



## Portland Classical Chinese Garden The Five Elements: ARCHITECTURE

### The Portland Classical Chinese Garden ~ At Home in Nature

The Portland Classical Chinese Garden was built in Oregon during the year 2000. However, it looks much the same as gardens built in the busy city of Suzhou, China around 600 years ago, during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). These beautiful gardens combined many buildings surrounded by nature. Rocks, water, and plants surrounded buildings where a high-ranking official of China's government lived with his family. The walls of the garden blocked out the demands of government work and city life. Inside his home and garden, the Chinese official could paint, write and study inside his living landscape painting. As people enter *Lan Su Yuan*, the Chinese name of the garden found in Portland, Oregon, they can imagine how people lived in China many hundreds of years ago.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Explain how Ming dynasty-style gardens were designed to allow people to live in nature inside a city.

### **Making a Garden Grow: Zig-zag paths...Borrowed and Framed views... Leak Windows...Hidden courtyards...**

To make the home and garden appear larger on the inside of the garden walls than could be imagined when standing outside, many forms of building were used long ago in China as well as in modern times in *Lan Su Yuan*. Portland's Chinese garden is not very big—less than one city block—yet visitors often say that they feel like they are in wandering inside a wilderness area, even though they are still in one city block. Design techniques used in a Chinese garden make the garden seem bigger than its actual size. Exploring the garden allows each visitor to discover nature's mysteries hidden among various the plants, stone, architecture, and building designs. Architectural designs include:

**Zig-zag paths:** Garden designers use these crooked paths to direct a person's attention to new views with each step. Used in a bridge over a garden lake or as a twisting-turning path, the zig-zag design produces a slower journey.

**Borrowed views:** In China, a distant hill or nearby pagoda are 'loaned' to the views inside the garden. Likewise, well-placed rocks inside the garden create scenic views of 'distant' mountains. Also, clouds floating overhead are seen in the reflection of the garden lake 'borrowing' the endless sky inside the garden.

**Framed views:** Nature enters every building through windows outlined with beautiful and complex carved wooden frames. The columns of a pavilion or

the hanging branches of a willow tree frame a moving painting for the viewer. In this way, each window or framed view becomes a living landscape painting. Looking through each different frame is like entering the garden again and again.

**Leak windows:** Unique and graceful patterns form the leak windows that are set into a garden wall. Animal, flower and geometric shapes open up the solid architecture creating a kind of secret passageway. Glimpses of nature's wonders 'leaked' through the wall are meant to spark a mental journey into what might be found on the path just beyond. Likewise, a backwards glance through a leak window, allows the landscape to be re-visited and distinctly remembered. Small hidden courtyards are only visited with the eyes through these patterned windows.

**DRAW OR DESCRIBE** how a classical Chinese Garden can appear bigger than it really is.

### **Chinese Garden Architecture Creates New Views of Nature**

Here are some examples of specific architectural features found within *Lan Su Yuan*, the Portland Classical Chinese Garden:

**Covered Walkway Bridge:** This is called *Double Rainbows Resting in the Clouds*. The covered bridge looks like a rainbow over the water or the curving spine of a powerful dragon.

**Lounge Hall:** *Hall of Reflections in Clear Ripples* would have been the 'family room' during the Ming dynasty. Views of the changing seasons and flowing water are visible through the hand-carved window frames, adding light and nature's movements to the liveliness of a family's time spent together.

**Land Boat:** This pavilion is shaped like boats in ancient China. The changing views from the boat's deck give the feeling of floating down the timeless canals around Suzhou. In fact, garden designers in Suzhou say that *The Painted Boat in Misty Rain* 'sailed' between the two cities in friendship.

**Main Hall:** The *Hall of Brocade Clouds* is where celebrations would have been held for families and important guests. The walls are entirely made up of framed windows. The garden's landscape—water, mountains (rocks), and forest (plants) are visible in all directions. The clouds reflected in the many windows appear like embroidery stitched onto famous Suzhou silk.

### **The Balance of Nature is Found Throughout the Chinese Garden**

In the Chinese Garden, a person could sit all day and watch the balance of nature in motion: shadow and light 'painting' designs across the garden walls; flowing water softening the hardness of rock around the lake; the inside and outside of buildings joining together on covered terraces and open pavilions. To the Chinese, uniting opposite elements of nature is part of the concept of *Yin Yang*. This creates an oasis of peace and tranquility within busy city life.

**In pictures or words create** Nature's harmony—yin and yang—inside *Lan Su Yuan*.