CREATING ATMOSPHERE IN THE GARDENS: ILLUSTRATED BY A JAPANESE HALF-ACRE IN CALIFORNIA: BY ELOISE ROORBACH

WITHOUT the subtle quality known as atmosphere, gardens as well as pictures fail utterly of their purpose, which is to charm, to uplift the imagination, to satisfy the aesthetic need, to add to the beauty of the natural world. If we were allowed individually to choose one picture from a room, whose walls were hung with canvases depicting every sort of a subject, we should be apt to take the one that was restful rather than striking, charming rather than bold in treatment. We should prefer the one that was so serene in tranquil beauty that it would never fail to disarm us of moods of despondency. It is atmosphere that we desire in pictures and in gardens. We need to step out occasionally, from our work-a-day frame of mind into the realm of dreams, or rather into delightful realities. This vital need is better supplied by gardens than by pictures: in pictures we are led mystically by the path of imagination; in gardens we walk in realized dreams.

Like all subtle things, atmosphere eludes the definition of the clev-erest, while hovering like a sentient personality wherever it is gently coaxed. Rigid laws of composition cannot ensnare it. Yet a sym-pathetic placing of one object with another, a flower with a tree, stone or fountain, will lure it into the garden as truly as into a picture. The handling of details in relation to masses, the proportioning of small and large spaces, the placing of a few conspicuous objects, compose the technique of gardens as surely as the bold or light strokes of a brush laden with pigment, form it in pictures.

One of the most perfect examples of garden atmosphere is to be found in San Diego, or rather on the Silver Strand at Coronado just across the bay. The garden lies so near to the sea that the restless breathing of the surf is continually heard, even though the place is the embodiment of peace. The huge Coronado caravansary is but a stone's throw away—yet not a suggestion of its pomp and show has crept into this happy planting ground. A fashionable Italian villa touches its simple wall, not having influenced its modest individuality. While this Japanese garden covers less than half an acre of American soil, the place is as thoroughly Japanese as if one had sailed to it across the sea, instead of mounting a long, low flight of steps and entering it through carved gates.

In response to the clang of a brazen gong struck with a wooden mallet, a maid from Japan shuffles along on sandaled feet. A Buddha sits in rapt meditation, hushing the incoming American chatterer.
THE JAPANESE GRASS Ripples over the ground like wavelets on an inland lake, giving a charming impression of "Aliveness" to the garden: the porcelain goose appears to be waddling to the little pond; the retaining wall at the left of the path has been cleverly made into a seat simply by turning one of the stones in a horizontal position.
UNDER A PROTECTING PINE, AT THE HEAD OF A FLIGHT OF STAIRS THAT LEADS PAST THE CHERRY TREES TO THE IRIS BEDS, STANDS THE BLUE AND GRAY PORCELAIN LANTERN, ONE OF THE MANY PICTURESQUE FEATURES OF THIS HALF-ACRE GARDEN.
CARVED STONE LANTERN AT THE HEAD OF A LONG FLIGHT OF BAMBOO STRENGTHENED EARTH STEPS; THE GARDENER'S PANELED LODGE, AN INTERESTING FEATURE OF THE GARDEN, IS DECORATIVE AS WELL AS USEFUL.

CRESCENT SHAPED BRIDGES SPAN THE WATER AND LEAD TO THE THATCHED TEA-HOUSE ON A SMALL ISLAND; THE PINE TREE AT THE RIGHT IS BEING TRAINED BY TRUSSES OF BAMBOO TO EXTEND ONE LONG ARM HORIZONTALLY OVER THE WATER, ITS NEW SHOOTS BEING PINCHED BACK TO GIVE IT GREATER STRENGTH.
Beneath the thatched roof of this garden shrine, a stone Buddha sits in eternal meditation, quite at home in the Japanese atmosphere that pervades this miniature California garden.

Well of the square bucket and hand-twisted rope; showing the decorative possibilities of old tree trunks when suitably used.
VARIED CHARM OF A JAPANESE HALF-ACRE

Mulberry trees arch the walk leading to a little pond. Dripping sprays of wistaria cover a rustic seat near the bank. A bamboo tea-house thatched with reeds calls the weary to rest on a little island. Crescent bridges span the water through which gold fish flash, playing beneath lotus pads. Japan itself seems somehow to have crept within the half-roofed fence that surrounds this lovely place.

It is the arrangement of the details, the choice of flowers, shrubs and trees, the placing of the stone lanterns, the fountain, well and shrines that has brought about this remarkable illusion or atmosphere of Japan. The paths of this garden are all narrow, bordered by stones of uneven size or else by trimly-cut turf. Here the grass is a rich bright green resembling blue grass lawns; but instead of growing so high as to require constant cutting, it never exceeds a uniform height of an inch and a half. It pushes up from its roots until it forms little waves, wrinkling all over the ground like a soft suède glove, or like shirred panne velvet, or the gentle ripples of a lake. It springs soft and thick beneath the feet, requires but little water, no cutting, and is equally rich in color, both summer and winter. It gives a peculiarly "alive" sense to the garden, forming one of its most interesting features.

This garden has been especially planned for vistas or pictures. Each thing has been considered in relation to everything else. From the pool which is the central point of interest, though not of its area, paths radiate that sweep gracefully, following the contours of the land. Not a hill has been leveled or a hollow filled. In the hollows are irises or lotus beds: on the crests of the hills are arboris, a shrine, a carved lantern, rest-seat or an especially fine tree. Small pine trees have been bridged, trussed and tied until they have been forced to parallel the paths or grass slopes, helping most decoratively to convey the foreign atmosphere. Bamboo thickets have been planted where they form screens from the street. White and lavender wistaria vines have been grown where a dark pine serves as their foil.

Nothing is so ridiculously unsuitable to American gardens as the marble Venuses, plaster of Paris Bacchantes, cast-iron dancing bears and wooden pigmies which are occasionally seen braving the winter winds and scorching suns of certain gardens. A tree clipped to resemble a full rigged ship, weird and abnormal, is a little better. But in this garden the images of Japan’s choice are delightfully pleasing. There is something so naïve about them that they charm instead of offend the onlooker. Here a bronze crane feeds among the grasses at the edge of the pool. White porcelain geese waddle to its shores or preen their brittle feathers near its mirrored rim. Yellow china birds
perch and nest among the branches of weeping birch or willow trees trailing branches in the placid water. Live canaries, orioles and lin-nets have here taken the pretty hint and flutter, sing and nest-build. Real blackbirds alight on lily pads to drink or else on the many-branched dead trees placed on the bank, that they may have an unobstructed vantage ground for observation.

The treatment of details accounts for much of this atmospheric charm. The steps alone are worth an especial mention. One illustration shows part of a long flight of earth steps faced by bamboo logs and held in place by short pieces of the same wood driven firmly into the ground. Here also is seen the effective use of a delicate bamboo curtain screening off the street, the position of the stone lantern, the rough stone retaining wall and a twisted dwarf pine against the gardener’s paneled cottage. Another photograph shows a short flight of rough stone steps leading, beneath a beloved torii, to a shrine where a Buddha, absorbed in meditation, sits under a thatched roof. A white-frocked baby came toddling by and saw the tonsured god sitting with mind firmly fixed upon the Eternal. She sat on the lowest step calling gleefully to the world at large, “See the little baby.” Then after the second puzzled stare she exclaimed: “No, a Teddy Bear!” The Merciful Buddha, who remembered five hundred births, was undisturbed by the conclusion of the child.

The well, illustrated, represents another point regarding the effectiveness of garden detail. Instead of making the sweep of smoothly sawed beams braced with other smoothly sawed beams, naturally twisted branches of old trees have been used. The wheel is of wood held in place by wooden pins. Infinitely more suitable than if made of cast iron! The rope is of hand-platted rags. The bucket is square instead of round and rudely carved with the sacred emblem of the sun. The curb is also square, the well of cobbles, a bamboo thicket casting over all its latticed shade. Every point speaks harmoniously of Japanese treatment.

Another photograph shows skill in composition. From the pool where the crane stands amongst grass and blossoming rhus, the vision leads along a stone waterway under a wistaria arbor, to the Guardian Dragon of the Roof. Here each detail merits attention. The waterway is curved instead of being straight and is partly covered with creeping cypress. It conducts the overflow from a fountain, through the stone flagged arbor, to the central pool—a charming way of holding the whole garden together. A carved stone lantern lights the entrance of the arbor and a shallow pool. Cherry trees scatter their pink and white petals upon the silky turf just beyond the range of the camera. The gardener’s daughter, faithful to the kimono of her
land, glides about helping with the pruning of the pine buds. The whole creates the atmosphere of a garden in the land of the Rising Sun.

The tree planting in this garden is unusually fine. Pines of different species, giving variety of foliage, texture and color, are massed together in a little swale. One that is especially beautiful stands alone. Dwarf pines nestle in small depressions of the hill. An illustration calls attention to the placing of the light gray granite lantern beside a slender, gracefully contorted, long-needled pine. A shrub moreover is being trained to stand stiffly erect, repeating the vertical line of the lantern. On the right is a pine in training for a horizontal position, that it may reach over the surface of the lake, repeating its flowing line. The narrow path dips gently to a bridge, and an antique, hammered iron lantern rests on a boulder near an approach to the tea-house.

The banks of the pool are charmingly planted. At one place the lawn falls to the edge of the water; at another, rocks raise it slightly. Vines trail from lawn to water, dripping over a tiny wall. An evergreen shrub is in one place, a flower in another. One plant, squat and round, its neighbor tall and slender. Papyrus fills in by a bridge support, so that it makes an attractive reflection. An artificial island of diminutive size holds water plants which soon will drift with the current. Irregularity of growth, object, height and size, mark the art of the marginal planting.

Other photographs show the beauty of irregular planting. Stones have been left at the foot of a cypress—or placed there, who can tell which? A stick has been pushed into the water from the bank. Is it there to support shrubbery or merely to make a woodsly reflection? One stone of the wall by the path has been turned horizontally. Is it an accident or intended for a little resting-place such as one finds in a woodland walk? A tall small-trunked tree shoots into the air. Its branches sweep to the ground, delicately, like the spray of a fountain. Nodding papyrus marks the presence of a pool, a mite of a pool just the right size for a mirror!

Still another illustration is of a blue and gray porcelain lantern at the head of a rough flight of stairs leading down to paths which appear to flow like water, with lines of least resistance, to iris beds around the corner. Color was needed under the dark pine, so the rich blue lantern was placed there—the light ones found their place in the open.

All the gates of this garden are interesting. There is the carved torii gate of the entrance, besides a narrow latticed one at the side entrance, one woven of finely split bamboo, like a basket. The gardener’s lodge is of matting, paneled and roofed with tile. The kitchen
MEN SAY

garden is laid in neat little rows and fenced decoratively. Even the chickens that emerge from their tiny house and yard fit properly into the picture for their feathers are all curled and ruffled the wrong way. Every bush suggests a poster design. Every hanging or standing lantern is the center of a picture. At every turn of the path is a fresh surprise. The gardener keeps mainly to his native costume, his wife carries the baby in a sling on her back.

This beautiful garden, as perfectly designed and proportioned as one of Japan’s incomparable vases, is an inspiring lesson in landscape art. Not that it is desirable in general to make poster designs of our trees, or to buy a few porcelain geese, or stand carved lanterns here and there in our gardens, but that an appreciation may be gained of the wisdom of doing things in a way that is true to individuality. Formal gardens should not have riotous vines; cozy gardens should beware of clipped trees; informal gardens should scorn smart little plants in square tubs. Atmosphere, charm, good taste or whatever name is preferred, is but loyalty to individuality. To merely think the thoughts that come spontaneously and to make them visible, is to produce the witching places, constant in their allurement.

MEN SAY

MEN say, “You may not pray with us who have new prayers to pray!”
Then am I brave to speak my word, and make my prayer, today?

Men say, “You shall not do the work which is not our work too!”
Have I the strength in spite of this, my own dear work to do?

Men say, “You shall not love the thing we have not learned to love!”
Have I the will to set that thing all other things above?

Men say, “You may not be the Soul, that you have longed to be!”
But, if I could be, God, my God, then would they worship thee!

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