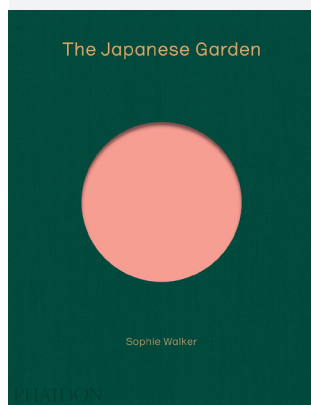


# Book Reviews.....continued

The Japanese Garden  
By Sophie Walker  
Phaidon Press (2017)  
ISBN-13: 978-0714874777



An art historian who subsequently moved into garden design, in 2014 Sophie Walker became the youngest female garden designer to exhibit at the Chelsea Flower Show. Over the years she has developed a fascination for Japanese gardens and this excellent book is a result of many years of passionate study.

The text, just over a quarter of the book, comprises eleven chapters plus seven short essays by a series of guest authors. A magnificent series of images, many taken by the author – others from a variety of sources including Isamu Noguchi, Yves Klein, John Pawson, David Chipperfield, Sam Francis, and David Hockney, constitutes the remaining three quarters following which there is an illustrated section on Japanese plants, a short glossary, a bibliography, and a detailed index.

In the introduction (The Nature of the Garden) we learn that the Japanese garden is "...an ancient cultural form that is potent, mysterious and esoteric"; "...arguably more relevant...today than ever before"; and "...a shared space where nature and human intention exist...in a deep and real engagement". In the subsequent chapters the author, she states, has tried to follow the tenet of calligraphists and "follow the brush"!

So, in the first chapter (Beauty, Terror and Power) which examines the history of Japanese gardens we are told that "*beauty and terror are inextricably linked*" reflecting the constant fear of volcanoes, earthquakes, tsunamis *et cetera* – hence the ubiquity of Fuji-like structures within gardens. Japanese gardens are also unique in their links to religion – first Shintoism, then Buddhism – together with influences from China and Korea.

In the second chapter (The Way, Body and Mind) we examine the relevance of the path – "...the most powerful design device..." which draws us "*towards self-illumination.....into the Garden Way*". For, as we all know, there is almost always a specific route we must follow, with elements being revealed to us as the designer intended. We then move in the next chapter (Expanded Understanding) to elements outwith a garden that can be incorporated into the design be they distant views (shakkei) or "*immaterial borrowings*" – for example moonlight. Subsequent chapters cover the mirror-like quality of water (Duality and Reflection); "*mitate*" – the



Cherry blossom above a wooden bridge at Kōraku-en, Okayama. Picture credit: Photograph © Sophie Walker (page 202)

use of objects such as rocks and sand to create the idea of scenery (The Hidden, Implied and Imagined); the development of gardens that cannot be entered but may only be viewed from specific locations (Zen Challenge: the Unenterable Garden); kare-sansui gardens (Time, Space and the Dry Garden); tea gardens (Death, Tea and the Garden); the "*capsule of wonder that punctuates the built environment*" (Inner Space: the Courtyard Garden); and, finally, a detailed analysis of the use of plants within gardens (The Poetry of Plants).

Throughout the text are found the essays referred to previously. Thus prior to the third chapter we find a delightful essay on Kyoto Gardens by Lee Ufan (a Korean minimalist painter based in Japan) and prior to the fifth chapter are essays by Malaysian author Tan Twan Eng and the Japanese Installation Artist Tatsuo Miyajima. Other essays are provided by Marcus du Sautoy (mathematician), John Pawson (architect), Anish Kapoor (Sculptor), and Tadao Ando (architect).

All of the text in this book is, in different ways, interesting, thought-provoking – and so very, very readable. In addition, the illustrations are superb. It is also worth noting that many of these images are published here for the first time.

And so to my conclusion – which is not all that difficult! If it only comprised the images it would be "highly recommended" – with Sophie Walker's text it would become "almost essential" – but with the additional essays it becomes a "no-brainer": we should all have a copy.



Tawaraya Ryokan, Kyoto, c.1700, Edo Period. Picture credit: Photograph © Sophie Walker (page 233)