



Greater Meaning to the Whole

TEAHOUSE PROJECT BECOMES MORE THAN A CONSTRUCTION JOB

by Mike Takeuchi

IN THE JAPANESE TEA CEREMONY, EVEN THE smallest movements have a purpose that collectively brings greater meaning to the whole. From the selection of the utensils and the decor to the eventual serving of tea, the ritual is not so much a series of steps but rather an integration of actions that come from the heart. The “Way of Tea” also encourages participants to be in the moment of a life filled with impermanence, *ichi-go ichi-e*—translated loosely as “one time, one meaning.”

Thanks to careful planning and a little serendipity, The Huntington is integrating a new tea garden and teahouse into the existing nine-acre Japanese Garden, which will soon celebrate its centennial. The addition is part of a larger project that also will include upgrades to the garden and pond infrastructure, development of additional pathways for increased accessibility, and some pruning of dense foliage to create new views throughout the garden. The new tea garden, itself about a half-acre, will occupy a pre-

viously undeveloped area on the plateau southwest of a Japanese house that was the focal point of the garden built by Henry Huntington and his superintendent, William Hertrich. That historic house, which is a residence rather than a teahouse, also has been the focus of renovation efforts by a number of architects and designers, including Long Beach architect Kelly Sutherlin McLeod.

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Jim Folsom, the Telleen/Jorgensen Director of the Botanical Gardens, has assembled an international project team, including a pair of residents from Kyoto—the respected landscape architect Takuhiro Yamada and architect and craftsman Yoshiaki Nakamura. Landscape architect Takeo Uesugi, a retired professor from California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, is overseeing design plans for expansion of the Japanese Garden, including the new tea garden.

One hundred years ago Hertrich reconstructed a Japanese house that Huntington had purchased from a shop run by George Turner Marsh at the corner of

Opposite: The teahouse, called the Arbor of Pure Breeze, is a gift of the Pasadena Buddhist Church. **Right:** A few of the 500-plus tea accessories donated by Pepperdine University in 2006. *Photos by Andrew Mitchell.*

THE URASENKE SCHOOL

While the ritual that promotes harmony (*wa*), respect (*kei*), purity (*sei*), and tranquility (*jaku*) dates back to the 12th century, the tea ceremony was popularized and formalized by Sen Rikyu in the late 1500s. His influence spawned three main schools: the Omotesenke, the Mushakojisense, and the Urasenke. The Urasenke school takes a more naturalized approach in everything from the teahouse itself to the use of an untreated bamboo whisk to stir the tea for a lengthy period. Landscape architect Takuhiro Yamada and architect and craftsman Yoshiaki Nakamura are residents of Kyoto and members of Urasenke International, the best-known organization dedicated to promoting the Japanese cultural tradition of tea ceremonies.

The Japanese Garden project is being funded in part by a \$2.6 million endowment from the late longtime Huntington supporter Mary B. Taylor Hunt, and from a series of new major gifts. The Japanese Garden will close in early 2011 and will reopen in early 2012.

California Boulevard and Fair Oaks Avenue in Pasadena. Coincidentally, as Yamada and Nakamura discussed plans for the new tea garden, attention turned to the donation of a teahouse that graced the grounds of the Pasadena Buddhist Church, a mere seven miles from The Huntington.

“The Huntington is very lucky to have the best architect and landscape architect in Kyoto,” said Uesugi, referring respectfully to the pair from Kyoto and drawing attention away from his own acclaim as a designer of many Japanese gardens in the United States. Yet another member of the team is Takeo’s son, Keiji Uesugi, himself a well-regarded landscape architect and professor at Cal Poly Pomona. “I believe that there was some force behind how we all came together,” the elder Uesugi concluded.

Nakamura said he was pulled toward the project by The Huntington’s earnestness and desire to integrate a teahouse and tea garden into a landscape that has already been established for nearly a century. In 2006, a fully equipped Urasenke teahouse was donated to The Huntington by Pepperdine University, but the project team deemed it too fragile to be placed outside on permanent display. The later offer from the Pasadena Buddhist Church was welcome, but research was required before positioning the structure in the landscape and designing the surrounding garden. Nakamura’s late father, Shosei, was a legendary master





Yoshiaki Nakamura (left) and Takeo Uesugi discuss their plans on the site of the new tea garden. Photo by Lisa Blackburn.

carpenter who created the Nakamura Sotoji Komuten construction company in Kyoto. The son now manages a firm that has 30 carpenters and six architects who have built more than 200 teahouses in Japan and abroad. Despite this global reputation, even Nakamura was surprised by something that occurred when he visited the teahouse, called the Arbor of Pure Breeze. On close inspection of the building that had stood on the church grounds since 1964, Nakamura discovered it had been crafted by his family's company.

“I was convinced that this is not something I just wanted to do, but had to do,” Nakamura said.

Yet despite the familiarity, there was something slightly different in the building. “There was a feeling it was our work, a column or something, but there was also a different feeling,” Nakamura said.

Curious, he returned to Kyoto to investigate. After further research, Nakamura confirmed that the elements of the structure had been produced by his family, but he concluded that local Japanese carpenters had assembled the materials after they arrived in the United States. From this, Nakamura fully realized that this fortuitous melding of all

the elements big and small—whether it was the formation of the international team, the donation of the teahouse, or even the timing of putting all the components together—had a meaning that was much deeper, and longer lasting, than he had originally expected.

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That is why, on a humid late September day, as the sound of saws and hammers filled the air just outside the Pasadena Buddhist Church, the project's first step of dismantling the house was in full swing with the craftsman perspiring happily amid it all.

Taking a break from the painstaking method of hand-washing the pieces of wood and stacking them into small, neat piles, he excitedly related step by step the process of packing the parts up, shipping them back to Kyoto for refurbishing, and then sending them to The Huntington next spring, when Nakamura will oversee the structure's reconstruction in the new tea garden. This meticulousness was important because each action, no matter how small or repetitive, collectively had great meaning toward the larger goal.

“That attention is what The Huntington expects from us and what we expect from ourselves,” Nakamura said, “because, moment by moment, we must concentrate on building a structure that is worthy of its place.” ☪

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