



Morikami Japanese Gardens

WHERE EARTHY ZEN MEETS MIND AND SPIRIT

BY LESLIE MCKERNS

Leading Japanese garden designer Hoichi Kurisu of Kurisu International has created the perfect place for contemplation and renewal, The Morikami Japanese Gardens in Delray Beach. The gardens, known as the Roji-en (Garden of the Drops of Dew) George D. and Harriet W. Cornell Japanese Gardens, are important in our effort to go green, save water and limit pollution.

The sculpting of these Japanese gardens in tropical Delray was a process of transforming a pine forest into six unique contemplative gardens with the process taking one year and five months to complete. The gardens are the Shinden Garden; the Paradise Garden; the Early Rock Garden; the Late Rock Garden; the Flat Garden and the Modern Romantic Garden, representing the six periods of Japanese garden history.

Florida's population is the fastest growing of any state in the U.S. with increasing numbers coming to Florida to live not just visit. Using green and sustainable building practices is currently leading Florida's focus in promoting an environmentally sustainable approach to growth.

In garden design, sustainable includes the use of native and non-invasive plantings. A Japanese garden uses some ornamentals and non-native plants but in the design of the Morikami Gardens, Hoichi Kurisu was able to use many Florida native species, including indigenous Slash Pines and Sea Grapes chosen for their natural sculptural shape and Gumbo Limbo

chosen for its leafy quality and aged-looking bark. The Morikami Gardens project required extensive knowledge of the requirements of Japanese gardens. Rather than putting out a plant list in a generic bid specification package, Kurisu and his team personally selected all plant material using local nurseries as sources for the plant specimens.

Working within an unusual Design Build contract, Kurisu International transplanted 270 pines used in dramatic groupings and hand selected all of the specimen plants used in the gardens.

The backbone of Japanese garden design is the use of large-scale boulders yet Florida has no true rock. The yellow or white Florida flat rock is not suitable for the essential structural elements of the Japanese garden. Hoichi Kurisu and his team went to Austin, Texas to select all the granite boulders used in the Morikami Japanese gardens.

Perfect not only for contemplation but also for water conservation are the dry landscapes and the dry waterfall in the gardens. These Zen inspired dry gardens use a dry creek technique and are naturally draining surfaces.

The Zen inspired gardens include dry cascades, which are careful arrangements of rocks meant to suggest dynamic waterfalls but without the actual flow of water. A dry cascade sits nearby the Paradise Garden. The dry cascade has the same qualities as a waterfall, simulating a water-fed creek and a waterfall using only gravel and natural rock forms.

These Zen rock gardens called 'dry landscapes' (karesansui) are abstract garden designs created as a means toward self-examination and spiritual purity. Dry landscapes are not designed as extensively planted gardens typical for the gratification of the senses. Zen gardens often use no, or very little, plantings, inducing a calming effect through simplicity and order. The ascetic arrangements of rock and gravel are expected to help clear the mind of worldly attachments that would otherwise restrict the attainment of enlightenment.

In the Flat Garden, the landscape designer uses a technique called "borrowed scenery," called shakkei, that can be used in other gardens even the small space gardens of the homeowner. The technique depends upon having some serenity in the distance, borrowing scenery from outside the immediate area and drawing the eye outward to the adjacent space.

Building and maintaining a Japanese garden takes commitment and requires a discipline in maintaining the sculptural shapes of shrubs, trees and groundcovers. Kurisu selected compact shrubs that keep a dense shape and have smaller leaves such as Orange Jasmine, Carissa, shrub Ligustrum and Japanese holly (Ilex crenata), avoiding any plants with a loose tropical feel, and taking care to use non-invasive plants such as clumping golden bamboo.

Morikami was given to the public as a perpetual park and garden and the landscape designer feels an obligation to maintain it for future civilization. So involved is Kurisu in its future, he maintains an office in Delray Beach.

Gardens and sustainable green space are important for atmosphere and climate regulation, for water quality and aquifer recharge, pollution control, noise and wind reduction as well as a habitat provision for birds and other wildlife. For Kurisu, the six new Morikami gardens are key to another kind of sustainability--that of green design for mind and spirit.

His company does extensive work with restorative gardens and stresses the healing nature of gardens. Comprehensive gardens and green space have been demonstrated to improve the strength of community by forming stronger bonds between residents and their surroundings. Kurisu states that the gardens reduce stress and provide beneficial healing and restorative nature for individuals and for their communities.

Studies have found that green landscapes are effective in promoting human health through reducing stress. Stress reduction includes reducing heart rate and blood pressure and reducing negative feelings such as anger, fear, depression, insomnia, anxiety and frustration. Increased levels of physical activity such as walking in the extensive gardens can lessen heart disease risk factors (systolic blood pressure, plasma cholesterol, plasma triglycerides) and provide increased immunity function. Japanese gardens' importance is reiterated by the designer, who mentions that tests in several study groups show that walking through these zen-like green and therapeutic garden spaces can help to heal by putting that person in a state of calmness and peace.

Garden settings promote feelings of peace, connectedness and strength. Self-awareness, self-esteem, mood and self-concept benefit. A reflection on personal values can restore and foster concentration and attention.

Festivals and educational events play a part in the programs that draw large groups and individuals to the Morikami. As visitors gather for activities, social networks expand, promoting community and a sense of belonging.

"We sustain pockets of water through sustainable design but we must also sustain the human mind," said Hoichi Kurisu. "Pockets of water are precious but it is more important to save the human heart."

The gardens speak of timeless truths and rhythms, providing therapeutic insights. "Listen to, cherish and act upon the inspiration the gardens impart," said Kurisu. "We exchange burden, boredom and despair for renewal, inspiration and hope. Plants have no ego or pride, no jealousy or anger. We set aside the negative part of our nature and let the garden smoothly and calmly affect the mind and spirit."

He added, "Learning through participation in the gardens benefits attention and self-control, resulting in enhanced coping skills, vitality and an overall feeling of well being. The healing importance of the Morikami Gardens cannot be overemphasized. Stroll through the pine forest or bamboo grove, view the rock formations, arrangements of plants and cascading waterfalls, pause to ponder the quiet surface of the lake and shoreline. Lay aside the chaos of a troubled world and gently nurture the capacity within to hear a more harmonious, universal rhythm." ☺

Hoichi Kurisu will be at Morikami's Japanese Gardens May 17 at 7:30 p.m. to discuss the concept of Ma in the Japanese Garden. 561.495.0233 x235.

