a major development in the way that nature was expressed in the Japanese garden, which up until then had been based on an objective representation of nature, it was still within the general parameters of the developmental process of garden design in Japan. This was because in a strict sense it simply represented a particular approach to nature per se. Nevertheless, there is no denying that with the emergence of the dry-stone garden, Japanese garden design left a period of "following nature" and entered a quite different age in which nature would be "fabricated."

There are two types of dry-stone garden. The garden fronting the abbots chambers at Ryoanji (Photo 1) is a rectangular space of level white gravel punctuated by 15 stones. Most people see it as a seascape with islands. It has also been interpreted, however, as being the scene of a tiger and its cub swimming. There may also be those who simply see it as a piece of abstract expression. In contrast to this, the garden of



Photo 3: Villa d'Este in Rome

Daisenin (Photo 2), one of the sub-temples of Daitokuji, looks very much like a typical Chinese landscape. The stones stood up on end remind us of towering peaks; and the objective style of the garden is intensified by having a stone bridge thrown over moving water expressed in white gravel.

Stones are, of course, fundamental to the dry-stone garden; and after the Heian period the making of a garden was referred to as "standing the stones." It is little wonder, therefore, that they were so important in the Japanese garden. Symbolic references were made with stones such as the *shumisenseki* and the *kusenhakkaiseki*, both stone-groupings identifiable with Buddhist ideology and teachings. The dry-stone garden was, in other words, an expression of nature taken to an extreme, generated by this kind of strong attachment for stones.

This period when the dry-stone garden was so much in favor corresponds to the Renaissance in Europe. In complete

contrast to the stones used in these quintessential Japanese gardens, the Renaissance garden was made up of flower-beds of colorful flowers and moving water in the shape of fountains and cascades. The water gardens of the Villa d'Este in the suburbs of Rome (Photo 3) are well-known in this respect. However, despite being from the same period of history and having a similar formative inclination, there is a strong sense of disparity between the style of such a water garden and the Japanese garden that takes its lead from nature, especially in terms of their rationale and the dynamic

means of expression employed.

With Freedom

The new style of garden which came into being at the end of the 16th century as a result of the townspeople's interest in tea, was the tea garden. Despite the fact that the general tenor of this age was toward grandeur and elegance, it would suggest that both the tea garden and the dry-stone garden were characterized by the same undercurrent of stoicism. Although the beginnings and development of the tea garden will be discussed in more detail later, one or two things should be mentioned at this time. Firstly, because people were actually required to walk through a tea garden, it provided a number of design pointers for the development of the stroll garden, which was so popular in the Edo period. Furthermore, because the culture of tea had come to occupy such a prominent position in the hearts and minds of the Japanese people, such essential elements in a tea garden as a stone lantern, a special basin for cleansing the hands and mouth, and stepping stone paths all became symbolic of the Japanese garden per se.



Photo 2: Daisenin



Photo 4: Sentogosho

During the first half of the 17th century, garden design became far more uninhibited. Prominent in this new development was the work of Kobori Enshu. He displayed considerable talent as both a garden designer and architect, while also occupying a position of some authority in the Shogunate and being responsible for instructing the Shogun's family in the "way of tea."

Enshu developed his own design concept of "contrasting natural and man-made elements," and proceeded to introduce geometric design elements into the Japanese garden with all its passions for the natural. Using

such things as straight pieces of dressed stone to edge water and paths composed of rectangular stone elements and naturally formed ones, he opened the doors on a new world of original design.

It was Enshu who employed a linear design for the lake at Sentogosho (Photo 4) — part of the Imperial residence in Kyoto — and he also planned the planted areas there. It

had been a thousand years since such ornamental pools had first been used in gardens in the Asuka period and, interestingly enough, it preceded the use of such formalized schemes in Baroque gardens in Europe.

Next we should turn our attention to two important directions in the development of garden design that occurred in gardens of the court, best represented by the gardens of Katsura Rikyu, and Shugakuin Rikyu located in the northeast of Kyoto.

The gardens of Katsura represent the first completion of a stroll garden around which, as the name suggests, it was possible to walk. At Shugakuin

where there are magnificent views from the Kami no Chaya part of these extensive gardens (Photo 5), an idea which had been used in gardens after the Heian period was brought into use once again. This was the integrating of a garden with its natural surroundings. The garden of Entsuji temple, too, displays a skillful introduction of views, this time of Mount Hiei seen at a distance to the east of Kyoto. It was during this period, therefore, that this method of



Photo 6: Katsura Rikyu

drawing natural scenery into a garden became established as a recognized style of garden design. It was described as a "borrowing of landscape" beyond the limits of a garden and such gardens were termed *shakkei* or "borrowed landscape" gardens.

As has been indicated, Katsura Rikyu (Photo 6) had the first successfully completed stroll garden. What this meant was locating a number of buildings or structures appropriate to a garden in various places around a traditional lake garden, and then linking them with a path of stepping stones, so that each one could be visited on a circuit of the garden. As a person proceeded along the path, they came across a dry-stone garden, an area which was laid out like a tea garden, and a shingle beach-like feature. Consequently, while there was some pleasure to be gained from the sequence and dramatic changes in aspect that follow the



Photo 5: Shugakuin



Photo 7: Gardens of Versailles

variations in the lie of the land, it also made it possible to have tea ceremonies at various locations within the garden and to enjoy a little boating as well.

Stroll gardens were a comprehensive compilation of all the various styles of the Japanese garden, and subsequently became used for grand receptions and entertaining by feudal lords. And, ultimately, they were heir to an individual style of garden that functioned as a banqueting facility.

Banqueting Gardens

Between the latter part of the 17th century and the middle of the 19th century, feudal lords constructed stroll gardens around their residences in their domains and at the premises they occupied when they were in Edo at



Photo 8: Genkyuen

the convenience of the Shogunate. At about the same time in Europe Louis XIV of France laid out the expansive gardens of Versailles (Photo 7) marking the beginning of the flowering of the Baroque period. What these gardens have in common is that they both functioned as large-scale banqueting facilities.

Despite this, however, they were poles apart in terms of design. The Baroque garden boasted a grand geometric arrangement of tidy flowerbeds and hedges as had been used formerly, while the gardens of Japan's feudal lords (Photo 8) had swathes of lawn around large lakes and occasionally included such features as a Mount Fuji in miniature. Alternatively they might include something of a completely different nature such as a pastoral mountain scene complete with tea house. While a tour of such a garden might well

present someone with impressions of the country's most scenic spots, things were arranged so that it would also be possible to find well-known scenes of China as well.

What was different about these gardens compared to the stroll garden of Katsura Rikyu was that they reflected an age of rampant curiosity, and were filled with all kinds of playful show-pieces that were sometimes ingenious in arrangement and of a novel design. In the gardens of the Edo mansion of the Owari clan, there was an exact replica of a streetscape complete with shops, at which it is said the Shogun enjoyed buying things on a visit to the gardens.

It was during the 18th century when these gardens were at their peak of popularity that gardens in Europe were going through a major transformation, especially in England. Up until then gardens had been formally arranged with a geometric design. This, however, was completely done away with and replaced by landscape gardens such as those found at Stourhead (Photo 9). The English landscape garden somehow symbolized the newly awakened freedom of thought among ordinary people and was a complete change from the strictly formal Baroque garden that can be seen as reflecting an authoritarian order. This



Photo 9: Stourhead

kind of major change in approach is something which is rarely seen in the history of garden design in the West.

It is of some interest, however, to note that the landscape garden and the stroll garden, which in terms of design at least had something in common, were two styles of garden design that both existed in the 18th century.

A Return to Nature

With the Meiji Restoration at the end of the 19th century, the gardens used by the feudal lords fell into decline. While doing their best to introduce western values and styles, the leaders of this new age kept one eye on traditional aspects of Japanese culture and the ceremonial custom of drinking tea became an important opportunity for them to get together. The pioneer of modern garden design who provided a style of garden suitable for this new age was Ogawa Jihei, or Ueji as he was known professionally.

Ueji designed the gardens of the Murinan villa in Kyoto (Photo 10), for Prime Minister Aritomo Yamagata (1838-1922). The gardens here have a grand spatial composition with views of the Higashiyama range of mountains along Kyoto's eastern flank — there are light, open areas of lawn; the design of the water courses is full of movement; and with its neatly appointed tea house that can be



Photo 10: Murinan villa

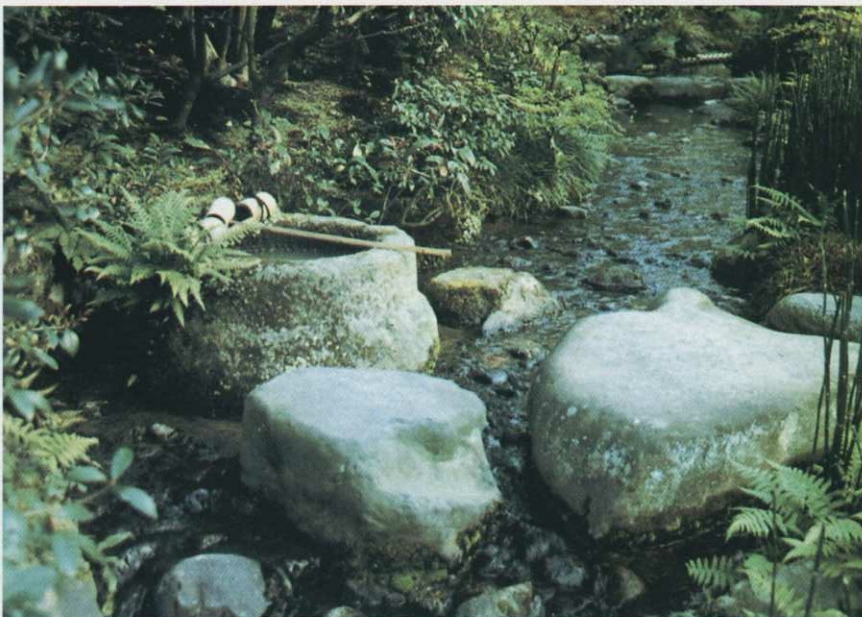


Photo 11: "Live" water as a feature (Tairyusanso)

glimpsed between the trees, it is a crystallization of the modern Japanese garden.

The dynamic composition within which there are expansive areas of lawn is evidence of how much it inherited from the gardens of the feudal lords as well as the influence of the English landscape garden. The expansiveness of the garden as a whole is something that would no doubt have made it ideal for entertaining guests at a large tea gathering. Nevertheless, Ueji's use of fast moving water to express nature in the garden was graphic evidence of this true character (Photo 11).

Lakes and ponds were always a main feature of the Japanese garden and designers went to great lengths to depict picturesque coastal scenery in them. Ueji, however, was more attracted to the kind of pastoral scenery he knew well and attempted to

express it in the garden by using mountain streams and narrow country-style rivers. Additionally, he wisely made no attempt to change their dimensions, so that they might appear as natural in character as possible. As a result, he was successful in breaking new ground in the way that nature was expressed in the Japanese garden. Moreover, it somehow seems inevitable that it was the animated character of his designs that captured the hearts and minds of those highly motivated people, who were involved in laying down the foundations of modern Japan.

In the Renaissance garden, the natural characteristic of water to flow from a high place to a low one was expressed in a paradoxical way by the fountain. Ueji, however, chose to stick to methods learned from nature.

So perhaps it was inevitable that the Japanese garden should once again turn to nature for inspiration. **UJI**

Amasaki Hiromasa is the president of Kyoto College of Art.