



Secret Teachings in the Art of Japanese Gardens: Design Principles, Aesthetic Values

David A. Slawson

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The art of the Japanese garden is a 1,500-year-old landscape design tradition that is still evolving, still instructive. *Secret Teachings in the Art of Japanese Gardens* explains the fundamental principles of this tradition and describes how those principles may be applied to a much wider range of environments than exists in Japan.

In the first section the author draws on his own experience as an apprentice to a master gardener in Kyoto, as well as his considerable knowledge of Japanese classical texts, to present the garden design process in terms of three primary aesthetic considerations:


Scenic effects-reproductions of appealing natural landscape forms.

Sensory effects-varieties of scale, framing, rhythm, motion, and spatial quality.

Cultural effects-the incorporation of allusions to classical literature, poetry, and painting.

The final section comprises a complete translation of a classic gardening manual used by Buddhist monks in medieval Japan. Its rules for planting trees and setting rocks still make good design sense today, and the author includes numerous garden descriptions as examples of how ancient masters practiced their craft.

This clear, authoritative work, fully illustrated with diagrams and photographs, elucidates much about the Japanese compositional sense. But at the same time it is a plea for a more holistic approach to landscape design-a recognition that a garden should conform to certain natural principles as well as meet the emotional needs of those who view it.

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