

China Garden Philosophy & Elements

A Brief Sampling of Thousands of Years of Chinese Tradition
"Chinese gardens are cosmic diagrams, revealing a profound and ancient view of the world and of man's place in it." Maggie Keswick



Architecture

- Structures harmonize with and enhance nature; frame views; connect to calligraphy and poetry
- Paths lead one through a succession of hidden delights
- Offers places for contemplation, viewing, writing, and conversation



Water

- Water evokes images of rivers, lakes, oceans
- Reflects and enhances its surroundings
- Can be still or changing
- Adds sound
- Key element in garden/landscape painting



Plants

- Willow signifies pliability, spiritual protection, friendship, spring
- Lotus rises from the muddy depths to bloom; a sign of purity; harmony; summer
- Chrysanthemum is associated with longevity and autumn
- Pine is a symbol of longevity and winter
- Plum is resilience, hope; symbol of winter/early spring
- Peony can represent wealth, honor, beauty, love



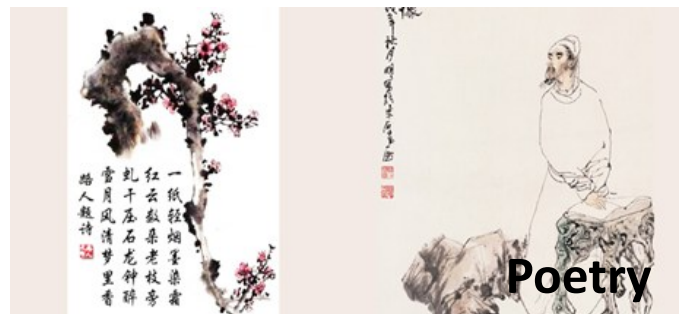
Rocks

- Evoke mountain ranges and towering peaks in nature
- Can reference mountains in paintings, poems, or life
- Can be pitted, patterned, intricate
- Act as a focus for contemplation
- Can represent a particular region
- Symbolize stability and permanence
- Key element in garden/landscape painting



Philosophy

- 天人合一 = "nature and humankind become one"
- Important to connect with nature even in urban setting
- A Garden is a microcosm of the larger world of nature
- Harmonize original landscape with addition of human designs
- Designed to create a sense of wonder and discovery; not reveal all at once
- Captures the sensation of wandering through a landscape painting



Poetry

- Poetry is a key element in gardens
- Found in the form of couplets and Chinese characters
- Can frame views and give context to elements
- Enhances one's emotional connection to the views
- Provides for contemplation of nature and life

China Garden Aesthetics (Cont)

China Garden Design Principles

Framed Views

China garden design uses openings to frame views, bringing a visitor's attention to that particular view or focal point. Designers use a variety of openings, like "leaky (open pattern) windows," doorways, gaps in vegetation, etc. Creates a sense of discovery.



Hide and Reveal

Chinese garden design takes the visitor on a journey of discovery through the garden and invites one to wonder what is around the next corner, blocking views, hinting at views, and slowly revealing various focal points and features, rather than showing everything at once.



Borrowed Views (Jie Jing)

Chinese garden design may incorporate surrounding vistas and views outside the garden, rather than hiding them. Working with views outside of the garden can form backdrops to what is inside the garden and can increase the sense of space.



Feng shui and Yin-Yang

Chinese garden design uses Feng Shui principles to harmonize the garden. It also embodies Taoist principles of Yin-Yang by harmonizing opposites and creating a balance between contrasts, such as light and shaded areas, and solid elements like rocks and open spaces (water and courtyards), curved and straight pathways, secluded introspection spots and areas for social interaction and activity.