

## Jim Dawson: A Chinese Garden in Seattle

**Part One** - *Read to the bottom of this page then stop.*

Jim Dawson's dream was about to become a reality: a Chinese garden in Seattle. But first he had to help raise a lot of money.

Jim Dawson was an architect who had his own architecture and planning firm in Seattle. He had visited China in 1985 and had become fascinated with Chinese gardens. They were completely new to him and completely unlike gardens in the West. Jim learned as much as he could about them.

Over the years, Jim's interest in Chinese gardens led him to Chongqing, one of Seattle's Sister Cities. Chongqing, which was located on the Yangtze River, was a major inland port, just like Seattle. Citizens in Seattle and Chongqing had exchanged visits and developed close relationships. During the mid-1980s, a group of people in Seattle decided to honor their friends in Chongqing by creating a Chinese garden in Seattle. They would work with designers, craftspeople, and architects from Chongqing to design and build it.

Jim quickly became involved. He helped create a non-profit organization, the Seattle Chinese Garden Society, to help design and build the garden. But the garden couldn't be built without money. In fact, the six acre garden, which would include pavilions, an education center, and all the other components of a traditional garden in China, would cost millions of dollars. That meant asking people for money. But why would they give money to create another garden in Seattle? Seattle had thousands of beautiful gardens.

That was Jim's challenge. Jim's colleagues at the Seattle Chinese Garden Society had asked him to take everything he knew about Chinese gardens and turn it into a simple explanation of what a Chinese garden was and why someone should be interested in donating money to build one in Seattle.

STOP

**Part Two** - *Read to the bottom of the next page then stop.*

Jim decided the first thing he needed to do was organize all the information he had. He didn't think many people would be interested in wading through his textbooks with him! He knew that he had to make a Chinese garden both make sense and sound exciting in a very short presentation. He decided the best way to do that was to explain the common elements of a Chinese garden to show how different Chinese gardens are from Western gardens. Jim reviewed ten years' worth of notes and files to decide what information he would use.

Every Chinese garden attempts to create a "microcosm" symbolizing the whole universe within the garden. Each garden is actually many gardens, separated by walls or tunnels or buildings. Chinese gardens are designed to inspire thought and spirituality, to let a viewer's mind "travel" to the scenes represented within the garden. To do this, every Chinese garden – large or small – contains several common elements:

**Rocks.** Rocks and rockeries are critical to the Chinese garden. Rocks symbolize mountains, the body and vitality of the earth. Many Chinese gardens feature distinctive rocks that were carefully collected and then positioned as if they were sculpture. Eroded rocks, etched into shape by water or wind are particularly prized as they show the forces of the elements of the earth working with and against each other.

**Water.** Water, too, is crucial in a Chinese garden, symbolizing the earth's spirit and life breath. Ponds in Chinese gardens are often lush with greenery to show the living vitality of the water. Water also serves a "mirror" function in Chinese gardens, the clear reflections in the water showing the viewer's inward reflection and cultivation of spirit.

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**Architecture.** Chinese gardens contain not just walls but buildings and pavilions as well. Most gardens have a large, formal building, situated over an elevated pond, that serves as a central gathering point. Small rustic pavilions often dot the perimeter of the garden. Other buildings create the complexity of spaces that make up the garden.

**Trees.** In Chinese gardens, evergreens – especially pine, cypress, and bamboo – are the favored trees. These symbolize undying, unchanging strength and moral virtue. Deciduous fruit trees, such as plums or peaches, often serve as contrast to the evergreens, showing the “large in the small.” Chinese gardens tend to have few flowers and no lawn.

**Miniature Elements.** Many Chinese gardens have a container garden, filled with miniature (or “bonsai”) versions of the full-sized plants in the garden. Container gardens help create variety in a small garden. In addition, the dwarf plants inside the container gardens appear magical or mythical because they are so different from their natural states. Container gardens have traditionally served to ward off evil as well.

**Borrowed Scenery.** Chinese gardens often rely on “borrowed scenery,” using a window or door or hole in the garden wall to frame the landscape beyond the garden. Then, the visitor in the garden sees the landscape outside the garden as a sort of picture within the garden. Borrowed scenery adds to the garden’s spiritual nature and its ability to help a viewer travel within himself or herself.

STOP

**Part Three** - *Read to the bottom of this page then stop.*

Jim had carefully organized his notes. Now, he needed to use this information to show how unique and exciting it would be to have such a garden in Seattle. The garden would be a real cultural attraction, something that would honor Seattle's many ties to Asia while, at the same time, creating a beautiful work of art that all could enjoy.

Jim decided to write a one-page essay explaining what a Chinese garden was and summarizing the major elements of a Chinese garden. That was bound to convince people to donate money to help build the garden.

He wrote a title across the top of the page: "What is a Chinese Garden and Why should we have one in Seattle?"

Jim began to write.