



Raked gravel and maple outside the guest house at Anderson Japanese Gardens where Hoichi Kurisu oversaw design from 1978.

Photo by K.T. Cannon-Eger

HOICHI KURISU
an excerpt from
**“Japanese
Gardens in the
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I was born in 1939 in a small rice-farming village an hour north of the city of Hiroshima, Japan. At that time, the world was in turmoil. The Second World War had begun, and Japan was experiencing material shortages of just about everything, including food. But as children we had no awareness of these things. We grew up playing in nature. We had no commercially manufactured toys. Instead, we explored the surrounding forests and valleys.

We delighted in foraging for food—mushrooms, fiddlehead ferns, chestnuts—and there was a wild pear tree at the base of a mountain. We would throw rocks to chase away the monkeys that sat in it so we could pick the pears. We made slingshots and bamboo traps to catch fish in the streams. We also helped in the rice fields. When it was time to plant and later to harvest the rice, the whole village worked together. I remember one early spring day when I was about three years old, while playing in my grandfather’s garden, I discovered the small, vibrant red shoots of a peony just emerging from the earth. I was fascinated! I will never forget this feeling of pure excitement. Later, I even took my grandfather’s spade and

tried to transplant these peonies, which just got me into a lot of trouble.

This carefree, village childhood came to an abrupt end in 1945, when the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and ended World War II. While a mountain ridge protected my village from the bomb's terrible destruction, its impact changed the course of all Japan. In the aftermath of the war, the rush to modernize, westernize, and industrialize virtually destroyed the traditional family structure I knew as a young child, as well as the social and educational systems. It changed people's minds about almost everything. Instead of going to high school, nearly all my classmates left the village to work in factories. Japan's culture became much more money driven, and Western countries were considered the ideal models for growth. I was fortunate enough to attend university in Tokyo, and when I graduated, the United States was perceived as a dream country. Despite substantial anti-American feelings among some students, many young Japanese people were looking to the West. In 1962, I bought a plane ticket to Los Angeles and, with no definite purpose in mind, went to see what all the hype was about.

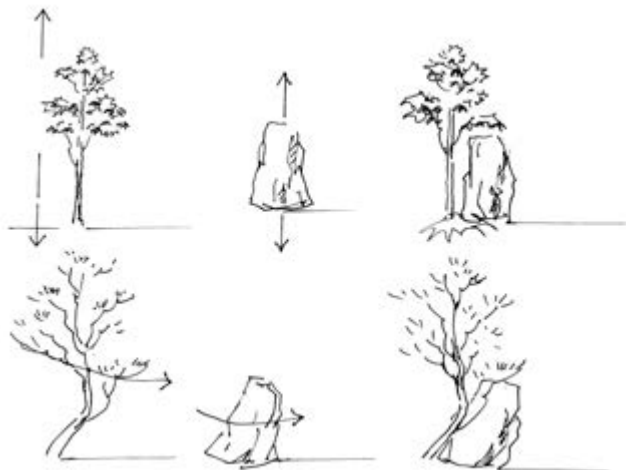
When I arrived, two things happened. First, I spent the first six months being amazed—at what Americans had and what they were spending. There was no

comparison in Japanese life to America's post-war affluence—Lincoln Continentals bigger than my apartment in Tokyo, Cadillacs that might as well have been spaceships. The houses were huge too. Even the steaks were huge! There was so much stuff everywhere. Second, I joined my father, who was working as a landscaper in the area. In doing so, I instantly rediscovered my childhood passion for plants, soil, and rocks. I knew then that I wanted to work in landscape the rest of my life.

A Rapidly Changing World

At the same time, as we worked in wealthy neighborhoods like Beverly Hills and Santa Monica, I began to sense an imbalance between Americans' material affluence and their quality of life. I saw many lavish homes and gardens but discovered that the owners were often unhappy. Many were going through divorces, or for whatever other reasons, were rarely home. I felt that somehow gardens could address this imbalance. Japanese aesthetics were popular in mainstream America then, and Japanese gardens had long been a cultural export. In 1960s California, I saw many very strange-looking attempts at Japanese garden design—full of enthusiasm but lacking authenticity—and knew that I could do better. I imagined building gardens like the famous ancient gardens of Kyoto, so after two years in California, I returned to Japan to study with a master:

But I never made it to Kyoto. Instead, I was introduced to Kenzō Ogata, a renowned Tokyo-based landscape designer, and began an apprenticeship with him. On a morning in May, Ogata took me to one of his residential garden projects. I will never forget the feeling of stepping into that garden. Immediately, I was overcome with an indescribable sense of peace, tranquility, and comfort. I thought, this is it. It was the same feeling I had experienced during my childhood in wild nature—a total disappearance of boundaries between myself and the natural world—a feeling of fascination and almost unconscious oneness with nature.



Every element in a garden is said to have an inherent force, or *kisei*, that determines the way it may be placed. This force may be expressed vertically or horizontally or in combination.

The naturalistic style in which Ogata worked was called *zōki no niwa*. This modern style was much different from the traditional Kyoto styles and unlike anything I had seen before. It affected me powerfully, and I wanted with all my heart to learn more about it. I found that zoki-style gardens took their inspiration from the native landscape beyond the outskirts of Tokyo. Compared with traditional-style gardens, they were much less formal, using deciduous trees and other plants that are sensitive to seasonal changes. Japanese society was changing rapidly at that time, and Ogata was creating gardens to respond to contemporary needs. I believe this is still the most important mission of Japanese gardens today. The techniques of Japanese garden design have not changed

much—they are as effective now as they were centuries ago—but the world outside the garden has changed dramatically. As designers striving to make gardens that respond to human needs, it is our duty to consider the world around us. Look at the global trends today and how they affect all of us. We increasingly interact with and depend on technology in daily life. We are shopping, looking for directions, reading, and listening to music more via our phones and computers and less by interacting with others or with the physical world. Recently, on a layover in Detroit with my crew, we went to a sushi restaurant near our terminal. At the table we discovered a tablet computer.

I thought it was a video game, but actually it was the menu! No waiters took our order—we simply touched the picture of the sushi we desired, and it appeared at our table a few minutes later. Much more convenient than the bamboo fish traps we built in my childhood! Still, I can't help feeling something has been lost along the way. As innovative technologies transform our world with new profit-driven efficiencies, I wonder what the long-term cost of eliminating human interaction will be.

Urbanization also is reducing the time we spend in nature in our daily lives. More than half the world's population lives in cities now, and that proportion

A view to the Yamato Building through bamboo in Roji-en at the Morikami Museum and Gardens in Delray Beach, Florida. Hoichi Kurisu began work on Roji-en in 1999.

Photo by K.T. Cannon-Eger



is expected to reach two thirds by 2050, according to estimates by the United Nations. And spending more time near other people doesn't necessarily mean more human connection—the dynamics of big cities can often amplify a sense of alienation and loneliness.

Stress is also changing us, and it has become so common that most people assume it is inevitable. The World Health Organization has called stress “the health epidemic of the 21st century.” The costs of stress are significant: 75 percent of health-care costs are due to chronic illness, and stress is the number one cause of chronic illness. The American Psychological Association reports that stress levels are on the rise not just among adults but also among teens and even grade school children.

What Role Can Gardens Play?

There is a significant and growing body of global research documenting the power of nature to heal us, relax us, and restore physical, cognitive, and emotional balance. Reducing and preventing stress is one of the major ways that gardens affect our well-being. But how, exactly, can Japanese gardens meet contemporary human needs? The oldest known treatise on Japanese garden making, the *Sakuteiki*, discusses the “art of setting stones.” At one point, it instructs the reader to “*ishi no kowan ni shitagahite*,” or “follow the request of the stone.” Likewise, we can look to nature for direction.

Ogata taught that every item in a garden—plant, tree, rock—expresses an inherent force, or energy, that must be recognized in order to create harmony in the garden. We call this quality *kisei*. *Kisei* may be expressed vertically or horizontally, or in any combination of the two. Identifying the inherent *kisei* of each item allows the designer to arrange items in a harmonious way. This is something like the way a conductor would balance the performance of each musician and instrument of an orchestra to produce a symphony.

Kisei applies to individual items, to groups of items, and to a design as a whole. In other words, *kisei* is scalable. And like the symphony, when the *kisei* of garden elements is harmonized, something greater than the sum of its parts emerges. In the garden, we call this *ma*.



TOP: The wetlands at Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 2010 before construction began on the DeVos Japanese Garden.

BOTTOM: October 2014, the DeVos Japanese Garden construction is well underway. The newest garden by Hoichi Kurisu opened to the public in June, 2015.

Photos by K.T. Cannon-Eger

Ma is a very complex concept that permeates almost every aspect of Japanese culture. The word ma has no literal translation but can be referred to as “space” or “void.” Ma may be expressed temporally, spatially, even socially—and as a combination of any of these.

As linear space, ma could be the length of a tatami mat, or in three dimensions, the space between stones in a dry rock garden. The punctuation of movement and sound amounts to a lot of ma in Noh theater and in traditional Japanese dance. The ma, or empty space, created between elements of ikebana is just as important as the flowers and branches themselves. In Japanese martial arts such as kendo, another type of ma, *ma-ai*, refers to the critical, dynamic distance between two opponents, determined by skill, potential power, and psychological strength. In daily life, ma can exist between two people when they bow to greet each other. There is physical space between two people, but also perceived space, activated by intention and respect.

Japanese gardens have ma that is physical, visual, and temporal. But no matter whether ma is seen, heard, or entered into physically, above all, ma must be felt. In the garden, ma should be an experience that engages all of our being. When this occurs, we are experiencing a space that cannot be measured—a mental space. This is the Japanese garden. Without this mental space, there is no Japanese garden.

There is a tendency to focus too much on perfecting technique and craftsmanship when making Japanese gardens. We can teach these things, but perfect craftsmanship alone does not make the garden good. I’m not degrading perfection, but somehow what makes people feel true comfort in the garden is beyond any single element.

As the famous kabuki actor Onoe Kikugoro once told a student who had asked him how to be a great performer, “There are two kinds of ma—one that can be taught and one that cannot. After I teach the first kind, you must go on to master the second by yourself.” The second kind of ma has to do with ego. Both mastering a craft and becoming receptive to the world around us require humility.

The time-honored techniques of Japanese garden design were developed to direct one’s experience in specific ways, to lessen preoccupation with the self and foster an increased awareness of nature and our relation to it. This simple transformation of thought meets a fundamental human need, now more so than ever. When you experience ma in the garden, you feel a sense of connection not only to the nature around you but also on a much larger, even universal scale. This receptivity reminds us of the timeless cycles of change and regeneration that support our world, and of which we are a part.

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Award-Winning Kurisu Garden Promotes Healing, Economy

When the Lebanon (Oregon) Community Hospital Foundation launched a campaign to raise funds for a Health Career and Training Center and Healing Garden in 2004, few could have imagined the long-term impact the effort would make.

The foundation supports Samaritan Lebanon Community Hospital, a 25-bed hospital in the Willamette Valley city of Lebanon (population 15,000). The hospital is part of Samaritan Health Services, a five-hospital system which serves a three-county region stretching from the Cascade mountain foothills to the central Oregon Coast.

The Infusion Center overlooks the pond. Patients receiving chemotherapy have a view of waterfalls and koi fish in the pond.

Photo courtesy of Samaritan Lebanon Community Hospital



With its 2004 capital campaign, the foundation's goal was to fund the construction of an education and training center for health occupations classes offered by the nearby community college as well as the hospital. The classrooms and adjacent hospital patient rooms were designed to look onto a Japanese-style healing garden—creating a unique opportunity to encompass the healing power of nature in a health care setting.

The 11,000-square-foot garden was designed and constructed by internationally renowned Japanese landscape architect Hoichi Kurisu of Kurisu International. Totally enclosed within the exterior walls of the hospital, it offers different views to each department that looks out at the garden:

- The Infusion Center overlooks the pond. Patients receiving chemotherapy have a view of waterfalls and koi fish in the pond.

- Maternity patients have a calming view of a backyard-type setting in the garden, with grass and colorful shrubs.
- The Health Career and Training Center has a motivating views for the garden, with trees and boulders.
- The public has views from a long hallway that spans the length of the garden, with a view of two gazebos, pathways and a waterfall. The main entrance to the garden is directly across from the hospital cafeteria.

Following the success of the fund raising campaign, the Foundation received:

- Honorable Mention for Economic Development, Project of the Year from Oregon's Rural Development Initiatives.
- 2006 National First-Place Landscape Design

Award for Healthcare Environment, from the Center for Health Design.

- Recognized by Modern Healthcare Magazine in 2006 as one of the top 10 health care design projects in the nation.
- Cover story and photos in *The Oregonian* newspaper's weekly "Home and Garden" insert in June 2006 (Oregon's largest daily newspaper.)
- *The Oregonian* insert caught the attention of Douglas Roth, owner and publisher of *Sukiya Living, the Journal of Japanese Gardening*, which ultimately led to the garden being featured as the cover story in the November/December 2007 issue of the journal.

Beyond the awards, the garden played an important economic development role in Lebanon, a former timber town. The garden caught the eye of officials from Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona, Calif. These officials were considering sites for an osteopathic medical school connected with its primary site in Pomona.

After visiting numerous potential sites in the Pacific Northwest, Western University leaders concluded Samaritan practices the type of compassionate health care that their university teaches and ultimately chose to build its medical school across from the hospital. The school—Oregon's first new medical

school in more than a century—opened in 2011 and is fully enrolled at 400 students.

This economic trend is continuing, following a competitive process that resulted in the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs decision to locate a new 154-bed residential facility near the new medical school. In addition, the region's community college will break ground this fall on a new 40,000-square-foot Health Occupations Building next to the medical school.

All of these projects led to more residential development in Lebanon, and the need for related support services. Toward that end, Samaritan has built a state-of-the-art conference center and hotel, and the hospital foundation participated with a capital campaign to finance a one-acre Japanese-inspired garden adjacent to the conference center and hotel.

That garden, also designed by Kurisu International, represents a larger version of the hospital's Healing Garden. The foundation's goal was to develop a place where people outside the hospital could take a break and stroll through a natural setting. The garden is about a year old now, and it has already attracted visitors and tour groups from across the Pacific Northwest.

The excitement is contagious and continues to generate additional inquiries of businesses wanting to locate on or near the campus. Other developments in the works include a 120-unit apartment complex to be completed by 2016, as well as a new coffee shop and bookstore.

All of the exciting development can't be attributed solely to the hospital's Healing Garden, but it's fascinating to think of the role one garden can play in the transformation of an entire community.

BETTY KOEHN