

Japanese Garden Introduction and History

Seisui Tei, Garden of Pure Water

The Minnesota Landscape Arboretum's Japanese Garden is an elaborately designed, intricate place that provides a calming atmosphere, inviting visitors to relax and reflect. Seisui Tei, or Garden of Pure Water, is a wet garden. Its focal point, a nine-foot waterfall, draws in and evokes the viewer's imagination. The Japanese Garden is about borrowed scenery and evoking nature's beauty. Nestled into a corner of the Arboretum's property, surrounded by mature trees, it is placed into a vista which expands the view and eliminates boundaries. It is accessible to the public and yet secluded so that visitors are able to find solace here, feeling embraced and protected within this garden. There is an alluring element woven into our Japanese Garden, the idea of "reveal and conceal". You can never see everything within the garden at once, different views are explored and created as you move through the garden. Each visit will show you something new that you may have missed before.

The Japanese Garden was built with a gift from Mr. and Mrs. John G. Ordway, Jr. . The garden was designed and implemented by the prestigious and highly awarded designer Koichi Kawana. Kawana was a professor of landscape architecture at UCLA and is considered one of America's foremost Japanese landscape architects. Dedicated in 1985, and said to have been inspired by Minnehaha Falls, the garden boasts the ranking of number 19 of North America's Top 25 Japanese Gardens. After the death of Kawana in September 1990, David Slawson was chosen as the garden's consultant. Kawana rarely wrote anything down; there were no instructions left on the care of the Japanese Garden and no drawings or plans. We are fortunate to have sketches of his which are in the Andersen Horticultural Library at the Arboretum.

The garden began to change in 1995. Changes were brought by necessity, by viewing how the garden is used, positive changes were made piece by piece, rather than all at once. For instance, the waterfall was refurbished to look more natural, stones and boulders being added so that it looked more like it is coming out of a hillside than it did when first constructed. Plants have been removed and others have been replaced. Cold hardiness and growth requirements affected what could survive and thrive in our northern climate. Some of the plants that Kawana had chosen were much too large when mature and were removed to keep the garden in proportion. Kawana's original design had had a blacktop sidewalk running through it rather than the stone and blue gravel one that is in place today. The blacktop sidewalk was removed in order to incorporate and grow more groundcover and to intersperse more "pull-offs", benches to invite visitors to stay and enjoy the garden. Large rocks and stones were brought in to sit on and share, room enough for multiple people to sit, making the whole garden more accommodating and inviting. Each sitting area has a different view, different vantage point, making the garden more alluring. The sidewalk itself, the gravel and set stones, is attractive and begs you to slow down.

Today, the Arboretum continues to work with David Slawson, while using three sketches that Kawana made which hang in the Andersen Library at the Arboretum. Thus, the garden has continued to evolve and change over time. The garden is never finished, things are always changing, and the

design that Kawana brought to the Arboretum is continuing to evolve to this day. Currently, Mary Bigelow, the Head Gardener works with David Slawson annually to asses and make plans for the garden. We hope that you will enjoy your visit to our very special Japanese garden.