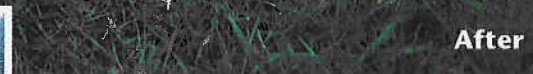
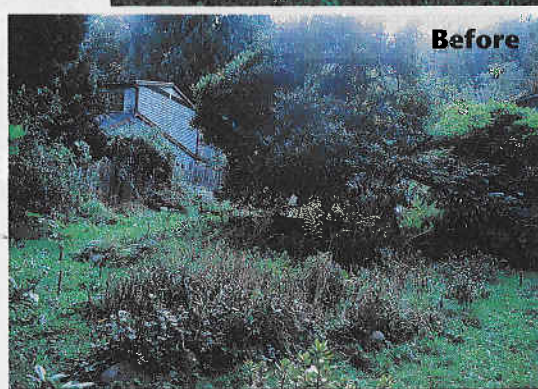
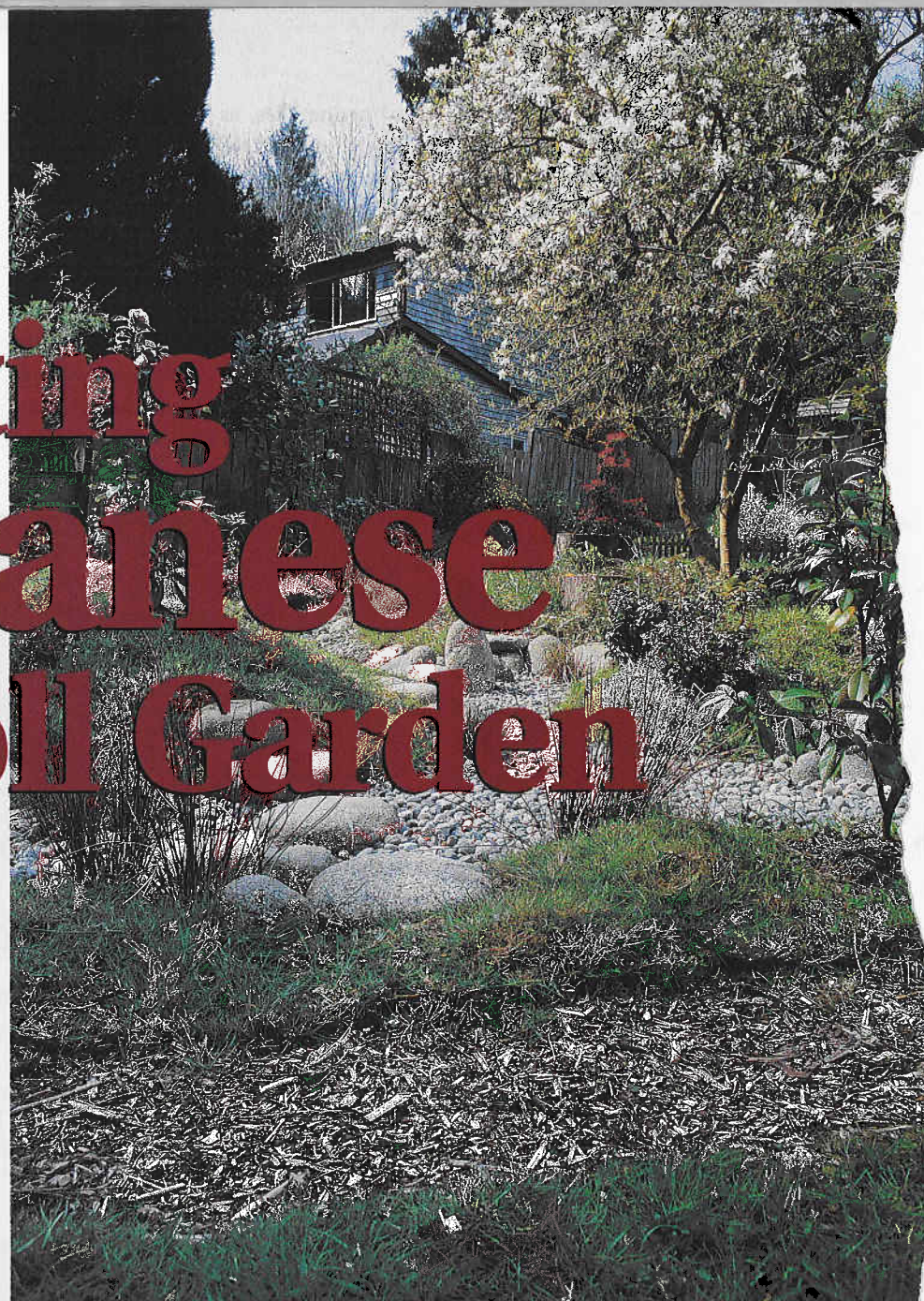


# Creating a Japanese Stroll Garden

CYNTHIA KANETSUKA  
TEXT AND PHOTOS

**W**hile it is perhaps stretching my mind to believe that there are fairies at the bottom of my garden, I do believe there is magic. I bought my little cottage on Bowen Island because I fell in love with its garden. At first sight this wild rambling English style garden with wisteria around the kitchen windows and old-fashioned pink Abraham Darby roses brought tears to my eyes. Much of the quarter acre garden was seriously overgrown, but right in front of my kitchen were two organized raised beds for vegetables. Misguidedly I thought I would work it into shape in no time, but with an unexpected bad back this was not to be.

After a year of experimentation and much trial and error, it appears more unkempt than ever. At this point magic



*A wild rambling garden is transformed into a low maintenance contemplative space.*

arrives in the shape of my friend Dorothy (whom I have not seen in more than a decade), and her landscape designer husband Yoshihiro Kawasaki, a Japanese leprechaun of a man. Trained in the princi-

ples of Japanese landscaping at the Kyoto School of Art (in the city where most of the remaining classical gardens of Japan are situated), he had designed gardens in Japan, the United States, Australia and India. Having just moved to North Vancouver from Kyoto they are eager to get their hands into B.C. soil.

They visit and show me photographs of Yoshi's work. After I lament on my



Bricks aren't a traditional Japanese building material (left) but were used to create a fan-shaped patio overlooking a waterfall. Selecting the rocks to represent Buddha and his five disciples (bottom) was an almost meditative event.

high maintenance garden, we wander into the jumble of fall dying flowers, while Yoshi assesses the site carefully. Taking into consideration the light and soil conditions plus my needs, Yoshi suggests that the lower part of the garden would be a natural for *kaiyushiki* or a contemplative stroll garden.

Japanese stroll gardens were first constructed in the 1600s and have curving pathways that lead you through a miniature landscape composed of hills, rocks, a stream, mosses, ferns, small trees and plants designed to create peace and tranquility. Traditionally, flowers are not emphasized in Japanese gardens as they can be too distracting. However, flowering shrubs such as azaleas, rhododendrons, camellias, wisteria and kerria are used to bring a sense of colour. The idea is to create simple elegance, so that as you stroll you can pause at any moment and a new aspect is revealed to you. This idea draws on Zen philosophy's idea of suggestion rather than completion, *mie-gakure*. It is designed so that you feel one with the environment.

### Multiple Design Elements

At our second meeting, I am presented with designs on paper and given a cost estimate. In the details I see miniature paths, a dry waterfall laid out with rocks and a stream and pond filled with pebbles. There are mounds representing hills and an island in the pond. Shrubs, miniature trees, bamboo, grasses and ferns complete the scene. To create a unique feature and to use some bricks I want incorporated, Yoshi has placed a small circular focal point near the waterfall to represent Sarnath in India, where the Buddha gave his first sermons. Bordered with the bricks and filled with pebbles, six rocks symbolically represent Buddha and his five disciples. Yoshi designed this garden to fit into a space of approximately 16





## Drawing on the Zen philosophy of suggestion rather than completion, each time you pause, the garden reveals a new aspect.

metres by 12 metres (52' by 30'). With a low wooden fence separating the lower from the upper garden, there is still plenty of room for my wildflowers, fruit, vegetables and herb garden.

To my delight, although my garden has been established for five years, there are a number of shrubs, and trees that fit into the Japanese design. My well established *Magnolia stellata* is in the perfect position. Several rhododendrons, an azalea, hostas and a *Pieris japonica* will be transplanted to play new roles. Two laurel bushes will be moved to provide screening.

The work commences on the new moon at the beginning of October, an auspicious time to begin a project and great for planting shrubs and trees. At first it is difficult for me to see the peren-

nials and hundreds of spring bulbs being dug up. One of the raised vegetable beds has to be moved to the upper area of my garden and I feel sad to see it go. Thankfully Yoshi works quickly marking the land with stakes where important focal points will be, which takes my mind off my loss.

Selecting the appropriate rocks for the waterfall and to represent Buddha and his five disciples requires an almost meditative Zen approach. We visit a woman on the island who offers a large pile of rocks of all different shapes and sizes. Yoshi spends considerable time inspecting the shapes, but most of them are unsuitable. However, a small cove turns up a few choice rocks that are perfect for the waterfall, and the Buddha stone is found later lying face down in the forest.

Our next trip is to the gardening centre where we selected two Nuccio's Pearl camellia trees, three bamboo (*Phyllostachys aurea*) and a dogwood (*Cornus kousa*), a Japanese snowbell tree (*Styrax japonica*), and an *Enkianthus cam-*

*panulatus*. I am attracted to a wonderful shrub with purple berries and am delighted to find that it is quite revered in Japan. The beautyberry (*Callicarpa bodinieri*) in Japan is named after Lady Murasaki who wrote *The Tale of Genji*. (The Japanese invest each of their plants with spiritual qualities or symbolic significance.)

After a couple of days' work, the whole panorama takes on a different image. Yoshi piles mounds representing hills, while Dorothy assists in digging areas for the pebble filled dry stream, pond and two curving stroll paths. Yoshi works in silence stopping only for a break to contemplate where to place the stepping stones which will cross the stream and lead to the island.

A week after commencing, Yoshi skillfully places the rocks for the waterfall, and like a half painted picture an exciting new landscape emerges. When I inquire why he is replanting an *Andromeda* a short distance to the right in front of the waterfall, he explains the concept of *miegakure* and how my eye will be subtly drawn to the waterfall. Twenty small azaleas are planted around the stroll path adding a softness to the scene, while the dogwood planted where the path curves creates an eye-stopping effect.

### A Reflective Seating Spot

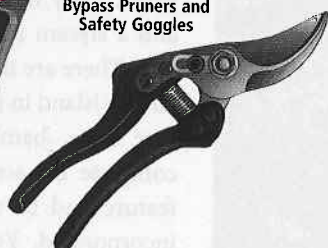
When I return home one day I find that Yoshi has created a small brick patio in the shape of a fan, where I can sit and drink tea and look at the waterfall and Sarnath. As the garden nears completion bark mulch is laid on the pathways and two cubic feet of pebbles fill in the stream and pond. Ornamental grasses, reeds, ferns and tiny kinnikinnick shrubs add the final touches.

The garden is finished close to the full moon and I wait each night for the time when I can walk the path catching silvery glimpses of stones and shrubs. The purpose of a stroll garden is to instill peace and tranquillity, but for me it has also created poetry and harmony.

## Gifts for the Gardener Starting at \$10



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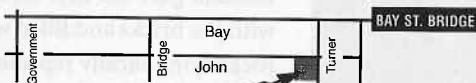
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