

Lecture 42

History of Gardens: Naturalism and the Eastern Tradition

Naturalism is the attempt to live with, rather than, to dominate nature. Naturalism strives for the appearance of a “happy accident of nature.” The methods to achieve this, however, are highly artificial as in the formal tradition.

China

The antithesis of Chinese gardens are the Egyptian gardens. Chinese were lovers of natural scenery, the Egyptians had none to love. China is one of the oldest of cultures, but there is no contemporary history of the earliest gardens. The gardens developed into romantic landscapes. There was great use of natural elements such as rocks, “mountains,” and waterfalls. The gardens were based on idealized landscape paintings. Flowers, weathered wood, and stone are important elements. Living animals are incorporated into the landscape, e.g., deer. **Deer parks** were later introduced to Europe; synonymous with pleasure gardens. The basic concept was a reinvention of idealized natural landscape. Pavilions (from the word for butterfly) were tent-like buildings incorporated in the middle of gardens; now used to refer to light buildings in a park.

Japan

Japanese gardens arose from the Chinese culture via Korea but developed into an abstract art form. Japanese gardening becomes one of the fine arts—traditional Chinese elements but organized in a new form involving symbolism, great use of stone and sand (often raked into patterns), and the development of schools of tradition. Creative use of water and rocks; love of aged and gnarled trees; new uses of non-traditional plants such as mosses. In the 10th century, landscape gardens were influenced by Zen, a religious and philosophical movement. A high development of garden art included: **ikebana** (flower arrangement based on symbolic use of flowers), **sakai** (miniature landscapes), **bonsai** (miniature tree specimens). Modernization and Westernization brought about some destruction of heritage but the culture persists still and has become a force in the United States where bonsai, for example, has become popular.

ENGLISH GARDENS

English gardens represent a fusion of Formalism and Naturalism. The mild marine climate (even though England is above 50° N) permits a great variety of plants to be grown. With the emergence of the empire, a wide range of plants and many styles were introduced. Until the 1750s, the garden was laid out according to an esthetic which saw beauty only in symmetry such as the geometrical pattern made by circular pools and the intersecting straight lines of avenues, allées, terraces, hedges. This formal design was discarded beneath the improvements of Lancelot “Capability” Brown, the most famous advocate of a naturalistic style of gardening which saw beauty only in asymmetrical arrangements of sinuous curves and trees planted in loosely scattered informal groups. Garden styles vary from the grand English landscape tradition to the use of fake ruins, wishing wells, and herbaceous border. Gardening is still extremely popular on all economic levels in the UK.

MODERN GARDENS

Modern gardens achieve esthetic expression through the combination of many art forms. It strives for a meaningful design for living and uses both formal and natural concepts. In the United States, a new development in garden art is found in **interiorscapes**, the use of plants within environmentally-controlled structures such as malls and arcades.