Facsimile Chinese Gardens are a relatively recent phenomenon. Since the 18th century, Europeans have been fascinated with the unusual charms of Chinese gardens – real and imagined – and ideas and impressions were freely incorporated into Western gardens, often under the title of “Chinese.” The fashion for Chinoiserie and the exotic ornamentation of architecture and gardens swept Europe and her colonies, leaving a trail of rockeries, pagodas, and tracery balustrades around the world. The increasing accuracy of information brought back to the West by architects and artists refined European impressions of Chinese garden arts, but the effect in garden emulation was still well shy of authentic recreation.

With increasing ease of transportation in the 20th century, garden makers were able to travel to China and East Asia and bring back plants, furnishings, images, and first hand impressions of both private and Imperial Chinese gardens. Although “Chinese” gardens in the West from this period still tended to exhibit ornamental use of Chinese features and furnishings, rather than a true Chinese conceptual framework, a few stand out as having true insight into the spatial proportions and functioning of a Chinese garden.

The American landscape architect Fletcher Steele traveled to China in 1934, as did his client Mabel Choate in 1935, and subsequently a small "Chinese Garden" was added to her property Naumkeag in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. It is a walled courtyard garden with a borrowed view of the mountains and not a shan shui, which also refers to Chinese brush and ink paintings that depict scenery or natural landscapes, such as mountains, rivers and often waterfalls.

Continued on page 3
Welcome again to Perspectives. This edition highlights Chinese gardens, both those in American and those in China. There are an increasing number of authentic Chinese gardens in the US, allowing us to learn about this very influential garden style. The images of Chinese gardens were brought back by travelers to the Far East; Marco Polo was amazed by the gardens of Kublai Kahn, the Yuan emperor of China and many famous European gardens have included recreations of Chinese gardens—a good reason to understand their origins and forms. Look for the resource sections on this page and the back cover of Perspectives if you want to visit or read more about these fascinating gardens.

I encourage you to visit our web pages (www.neldha.org) for current member activities. I also hope that you will consider writing a short article for Perspectives about your current projects or summer activities. We welcome your comments and contributions. Have a wonderful summer.

JoAnn Robinson
Continued from page 1

water, landscape garden, but its proportions, architecture, and livability are plausibly Chinese. Other designers, such as Beatrix Farrand, created hybrid gardens incorporating some of the strongest concepts of Eastern and Western traditions. The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden in Seal Harbor, Maine, designed in 1926 for Mr. & Mrs. John D. Rockefeller Jr., stands as a prime example of a balanced meeting of East and West in a garden.

Although there has been a modern tradition in Europe and the Americas for importing Japanese designers to create Japanese-style gardens abroad, no such impetus has existed for Chinese gardens until the last quarter of the twentieth century. The new thirst for Chinese gardens is not only for authenticity of design, but also for authenticity of execution. These facsimile gardens are recreations of private gardens from the classical period of Chinese garden design, during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. They are designed in China by professional architects and craftsmen who are involved in the restoration of historic gardens there, mostly in the Suzhou area. Much of the garden architecture is prefabricated in China, and the building materials for both garden and structures are assembled and shipped to the host country. A team of Chinese designers and craftsmen accompanies the materials to the designated garden site and fabricates the entire garden, from walls and pavilions, to rockeries, tai hu stones, and plantings. The effect in some ways seems more real than a Suzhou garden, given the newness of material and the crispness of new construction. The spatial relationships and the livability of the garden are conveyed in ways that no photograph or publication can match. The visitor’s understanding of the whole garden expression is profoundly enhanced.

The first true facsimile Chinese garden was created for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City in 1981, at the behest of Mrs. Vincent Astor. The garden is a single courtyard, modeled after the courtyard and study, called the Late Spring Studio, of the Wang Shi Yuan garden in Suzhou. A full-scale prototype was built in Suzhou, now open there under the name East Garden, before shipping and constructing the garden in New York in 1981. The courtyard, a modest 46 feet by 18 feet in size, is mostly paved and contains rockeries, planting beds, tai hu stones, a half pavilion, and a covered walkway. Despite its severity and sparse plantings, this garden has garnered great interest in traditional Chinese garden design, an interest that has spread and deepened throughout North America.

Since that initial foray into Chinese design and construction of traditional gardens abroad, several dozen gardens have been constructed throughout the world primarily by two government-sanctioned Chinese landscape design companies. Many of these gardens were constructed under the concept of cultural exchange or friendship, sometimes as a direct result of a "sister city" relationship with a Chinese municipality, as in Sydney, Australia. Some are constructed as a

*Astor Court, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. Image: Metropolitan Museum of Art

Tai hu stones come from Lake Tai in the Yangtze River delta plain. Also known as scholar stones or viewing stones, they are shaped or naturally-occurring rocks appreciated by Chinese scholars from the Song dynasty onwards, and quite frequently found in traditional Chinese gardens.
cultural asset for a local community of Chinese immigrants, and others, like the proposed garden in Seattle, Washington, are built as a bridge of reconciliation between alienated communities. Although Asian gardens share some common roots, they differ as much as they are alike. The construction of Chinese gardens in Singapore, Japan, and other Pacific nations helps to contrast and compare garden traditions within Asia.

Canada boasts the first true Chinese landscape gardens, larger and more complex than the single court gardens, in Vancouver and Montreal. Germany is the Chinese garden center of Europe, with gardens in Berlin, Frankfurt, Munich, Stuttgart, Dusseldorf, and other cities. The United States continues to add new, and larger, gardens to its collection, with significant garden complexes opened in Staten Island, New York, Portland, Oregon, and San Marino, California.

The most ambitious Chinese garden recreation underway is at the Huntington Botanical Gardens, in San Marino, California. The garden will cover 12 acres with a lake, a stream, four clusters of court-yards and pavilions (identified with the 4 seasons), five collection gardens, numerous bridges, and a landscape setting more spacious and verdant that any of its predecessors around the world. With the first phase and the lake in place, the final scale of this garden may even outshine that of traditional gardens being constructed within China. The classical garden is a strong cultural touchstone in China, and new gardens in traditional styles outnumber those with more modern or “international” inspiration.

Seattle is also building its own Chinese garden, due to begin construction in the spring of 2010, with the arrival of a team of Chinese craftsmen. These new gardens at home and abroad continue the tradition of reinvention within the classical vocabulary and palette, and shun slavish copying. This model could well be emulated by other cultures in the conservation and adaptation of historic landscapes.


Top: Wall of the Colorful Clouds, Chinese Garden, Huntington Botanical Garden.
Bottom: Moon Gates, Chinese Garden, Huntington Botanical Garden.
Images: Patrick Chassé
When westerners see Chinese imperial gardens and scholar gardens, the basic layout, structures, and plants are relatively easy to grasp. Not readily understood is the Chinese approach to creating gardens, which is based on thousands of years of history, ancient legends, and philosophies. This approach results in a complexity of garden forms that allude to valued meanings and heightens the experience of being in the garden. As Loraine Kuck states, “...the Chinese have been a literate, artistic and conservative people and their culture has never been superseded by another. Traditions and form, therefore, have remained consistent.”¹

Imperial Gardens

The tradition of imperial gardens such as Beijing’s Temple of Heaven Park, Beihai (Gongyuan) Park, and the Old and New Summer Palaces goes back to the Qin and Han dynasties.² The first Qin emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi, united many kingdoms into a Chinese empire. Agriculture was the base of China’s economy and the emperor was the agent for ensuring harmony between heaven, man and earth. The rituals he performed to communicate with the supreme power in the sky or heaven, asking for advice on avoiding disasters and assuring successful harvests, became so frequent and formalized that they were moved from the sacred mountains to the large parks near the imperial palaces. These sites were the first imperial gardens.

A square earth platform in the garden symbolized the earth and the sacred mountains and a round altar was added to the platform to symbolize heaven, the supreme power. Later a dome roof was put on the altar, transforming it into the earliest garden building. The garden’s symbolic layering of earth, man, and sky also follows the three Confucian components of a harmonious cosmos.

Taoist beliefs are also represented in imperial gardens. The concept that human beings are an integral part of the cosmos and that it is important to be in harmony with nature (earth) and heaven is expressed in the concept of yin yang, a harmonious whole made up of interlocking opposites. The principle of yin yang is represented in the Chinese garden by deliberate contrasts in the gardens such as light and shade, square and round, regularity and asymmetry. All Chinese gardens are enclosed by walls to make them places of harmony and spiritual refuge.

The magnificence and extravagance of the large imperial gardens was a manifestation of the power of the emperor and the Chinese state. Military exercises took place in the imperial gardens and, later, lakes were dug for naval training. Kunming Lake, which extends across

²At Beihai Park one of the largest man made lakes exists – two other imperial lakes also remain, but are closed to the public as the site of government offices. The Old Summer Palace has areas recently restored, but ruins remain as testament to its devastation by the English and French in 1860. The New Summer Palace was reconstructed by Empress Cixi in 1888. The Temple of Heaven was restored in 2005-6. Smaller gardens remain in the Forbidden City. See the Time Line for dates of the Chinese dynasties.
a square mile at the New Summer Palace, was dredged out of a marsh; the soil was then used to build Longevity Hill, the other large topographic feature that dominates the garden. Often imperial gardens included recreations of favorite landscapes from other regions of the empire. West Lake at Hangzhou was so loved that it was frequently copied in later imperial gardens. Aesthetically the gardens were for enjoyment and spiritual renewal as well as entertaining.

During the Qin and Han Dynasties, legends of immortality fascinated the emperors. They believed that immortal spirits lived in the sacred mountains, like Mount Taishan, and on islands in the Eastern Sea that rise out of mist and fog. It is said that when the first Qin emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi, failed in seeking an elixir for longevity from the Eastern Sea, he built a fairy tale garden, living the rest of his life in his own immortal world. Many imperial garden conventions are thought to have come from that fantasy garden. Traditionally, lakes in gardens include three islands. The Han emperor Wudi was inspired to build lakes with islands to attract the immortal spirits to share their secrets of longevity. Today you can see an example at Beihai Park.

In imperial gardens, the siting of buildings and their features such as building materials and bright paint colors followed strict traditional conventions. Temple, mon-
building gardens. Landscape artists both influenced and were influenced by these gardens. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, scholar gardens became much more elaborate and had an influence on imperial gardens.

Although the owner of a scholar garden took pride in the creative process of building his distinctive garden, garden features were traditional. In the well-known Suzhou gardens, colors seem restrained, with white and black buildings and pale green plantings. Curving gazebo and pavilion roofs and hollowed out windows are delicate, feminine and Taoist in style. While opportunities for sitting and viewing the garden are numerous, there are twisting paved paths, views, miniature bridges and thin and long corridors that invite one to stroll. The genius of these gardens is the art of illusion. Small spaces are made larger and richer by dividing and hiding, twisting paths that go up and down, and borrowing views above their walls.

The use of allusion is also important. Fantastic shaped rocks from Lake Tai near Suzhou, with their unusual crevices and holes, have been used to represent Taoism’s concept of not fearing nature’s shifting patterns and uncertainty. Single or piled in rockeries, they symbolize sacred mountains thought to be the roots of the clouds and the sky. Water is also necessary in some form, usually a pond or stream, to bring energy to the garden and to balance the mountains for harmony. It provides wonderful reflections, tranquility, and cools the garden. Strolling around the garden and enjoying its varying views is deliberately reminiscent of looking at landscape paintings as they unfold in scroll books. Similar to imperial gardens, plant choices symbolize Confucian ideals such as perseverance, longevity, purity. Many of the names of gardens also refer to these ideals, such as the Garden of Tranquil Longevity at the Forbidden Palace in Beijing.

More understandable than the layering of meanings in Chinese gardens may be the impressions one has when visiting them. Yo Yi Chen describes her own feelings, “The imperial garden Beihai Park in Beijing is like a fairyland. The happy and exciting colors such as red, gold, orange, indigo, purple and jade green covering the buildings are wonderful bathed in golden rays of the evening sun. When I am surrounded by exotic flowers, songs of

Above: Wen Zhengming, Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician, Ming Dynasty, 1551. Image: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Below: An uneven and twisted path in The Garden to Please, Yu Yuan, Shanghai. Image: Karen Falb

Continued bottom of page 8
Once again, it is with pleasure and much gratitude to our editor JoAnn Robinson and to Karen Falb, as well as to our literary contributors, that we present the Spring 2010 issue of Perspectives, which has Chinese gardens as its major theme. Hopefully, you will all have the opportunity some day to visit the remarkable landscapes of this ancient land, which is presented so well at the Landscape Institute by our member and special “sister” Yo Yi Chen. May you take pleasure in reading it, and may it inspire you to contribute your own research, writings and musings to this publication.

In the last issue of Perspectives, Spring 2009, the world looked very bleak to many of us with the economy going to hell in a hand basket, as the saying goes. However, we did not expect the shock that Harvard University, sponsor of the Landscape Institute (LI), would in early summer withdraw all funding for this vital institution, sending its administration into a tailspin. The LI has now become a vital and welcome part of the Boston Architectural College (BAC), a suitable home. The curriculum and tuition structure of the LI will, over time, be evaluated and restructured, but with the steadfastness and wisdom of its Director Heather Heimarck, it will find the right course to navigate towards the traditionally academic and highly valued degrees and certifications.

Speaking of training and continuing education, it is common wisdom that the marketplace will dictate the professional know-how required to succeed. It is to this end that NELDHA advocates and urges its members to participate in programs that qualify them to practice the methodologies and theories that guide sustainable design and land care. Therefore, I highly recommend the Northeast Farming Organization (NOFA) whose programs offer certification in organic land care; the Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Association’s (MNLA) certification programs for MA Certified Landscape Professionals and/or MA Certified Horticulturists. With a little extra work, qualified applicants to Massachusetts Arborists Association can also become arborists. I have observed with amazement that the opportunities to succeed as landscape professionals are there – just trust your instincts to make the right decisions.

NELDHA programs aim to educate and introduce you to the cutting edges of these market forces. The NELDHA Board is here to help you and welcomes your input, your ideas and your participation in all its programs, as learners, presenters, and as board members.

Have a successful year and use every opportunity offered to network with others, whether it is through NELDHA, a listing on our website, a blog of your own, LinkedIn, Face Book, or Twitter.

Best Wishes, Heidi Kost-Gross

Karen Forslund Falb and JoAnn Robinson wrote this article after many long and interesting discussions on these topics with Yo Yi Chen, a former instructor at the Landscape Institute. The thrust of the discussions was to try to clarify for westerners how Chinese ideological, religious, artistic, and literary concepts are essential to the understanding of Chinese gardens.
based on an assessment of their interest and participation in NELDHA programs. While NELDHA continues to maintain a close relationship with the Landscape Institute, our primary focus is on you, our members, who come to us from many different backgrounds. We are here to serve you in your professional life.

**Professional Resources**

NELDHA continues to look for ways to enhance your professions. One step we are taking this year is to revamp our website. We hope to have it up and running before the beginning of our next fiscal year, October 1, 2010. We will keep it from feeling stale and more up to date. It will feature news about you and your accomplishments, thus giving you exposure to the general public. The member side will provide professional resources and contact information. We need you to give us information to make this work.

Your membership in NELDHA is a bargain; our programs are run by volunteers and we continue to keep your dues low with careful management of expenses. This year NELDHA hosted three lectures, a student reception, and Career Day at the BAC. Our Annual Tea was at the Arnold Arboretum and our Annual Dinner is at a beautiful new venue, the MIT Endicott House. We brought former graduates together to tell the story about what happened to them after completing their Independent Projects; sponsored a workshop at the Queset Garden in North Easton; and are developing self-guided walking tours of the Back Bay and North End. We posted back issues of *Perspectives* and the *Resource Book* on the NELDHA website. All this was done by our generous member volunteers.

This year your membership application contained a survey asking what programming you would like to see NELDHA sponsor. We will tabulate the results and use it to develop programs for next year. Next year our survey will be on mentoring. Our goal is to foster new members and ensure our profession and our reputations are protected with sound and ethical business practices.

See you at the Annual Tea next October! Membership and web listing renewals are due October 1, 2010.  

*Maureen O’Brien, Membership*

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**Restoration of the Qianlong Garden**  
**Forbidden City, Beijing**

The Qianlong Garden occupies a two-acre nook in the vast complex of the Forbidden City in Beijing. China’s longest reigning monarch, the Qianlong Emperor, built the garden and its 27 structures between 1771 and 1776 as a retirement compound. The district had been closed off by imperial decree and was largely untouched since the last emperor left the Forbidden City in 1924.

That seclusion meant the garden and buildings stayed remarkably intact. Today, the complex is undergoing restoration; work on the garden is expected to be finished by 2017. The Qianlong garden is the sole survivor of the landscapes the emperor created. He designed it as a scholar’s garden, with rockeries, pavilions, pathways, and stands of bamboo connecting four courtyards.

The emperor spent only the winter months there, so the garden was viewed primarily through the many windows – glass had recently been introduced to China from Europe. He drew on inspiration from scholar’s gardens he had visited in southern China, and he imported workmen from that region. He retained existing trees. A catalpa that was a favorite subject for the emperor’s poems grows still, casting its ancient shadow.

No expense was spared in creating the luxurious interiors, many of which bring the outdoors inside with *trompe l’œil* nature paintings. The Palace Museum, the state agency that administers the Forbidden City, worked with the World Monument Fund to complete restoration of one of the 27 buildings, Juanqinzhai, translated as “Studio of Exhaustion from Diligent Service,” in 2008. Among the international group of conservation experts involved was Nancy Berliner, curator of Chinese Art at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Mass. An exhibition of furnishings and artifacts from the Qianlong buildings opens at the Peabody Essex this fall.

The Qianlong garden restoration faces challenges such as finding artists knowledgeable about the techniques involved. “The craftsmanship of 18th century China had
The history of Beijing’s public parks goes back to the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) when imperial gardens formerly enjoyed by the emperor, his family and large court were opened to all Chinese citizens. The Olympic Green Park is the newest, an important project of the city’s rapid development.

Views on the Olympic Green Park

reached a peak,” Ms. Berliner says. “The work was done by the very best craftspeople. Those skills have almost disappeared.” Only written descriptions, not plans, survive from the emperor’s time. “We know there were three-dimensional models, but they no longer exist,” she says.

Another difficulty will be providing controlled access to the garden and additional buildings once they are restored and opened to the public. (Visitors to the Forbidden City can walk the entire north-south axis, but have limited access to individual districts.)

Berliner says Chinese conservation guidelines are similar to those accepted by international groups. What is perhaps changing is recognition of the need for more interpretative signage. She recalls an area of the Forbidden City walled off for restoration during the Beijing Olympics. Instead of leaving the wall blank, officials placed panels that explained the project and hung a large scrim with a picture of how the building would look when finished. Westerners take these public relations efforts for granted, but they are less common to the Chinese.

Though the Qianlong garden occupies a narrow space, the layout gives it a feeling of openness. “You don’t feel confined,” Berliner says. “It’s very calm.”

April Austin

“The Emperor’s Private Paradise: Treasures from the Forbidden City” will be at the Peabody Essex Museum from September 1, 2010, to January 9, 2011.
The site of the new national stadium is on a long central axis. In the central area, Olympic buildings are clustered on the west of the axis, balanced by a more natural setting on the east. The center axis of the lower two park areas was kept free of buildings and originally designed as a greenway for pedestrians. This long walk originated in the southern Asian Games area; its focal point was a man made hill, representing a sacred mountain, in the northern Olympic Forest Park.

Another inventive design integrating the three areas was a watercourse created by channeling water from the Qinghe River. Shaped as a dragon, it alluded to the traditional Chinese symbol of national power and wealth favored especially by the emperors of the Qing Dynasty. In the original master plan, the dragon is a playful image with its head in the Olympic Forest Park and tail surrounding the Asian Games area.

Not readily seen in plan views is the park’s proposed infrastructure, which addressed the issues of pedestrian and traffic circulation and utility efficiency. A great effort was made by the Sasaki team to use the latest techniques and systems to build a sustainable urban park.

It is interesting to compare the winning master plan with the park as it was constructed. Alan Ward has said that the Sasaki experience of winning the design contest was “bitter sweet” because the firm was not rehired to implement the plan. 4 There were several major changes made by the Chinese planners. 5 The shape of the dragon head in the watercourse became more abstract, and the body was pushed out of the central axis.

When Beijing was chosen in July 2001, as the site for the 2008 games, the Chinese were jubilant about the opportunity to use the games as a show case for their long cultural history and recent economic prosperity. The Party Central Committee worked with a Beijing organizing committee to plan a new urban park of Olympian size to accommodate the games and serve a developing region of the city. 1 China’s eminent domain rights enabled them to quickly remove villages, warehouses and factories from an area of 2,815 acres.

Symbolically important was the location of the park on the north south axis of the cultural center of Beijing with Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City to the south. By early 2002, an international design competition was organized to create a master plan for the site with the instructions that “the design should be comprehensive, integrated, representative of the Chinese culture, and contemporary.” 2

A team from Sasaki Associates 3 won over 57 entries from 21 countries. Sasaki’s team was led by Alan Ward who studied the history of landscape design as a student at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design. Another important member was Jie Hu, who had studied Chinese gardens as a graduate student in China.

The greatest challenge was the size and scale of the project. The park’s overall area is 3.3 time the size of Central Park in New York. It is flat and just south of a mountain range. There were three contiguous areas to design: (1) the site of the 1990 Asian Games; (2) a new central area for Olympic facilities, and (3) a large, partially forested area. The Sasaki plan incorporates features from traditional imperial gardens.

1This land was shown as public space in a 1993 Beijing development plan.
3Sasaki Associates of Watertown, MA, was founded in 1953 by Hideo Susaki, who chaired Harvard University’s Landscape Architecture Department from 1958-1968. He advocated an interdisciplinary approach to design.

The site of the new national stadium is on a long central axis. In the central area, Olympic buildings are clustered on the west of the axis, balanced by a more natural setting on the east. The center axis of the lower two park areas was kept free of buildings and originally designed as a greenway for pedestrians. This long walk originated in the southern Asian Games area; its focal point was a man made hill, representing a sacred mountain, in the northern Olympic Forest Park.

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1This quote is from a talk by Alan Ward on his Olympic Green Park experience given at the NELDHA Annual Dinner April 10, 2009.
2Although the memory of Sasaki’s role has diminished with time, Jie Hu is now respected for his master plan and implementation of Olympic Forest Park, the northerly area of the Olympic Green Park, a project he took over after leaving Sasaki in 2003. He is the director of the Urban Planning and Design Institute at Tsinghua University in Beijing and an important promoter of Chinese urban design based on regional ecology and culture.
and emptied of islands. The new tennis, temporary baseball, and other Olympic sports facilities were moved from the Asian Games site to the southwest corner of the Olympic Forest Park. But all in all, the fundamental concepts of the Sasaki team remain in the finished park, a testament to the excellence of the original plan.

How well does the park function? I was in Beijing during the Olympics and for security reasons was only able to walk there on days that I had a ticket to an event. The views of its famous “bird’s nest” national stadium, “water cube” natatorium, and the dragon waterway are spectacular. However, I felt lost within the park’s enormous scale, and the summer heat and sun seemed relentless in the open area of the paved central axis. The park is enjoyed by nearby residents and it continues as a great tourist attraction; it is the venue for The China Tennis Open, conferences, concerts, and exhibitions. Plans are underway to convert the national stadium into a hotel/conference area and the natatorium is being enlarged to an aquatic center. The Chinese are a practical people, and so one can expect the park to evolve as it serves new functions.

Karen Forslund Falb

Chinese Garden Resources


Web Resources

There is a very complete bibliography online at the Bard College website: http://inside.bard.edu/~louis/gardens/bibliochina.html