

Portland's Japanese Gardens

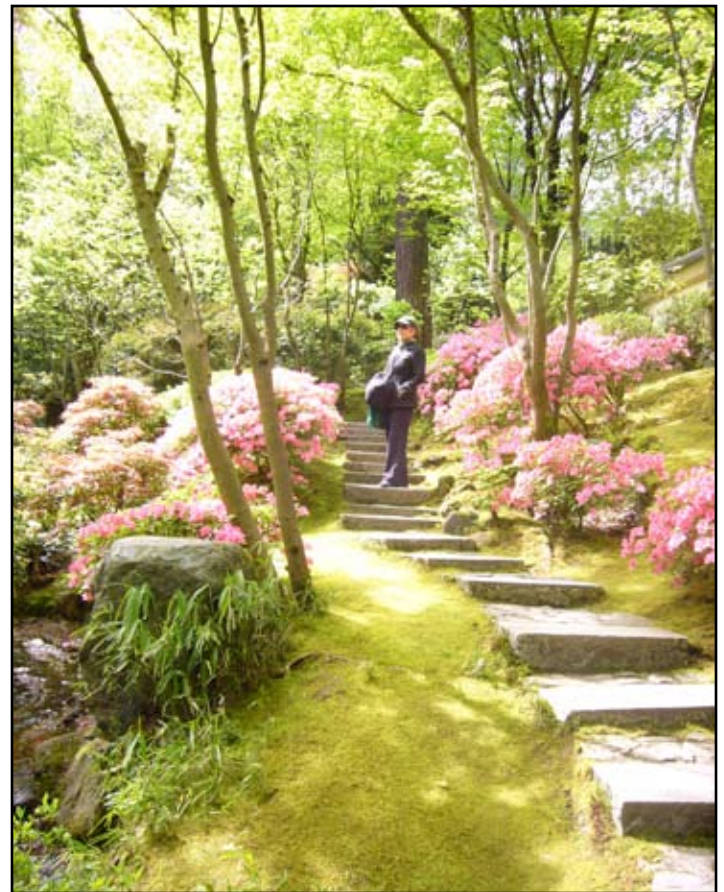
Look, you can't do much when you spend only two days in a never-before-visited city. The arrival day and the departure day bracket the only full day you'll get. That's why we must go back to Portland, Oregon, perhaps as early as next spring. We'll spend several days there and do it right. Portland offered more than I expected in late April of 2007. It was pleasantly green, even downtown where we stayed, and I found myself strolling on brick walkways under leafy canopies of trees that were doing just fine between hundred-year-old structures built before architects even thought of glass and steel. And a wide river, the Willamette, runs through it. The river's name is pronounced "Wil-LAM-it," rhyming with "Dammit." Friendly natives patiently corrected me. Great restaurants, even bars that welcomed my cigarettes as well as my money, stood waiting in all directions from our hotel. Yoshi, fresh off a riverboat that served American food for a whole week, needed raw fish and *miso* soup. She got



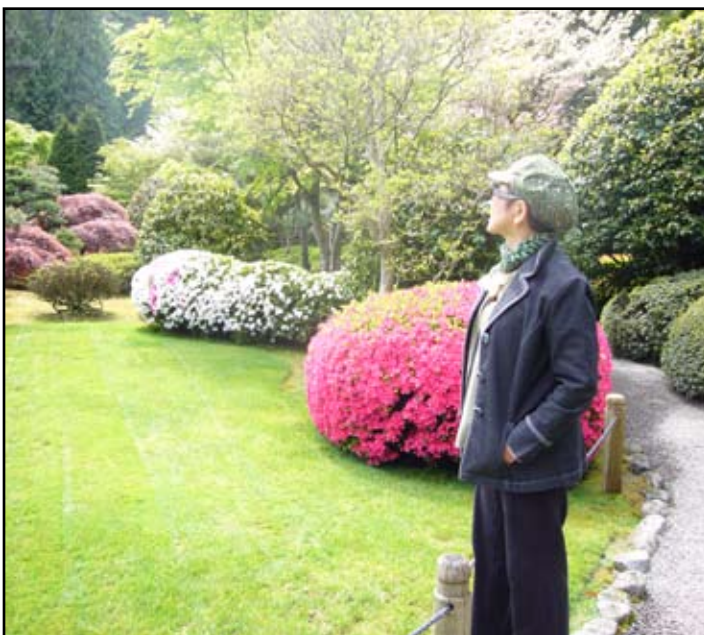
both on Broadway, the main street, at a shop where the foreign chef spoke no Japanese and little English but could slice *sashimi* well enough. The second night, Yoshi pried every edible morsel from a Maine lobster at Jake's Famous Crawfish. But the main day, the one full day, was spent at Portland's Japanese Garden, which was billed as the most authentic Japanese garden outside Japan. Above, we paused for a picture on the uphill path to the garden's 5½ acres. We could have taken a shuttle bus, but we didn't.



Photo Enhancement by Bart Everett



Okay, it's officially named the Portland Japanese Garden, a singular garden since there is no pluralization to suggest otherwise. But I can count, and there were five distinct types of gardens here. The designer, forty years ago, took the "hide and reveal" approach. Turn a corner and you enter another type of Japanese garden, each with its own name: Pond Garden, Natural Garden, Sand and Stone Garden, Flat Garden and Tea Garden, each a feast for the eyes. In late April, we caught the tail end of the azalea season, but we were too early to see blossoms in Portland's nearby Rose Garden, equally famous. Maybe next year. My only disappointment was the weather. It was too good. As a tourist from dry Southern California, I wanted to see rain. I would have gotten happily soaking wet at the Japanese gardens. But there was nary a drop during the couple of weeks we spent on Oregon soil and its rivers. I complained to the natives, who smiled and thanked me for bringing the good weather with me.





April 2007, Portland

Sand and Rocks

It's all very Zen Buddhist if you are into that sort of thing. A place for contemplation. Since nothing grows, maintenance is low, but the gardener must rake with meticulous skill to preserve the illusion of islets poking up from the surface of the sea. I'm referring to Portland's Sand and Stone Garden above, where I allowed myself to be photographed, something of a rarity nowadays. *Look up, Jackson*, camera-wielding



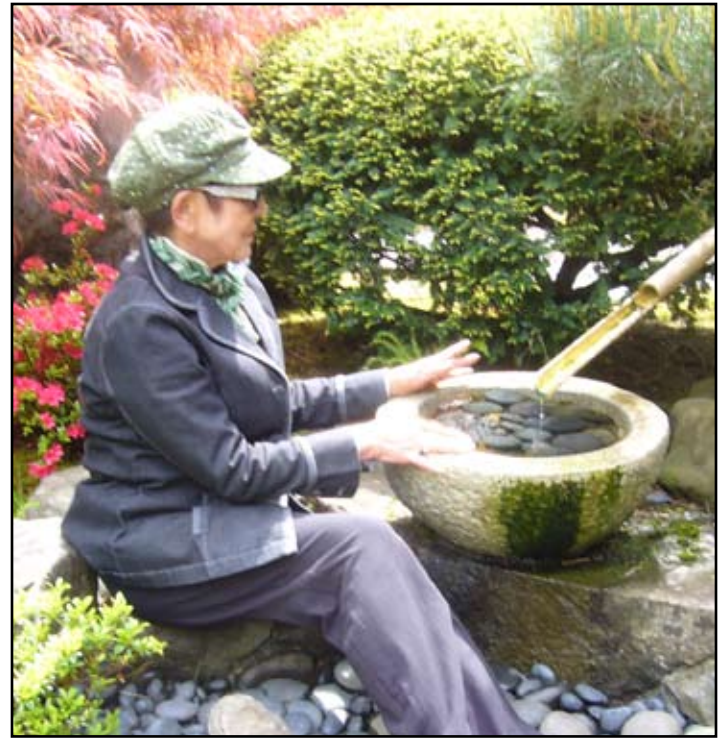
Yoshi said. She didn't want my old lambswool hat to shade the entirety of my old mug. Speaking of shadows, take a look at the inset photo

here. Low sunshine delineates the raked swirls around the base of the tall stone rising behind me. That stone, by the way, symbolizes Buddha, a supreme deity in Japan and China. Exactly a year earlier, Yoshi and I visited Ryoanji Temple on a rainy day in Kyoto, Japan. In the middle photo at right, Yoshi joins a gawking crowd at this famous 500-year-old sand garden, the mother of all such gardens, wherever they might be. At bottom right is a close-up of one of the fifteen protruding rocks. "Nothing grows," as I said at the beginning here, but you can't stop moss, nor would you want to. There is nothing wrong with Portland's stucco and stone walls, of course, but I prefer Ryoanji's earthen walls, made of clay boiled in oil centuries ago.



April 2006, Kyoto





Garden *kakehi* appeal to me on several levels. They are just pots or receptacles of some kind into which a tiny stream of water flows from a bamboo spout. No big deal, but I sat for more than a moment

in front of the *kakehi* at above left, photographing it several times until I was happy with the play of ripples and light. Yoshi dips her fingers into another one. These *kakehi* don't drain. They overflow. I like that.



Dwarf tree in the mossy Tea Garden