

NOOK

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JAPAN

Interior architecture
in the land of
the rising sun

House NA in Tokyo
designed by Sou Fujimoto



Flowing from interior to exterior

Japanese gardens are renowned for their tranquillity, simplicity, and harmony, all characteristics that Japanese people value within their homes as well. In many cases, the garden becomes an extension of the house. *Nook* asked architect Takaaki Fuji and landscape architect Stefano Marinaz what makes the Japanese so skilled at connecting interiors and exteriors.

Journey of discovery
For this Japanese-inspired garden in Queen's Park, Marinaz used large stones dotted throughout the garden to conjure up a sense of exploration and discovery.
Photo: Alistair Thorpe

[food for thought]
In the film *Lost in Translation* there is a delightful scene where Charlotte (*Scarlett Johansson*) travels to Kyoto and meanders through a public garden. She walks under a shrine and watches a traditional Japanese wedding, crosses a pond by hopping on a path of disc-shaped stones, and ties a wish to a tree filled with white paper. The scene magnificently captures the mesmerising beauty and atmosphere of a Japanese garden, and what makes it so distinctive.

The minimalistic approach and the control over nature is what makes Japanese gardens so special for *Stefano Marinaz*. “The Japanese garden has structural elements using hard landscaping such as paving and rocks and soft landscaping such as trees and shrubs,” he explains. “Not only are rocks, paths, waterfalls focal and structural elements within the composition but also the planting is very well defined and shaped so that trees and shrubs also become quite structural elements within the composition. Depending on the size of the garden, the trees are chosen for their sculptural forms, and many times even trained with steel bars or wires to obtain unusual shapes. The pruning of the trees is very important, as there is a control over nature, but the shapes that are obtained with the training or the pruning are very organic and flowing. In Japanese gardens there is also the journey of discovery while moving through them.”

Marinaz has designed many gardens in London where, just like Tokyo, space for a garden is often limited. He created gorgeous, serene spots where the inhabitants can retreat or relax with their

friends. The Italian hasn’t yet designed or been commissioned to design a Japanese garden himself, but he does employ the simple and minimalistic approach. He is keen to emulate the same forms and materials that are used for interiors and exteriors, but applies them slightly differently. For a garden in South Kensington he used the same type of pots for various purposes. Tall pots are sculptures, normal pots contain plants, and a shallow pot was transformed to a water pond with a small pump to provide a sense of calm in the garden. Another example inspired by a Japanese garden is the use of large stones dotted throughout the garden to conjure up a sense of discovery rather than taking in the whole garden all at once. His garden designs are always natural extensions of the house.

Natural flow
Japanese architects and garden designers are masters in connecting interior and exterior. Architect *Takaaki Fuji* thinks this skill stems from the difference in the way windows have been made in Japan and the West since ancient times. “In the past, traditional Western architecture was mainly built of stone and brick, so windows were made as holes in the walls,” he explains. “Traditional Japanese architecture, on the other hand, was mainly made of wooden beams and pillars, so there were no walls and the inside and outside were connected. The minimum partition was a shoji [paper sliding door, *Nook*], which was used as a partition between the inside and the

Japanese architecture was originally a combination of inside and outside, so Japanese architects have learnt to think of the inside and outside as equivalent. – **Takaaki Fuji**

outside. Therefore, Japanese architecture was originally a combination of inside and outside. For this reason, I think Japanese architects have learnt to think of the inside and outside as equivalent.”
Marinaz offers another insight. “I feel that the need of connecting the inside to the outside is to achieve a sleek, modern, minimalistic composition on the overall property. With Japanese gardens there is a flow that connects one place in the garden to another, and the same principle is used to connect with the house as well. In other words, there are no abrupt changes but rather physical and visual connections of the different spaces.”

Are there things that interior architects can learn from Japanese garden design in terms of how they connect interior and exterior? Fuji: “In my opinion, Japanese architects connect the inside with the outside so that the four seasons can be felt inside as well. So if we learn from Japanese garden design about things like the changing of the seasons, we can see things applied to interiors as well.” Marinaz adds: “With the importance of the view from the inside, the similar use of materials, and working alongside landscape architects or garden designers, the property can be considered as a whole rather than the interior separated from the exterior.”

High maintenance
Marinaz is critical, though, of Japanese garden design in terms of the amount of control over nature and a limited palette of flowering plants. “The simplicity of the hard landscaping materials is just brilliant,

but the soft landscaping is controlled and manicured too much. This requires quite a lot of maintenance, and with less variety of flowering plants the Japanese garden limits the ecological value and biodiversity we are keen to include in our gardens.

He touches on the issue of sustainability, the Achilles heel of Japanese architecture, with a scrap and build mentality resulting in the lifespan of a private home in cities being between 20-30 years. “Japanese gardens are partially sustainable in the use of paving materials and are permeable to rainwater,” he explains. “Trees and shrubs may be long-lived, as they are looked after for so long. The gardens, though, require a very high level of maintenance in my view, and therefore a cost that may have an impact on the sustainability overall. This year, I visited a garden centre and nursery in the south of the Netherlands, that sells plants and products specific for Japanese gardens. What I found bizarre is that they ship giant rocks from Japan all the way to the Netherlands. I’m sure that a rock for a Japanese garden can also be found in Europe, to avoid the expense and environmental impact that we have when shipping heavy and unnecessary rocks from one side of the planet to the other.” [TS]

[cv] Stefano Marinaz is an acclaimed landscape architect with offices in London and Utrecht. His practice works alongside international architects and designers on projects ranging from small private gardens to larger landscapes and historical restorations. He designed a garden for the Floriade Expo 2022 which can be visited until 9 October 2022.