

Self-Guided Tour

HILLWOOD
IN FOCUS

JAPANESE-STYLE GARDEN



CONCLUSION

A garden is a product of several factors including the intent of the designer, the desires of the owner, prevailing trends, and the time in history in which it is created. The Japanese-style Garden at Hillwood illustrates a 1950s American perspective of Japanese culture and its gardens, and gives us an insight into both worlds.

Hillwood Museum & Gardens

4155 Linnean Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20008

Hillwood Museum and Gardens is open Tuesday-Saturday, 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. and on select evenings and Sundays. The estate is closed during the month of February and on national holidays. Reservations are required.

General Information
Phone: 202/686-8500
Fax: 202/966-7846
TDD: 202/363-3056

Reservations: 202/686-5807 or 1/877-HILLWOOD
Café Reservations: 202/686-8505, ext. 8811

Hillwood web site: www.hillwoodmuseum.org

Cover: Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*)

To begin your tour of the Japanese-style Garden, use your Map & Guide and the map in this brochure to find the path overlooking the garden.

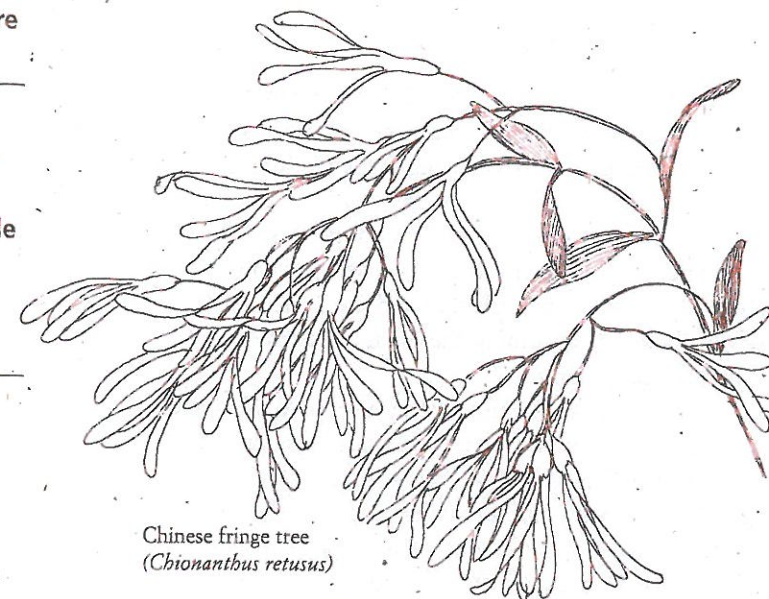
Because the walkways and stairs in the Japanese-style Garden are made of natural stone, which can be uneven, and handrails are absent beyond the first few steps, some visitors may be uncomfortable walking through the garden. This tour and the beauty of the garden, however, can be enjoyed from the overlook flanked by stone guard dogs.

INTRODUCTION

Hillwood's Japanese-style Garden was built for Marjorie Merriweather Post in 1958. The garden's designer, Shogo Myaida, had built gardens in the Japanese style since arriving in the United States in the 1920s. Japanese-style gardens, in fact anything with a Japanese theme, were immensely popular with the American public in the early part of the 20th century, and Japanese gardens were created throughout the country. With the onset of World War II, anything associated with Japanese culture was considered unpatriotic and these early gardens were often destroyed or neglected. The late 1950s saw a renewed interest in Japanese culture, spurring a new taste for Japanese-inspired design in architecture and landscape.

The design principles of Japanese gardens are heavily influenced by the native, animistic Shinto religion of Japan and by the austere philosophy of Zen Buddhism. Many designers of Japanese-style gardens in America were, like Mr. Myaida, of Japanese descent. They sought to unite Japanese aesthetics and design with American sensibilities and lifestyles. Hillwood's Japanese-style Garden is an excellent example of this artful hybridization of Japanese and American cultures.

Throughout this tour, we hope that you will experience and enjoy the Japanese-style Garden with new eyes. You will see how Shogo Myaida adapted Japanese design elements and aesthetics to meet the needs and desires of Mrs. Post. You will learn about traditional Japanese gardens and about how 1950s America viewed Japanese culture.



Chinese fringe tree
(*Chionanthus retusus*)

STOP 1 GARDEN OVERLOOK

As you look into the garden from the head of the waterfall, you can tell immediately that this garden is unlike the other, European-influenced gardens at Hillwood. The garden below you is filled with sculpture and plants that instantly bring to mind an Asian influence, including the two *komainu*, or guard dogs, flanking this overlook. These guard dogs are usually found at a garden's entrance. The closed-mouthed dog is meant to welcome good *kami*, or spirits, into the traditional Japanese garden while the open-mouthed dog frightens evil *kami* away. Here, in this 1950s American Japanese-style garden, they sit, not at the entrance of the garden, but at this overlook, as if inviting visitors to their first view of the garden below.

As you scan the scene you may notice that color is used sparingly. Most of the plants within a Japanese garden are evergreens—pines, spruces, and false cypress. This monochromatic palette minimizes the distraction of color and encourages the viewer to focus instead on the structural form of the garden. Flowering trees and shrubs, especially azaleas, are used for the contrasting textures of their foliage and bark rather than for their spring or autumn color. One exception is the Japanese maple that hangs over the falls. Its bright red foliage unfurls in the spring and changes to a burnished reddish-green during the summer. The delicate fringe-like leaves, which turn an intense dark red before falling to the ground, suggest the Japanese appreciation of the ephemeral nature of beauty and life—the “permanent-impermanence” celebrated in Buddhist philosophy.

Move to the top of the stairs leading into the garden.

STOP 2 ENTRANCE TO THE GARDEN

As you stand at the top of the steps leading into the garden, you will notice an abundance of Asian statuary—lanterns, figures, animals—dotting the landscape. In most Japanese gardens, sculpture is used sparingly according to the principle of *kanso*, or simplicity. Mrs. Post added decorations reminiscent of Japan to her garden to suit her taste. The quantity of sculpture and the green metal flower-shaped lamps lining the paths are examples of American adaptations.

At the top of the hill, slightly to your right, stands a striking *kasuga* lantern made of granite. Kasuga lanterns were originally used in Buddhist temple architecture to light the way to the public shrines and were later adopted by the Shinto religion for the same purpose. These lanterns are decorated with a carved lotus blossom motif, which may represent purity and enlightenment.

They have been used in Japanese garden design since the sixteenth century. While lanterns in Japan were traditionally lit with small oil lamps, Mrs. Post had many of the lanterns in this garden fitted with electric lights.

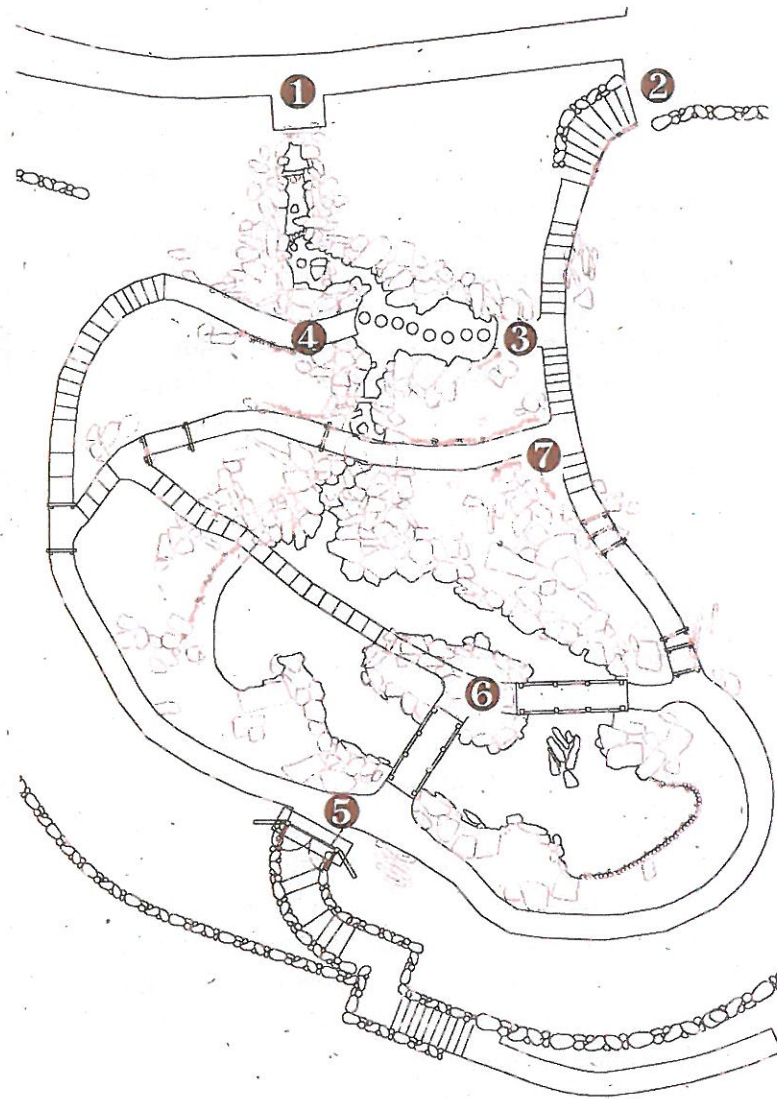
Move down a few steps, stopping at the small pair of stone dogs.

STOP 3 UPPER POOL

At the edge of the small pool guarded by two smaller dogs, take a look at the round stepping-stones that provide a path across the water. These stepping-stones are reproductions of the originals, which had deteriorated over the years and were replaced during the 2001 restoration. However, even the original stepping-stones were not exactly what they seemed. Using stepping-stones designed to look like old millstones was a subtle use of the Japanese concept of *mitate*, in which the use of unanticipated materials or objects introduces an element of surprise into the garden. As you wander the garden, you may come upon other such unexpected, yet delightful, details.

Sound is a vital element in Japanese garden design. Spend a few moments just listening to the movement of the water as it courses through the cascade and splashes on the rocks.

Cross the upper pool and pause at the other side.



STOP 4 TOP FALLS

Now that you have crossed the upper pool, let your eyes wander from the pool up the cascade towards its source. You can see many animal sculptures, including a small stone turtle and bronze crane—both traditional symbols of longevity in Japan. Look for a medium-sized orange stone protruding from the water at the top of the initial waterfall. This stone, known as the *Dragon's Gate*, divides the water, giving it more sensory interest than would a single sheet of water. The traditional symbolism of this stone is that of the carp, whose determination to swim upstream is rewarded by its transformation into a dragon. While many of the stones, sculptures, and design elements within Japanese gardens have traditional meanings attached to them, we do not know if Mr. Myaida intended for Hillwood's Japanese-style Garden to be interpreted with these meanings.

The placement of each stone and boulder within this garden, however, was very intentional. It is often said that the "stones are the bones" of a Japanese garden, and that is no less true for Mrs. Post's garden. During the 2001

restoration of the garden, each of the over five-hundred boulders had to be precisely surveyed, tagged, and removed from the garden in order to expose the concrete shell and waterworks underneath. After this infrastructure was replaced with modern equipment, each boulder was returned to its exact position and orientation to the rest of the garden.

Follow the winding path to the redwood gate at the bottom of the garden.

STOP 5 BOTTOM OF GARDEN

Standing in front of the redwood gate, you have a view of the entire hillside garden. Mr. Myaida wanted this garden to give the feeling of a mountain landscape with a river stream cascading through the rugged terrain into a small lake and finally out to sea. Japanese garden scenes are often inspired by full-scale natural landscapes. The hillside location of this garden fit into this traditional scheme, the upper and lower pools representing a small lake and the ocean, respectively.

Now look across the water to the small gnarled pine tree on the island. Japanese black pines (*Pinus thumbergiana*) traditionally symbolize old age and longevity. The twisted, windblown shape of the pine suggests that this little tree has survived the harshest of its ocean-side environment. The subtle feeling of melancholy in the presence of something that has withstood the test of time and fate, such as this tree, is known in Japan as *sabi*, and is an aesthetic often found in Japanese gardens. However naturally age-worn the tree appears, it is the product of extensive and purposeful pruning and training, much as one sees on bonsai.

Turning away from the island for a moment, notice the redwood gate behind you. Traditional Japanese gardens often use the scenery beyond the boundaries of the garden to give an illusion of great space. In the case of Mrs. Post's Japanese-style Garden, the gate provides a visual and physical transition from the carefully kept gardens into the woodlands beyond. Such gates are usually placed at a garden's entrance. As we do not know with certainty either the designer's or the owner's intent in the placement of these gates, we can easily ponder the decision to place them here at the bottom of the garden. Are they meant to suggest a separate entrance into the garden from the woodlands, as Mrs. Post often used them to enter the garden from her woodland walks? Is the designer playfully inverting the traditional entrance into an exit from the garden? Or was the gate simply a decorative element that provided a visual boundary and evoked an Asian flavor?

Turning away from the gates, cross over the redwood bridge to the small island.

STOP 6 ISLAND

Turning away from the gates, cross over the redwood bridge to the small island. The semi-circular bridge—known as a *drum* or *moon bridge* because its reflection in the water creates the illusion of a circle—traditionally symbolizes passage from this world to the next. Islands, such as this one, are usually found in the middle of a large pond in traditional Japanese gardens and symbolize the mythical island of the deities, a land of everlasting youth and bliss.

I CAUGHT A PETAL FALLEN FROM A CHERRY TREE
IN MY HAND.
OPENING THE FIST
I FIND NOTHING THERE.
—KYOSHI TAKAHAMA (1874-1959)

Crowded onto this little island are another kasuga lantern, the pine for longevity, a Chinese fringe tree (*Chionanthus retusus*), and a Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*). The Chinese fringe tree, like the weeping cherry tree just uphill from the island, blooms for a short time in early April. These soft white blooms evoke a feeling opposite to that of *sabi*, or weathered age, referring, with their temporary flush of color, to the impermanence of life. Around the island are a stone turtle, bronze goldfish and frog fountains, and two bronze phoenix sculptures. This exuberant abundance of sculpture is a very American quality, unlike the sparing use of objects within a traditional Japanese garden.

In the almost fifty years since the garden was built, the trees on this island had grown too large for the island. Tree experts determined that the fringe tree did not have long to live. The Japanese maple's health was failing. During the 2001 restoration, the original trees on the island were replaced with younger, healthier specimens of the same species. These new trees have many years of life ahead of them in this garden.

Cross over the bridge and proceed uphill stopping at the alcove on the left.

STOP 7 HOTEI

Coming up the garden path, you will see to your left a small niche surrounded by wooden posts called *rangui*. Inside you will find a sculpture of a bald, smiling man with a round belly and a sack over his shoulder. This is *Hotei*, the Shinto god of happiness and good fortune. This sculpture was given to Mrs. Post in the early 1960s as a "laughing Buddha." *In Japanese mythology*

Walk back to the entrance of the garden at the top of the stairs to look out over the garden.