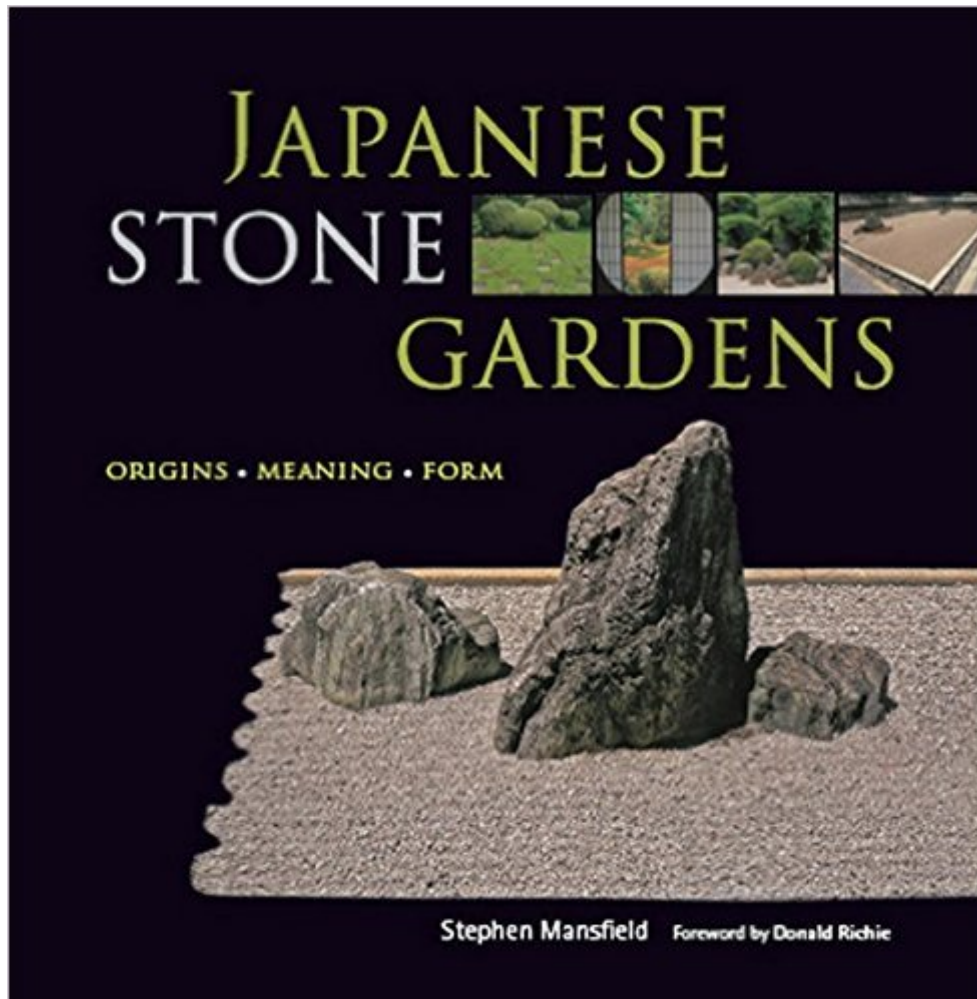


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Japanese Stone Gardens: Origins, Meaning, Form



Synopsis

Gain some new ideas along with the principles and history of Japanese stone gardening with this useful and beautiful garden design book. Japanese Stone Gardens provides a comprehensive introduction to the powerful mystique and dynamism of the Japanese stone garden "from their earliest use as props in animistic rituals, to their appropriation by Zen monks and priests to create settings conducive to contemplation and finally to their contemporary uses and meaning. With insightful text and abundant imagery, this book reveals the hidden order of stone gardens and in the process heightens the enthusiast's appreciation of them. The Japanese stone garden is an art form recognized around the globe. These gardens provide tranquil settings where visitors can shed the burdens and stresses of modern existence, satisfy an age-old yearning for solitude and repose, and experience the restorative power of art and nature. For this reason the value of the Japanese stone garden today is arguably even greater than when many of them were created. Fifteen gardens are featured in this book, some well known, such as the famous temple gardens of Kyoto, others less so, among them gardens spread through the south of Honshu Island and the southern islands of Shikoku and Kyushu and in faraway Okinawa.

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Customer Reviews

The study of the Japanese Stone Garden is the study of Japanese religion. The two are as inseparable as the symbolic architecture of Catholic Cathedrals and the Bible. There are no rocks in a Japanese stone garden, but only icons of Mt. Horai, home of the immortals, or great turtles

swimming in the cosmic ocean, bearing the Earth on their backs. As author Stephen Mansfield states, Japanese gardens are works of religious art. Which is why "Japanese Stone Gardens: Origins, Meanings, Forms" is much more than a guide to the garden. Mansfield does his best to give you a crash-course on Buddhism and Shinto, on why stones in particular are of importance to Japanese religion, and how those views have been shaped by contact with China and India. He takes you on a tour through the symbology of stone, showing what to look for and how to recognize certain arrangements and what their meanings are. The book is split into two sections. The first, "Introduction to the Japanese Stone Garden," takes up the bulk of the book and lays out all of the religious motifs and meanings, as well as the nature of Japanese stone gardens. He is quick to point out that the term "Zen Garden" is entirely American and has no meaning in Japan; these are gardens linked with Buddhism, but rarely with the Zen sect. He also talks about some of the standard design elements of the garden, the use of borrowed scenery and framing. I particularly enjoyed the talk on modern stone gardens, and how modern materials and techniques have shaped new gardens. The second section, "Japan's Exquisite Stone Gardens" is a picture-tour through some of Japan's most famous and beautiful stone gardens.

Of an old-fashioned bent, a Luddite at heart, I bemoan the shift in publishing from print to screen. A book should comprise ink and paper between covers. Its pages can be dog-eared, turned with a moistened thumb, scribbled on--indeed, the marginalia becomes part of the book. "Japanese Stone Gardens," then, is a book that reassures; for no e-book could duly reproduce Stephen Mansfield's photographs stretching across facing pages of a book whose design draws on the beauty of empty but expressive space as do the gardens it pictures. Which is not to imply the author-photographer is concerned only with the big picture of these gardens; his lens can be pointillist, resting on pebbles beneath temple eaves, a pair of straw sandals on a "shoe-removing stone," the shadow of an iron lantern cast on a reed shutter. His palette encompasses not only the gray hues of stone but also a variety of greens, for he opens our eyes to the breadth of the dry landscape garden, which can even embrace topiary. Indeed Mansfield points out that despite the rules laid down in hoary gardening manuals of centuries past, the stone garden continues to evolve and is "well suited to the bleak urban settings of today's cities, the hard textures and surfaces of buildings, the towering skyscrapers that lend themselves as the new 'borrowed scenery' in place of mountains and jagged cliffs." He credits Mirei Shigemori with liberating the stone garden from the dead hand of the professional gardeners who came into dominance in the Edo Period. Such liberation is apparent in Shigemori's garden at Kishiwada Castle in Osaka--a mandala of bluish stone and raked sand,

visible from the top of the castle donjon.

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