

A CHINESE GARDEN COURT

The Astor Court at The Metropolitan Museum of Art





DIRECTOR'S NOTE

With the dedication of the Astor Court and Ming Room and the Douglas Dillon Galleries of Chinese paintings in spring 1981, The Metropolitan Museum of Art will have completed the first phase in the reinstallation of its Far Eastern collections. This ambitious program, for which plans were outlined nearly a decade ago, will eventually include galleries for Japanese, Korean, Indian, Southeast Asian, and ancient Chinese art. When it is completed, this artistic complex will rank in scope and in quality with the best in the world.

An important element in this new installation is the Astor Court, a Ming-dynasty garden court set in the midst of galleries devoted to Chinese paintings. The garden court was conceived by Brooke Russell Astor, a trustee of the Museum and chairman of the Visiting Committee to the Department of Far Eastern Art. Mrs. Astor spent part of her childhood in Peking and there grew to love the courtyards so essential to traditional Chinese architecture. Remembering the serenity of these enclosures away from the busy city streets, she thought that such a space in the Museum would not only provide a quiet area where visitors could rest and reflect upon the works of art in the adjoining galleries—many of which echo themes of gardens and the contemplative life—but also serve as a transition, helping visitors to bridge the cultural gap between the more familiar arts of the West and the less known ones of the Far East.

The model for the Astor Court is a small courtyard in the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets in Suzhou, a city west of Shanghai that experienced a flourishing garden culture during the Ming period. The hall at the north end of the courtyard was created to display in an authentic setting a magnificent collection of Ming-dynasty domestic furniture purchased with the help of the Vincent Astor Foundation in 1976.

The building of the garden court represents the first permanent cultural exchange between the United States and the People's Republic of China and was marked throughout by a special spirit of cooperation. A team from the Suzhou Garden Administration first erected a full-scale prototype, which remains in Suzhou as a gift to the Chinese people, and last winter a technical delegation arrived in New York to assemble components fabricated in China. In an atmosphere of mutual respect, Chinese and Americans worked together quickly and courteously to complete the assembly.

Of fundamental significance in the first phase of the installation has been the extraordinary generosity of the Vincent Astor Foundation, which provided the funds for the Astor Court and for the Ming Room. The Dillon Fund donated the cost of the installation of the adjoining Douglas Dillon Galleries. We are particularly grateful to Mrs. Astor and to Douglas Dillon, chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Museum, for their personal leadership and dedication. Wen Fong, special consultant for Far Eastern Affairs, played an indispensable and varied role as researcher, negotiator, and coauthor of this publication, along with Alfreda Murck, Assistant Curator of Far Eastern Art. A number of other talented individuals made outstanding contributions, and these are fully described in "Building a Garden Court in New York," which chapter begins on page 58.

Philippe de Montebello
Director

Opposite: The terra-cotta bricks of the Astor Court are arranged in a pattern described in the 17th-century garden building manual *Yuan Ye*. They fit closely around the irregularly shaped rocks that are an invariable feature of Chinese gardens.

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The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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New York

I. The Scholar's Garden

In traditional China the scholar-official stood at the pinnacle of society; second only to members of the imperial family, officeholders in the civil bureaucracy had power, money, and status. Following the ideals formulated by Confucius in the fifth century B.C., the scholar strove to educate himself, to cultivate wisdom as well as knowledge, and to serve a worthy sovereign. From about A.D. 1000 the entrance to government service was accomplished by passing a series of arduous literary examinations open to all applicants. Based on his performance in these examinations, the scholar was given an appointment in the government.

A position in the bureaucracy brought both prestige and privilege, but it also had drawbacks and indeed dangers. Officials were assigned to posts far from their homes in order to avoid conflict of interest, and their responsibilities were heavy. Even though the Confucian ideal of loyalty to the sovereign required that an exemplary civil servant speak frankly, criticism of superiors could be construed as treasonable. Officials risked censure, fines, public flogging (which was especially prevalent during the Ming period [1368–1644]), imprisonment, banishment, and execution. Many public careers were sadly brief: in the Ming dynasty a typical career lasted less than eight years. A familiar pattern became established: a scholar earned a degree, served with distinction, and then retired at a relatively early age in order to write or teach, nurse a chronic illness, care for his parents, or build a garden. These officials had dozens of precursors on which to model their own eremitism. Three of the most illustrious were Tao Qian, Lu Hong, and Wang Wei.

The earliest of these retired scholar-officials was the fourth-century poet Tao Qian. Finding the ceremonies and obeisances of official duties onerous and humiliating, Tao resigned after a scant eighty days of service and returned to his country home in order to devote himself to nature and poetry. Despite poverty and hardship, he never regretted this decision, and his poems express the serenity of the true recluse:

I built my hut beside a traveled road
Yet hear no noise of passing carts and horses.
You would like to know how it is done?
With the mind detached, one's place becomes remote.
Picking chrysanthemums by the eastern hedge
I catch sight of the distant southern hills.
The mountain air is lovely as the sun sets
And flocks of flying birds return together.
In these things is a fundamental truth
I would like to tell, but lack the words.

2. Wang Wei's 8th-century Wangchuan Villa was composed of rambling houses, pavilions, and halls connected by bridges and paths. The retreat—with its exquisite architecture and huge staff—imposed neither isolation nor abnegation. It became a compelling symbol in both painting and poetry for the elegant life of a scholar. Wang Yuanqi (1642–1715) had both poetic and visual inspiration for the scroll illustrated in part here: Wang Wei's poems describing each section of his villa, and a painting composition attributed to Wang Wei copied on stone in 1617. Handscroll. Ink and color on paper, h. 14 $\frac{1}{16}$ inches. Purchase, Douglass Dillon Gift, 1977. 80.

1. By the 8th century A.D. reclusion had become a noble alternative to precarious service at court. Lu Hong, an outstanding scholar, declined a prestigious position at the capital. Here he is pictured in his rustic mountain hut, which was bestowed upon him by the emperor in recognition of Lu's knowledge and integrity. The lure of a simple solitary life in harmony with nature was one impetus toward the building of walled garden complexes. Detail from *Ten Scenes of Lu Hong's Thatched Hut*, handscroll, attributed to Lu Hong, 8th century. Ink on paper, h. 11½ inches. National Palace Museum, Taipei.



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Tao Qian's humanity and profound feeling for nature—especially the chrysanthemums he carefully tended—endeared him to generations of Chinese.

Unlike Tao, who received no official recognition for his self-imposed reclusion, the scholar Lu Hong was greatly appreciated by his emperor, Xuan Zong (reigned 713–55). Lu Hong chose a quiet life of retreat on Mount Song outside the eastern capital Luoyang. Hearing of his learning, the emperor summoned him to the palace and offered him the position of imperial censor. When Lu resolutely refused this honor, the emperor permitted him to return to Mount Song and granted him a yearly stipend of one hundred pecks of rice and fifty bolts of silk, as well as the farewell presents of a recluse's robe and a *caotang*, or "thatched hut," to be built for him on the mountain. Although Lu Hong declined to serve his emperor, a handscroll in the National Palace Museum in Taipei commemorates the ruler's recognition of his integrity as a scholar (figure 1).

Although Lu Hong lived in a rustic hut, Wang Wei, an eighth-century poet, musician, and landscape painter, epitomized the talented scholar in elegant reclusion. His Wangchuan Villa was more than a humble retreat: made up of spacious buildings, courtyards, and pavilions situated in the picturesque hills outside of the Tang capital, Chang'an (modern Xi'an), this rambling country estate enjoyed spectacularly varied scenery. Wang made paintings of each of its views and wrote poems to celebrate them, and in subsequent centuries leading artists recreated these compositions and transcribed the poems (figure 2). For more than a thousand years, the Wangchuan Villa served as a model for all aspects of gardens—in garden design as well as in painting and poetry.

The scholar's ideal of retreating to a garden, far from the business and intrigues of the court, appealed even to an emperor. In a painting of the Qing emperor Jia Qing (reigned 1796–1820), the sovereign appears in the guise of

3. Emperors did not hesitate to spend the wealth of the empire on their private gardens, which often grew into enormous pleasure grounds with lakes, hills, hunting parks, lavish buildings, and fantastic rockeries. By the 3rd century B.C. the garden was already a synonym for extravagance and ostentation, blamed for the fall of more than one dynasty. With vast resources at hand to indulge his every building impulse, the emperor lacked only the veneer of scholarly refinement. Here the Jia Qing emperor (reigned 1796–1820) is posed as a scholar enjoying his collection of bronzes and paintings in his garden. Album leaf, artist unknown.





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4. The tracery of canals in Suzhou makes every sector of the city accessible by water. The Grand Canal, the completion of which in A.D. 605 contributed to the unification of China, links Suzhou and the luxuriant Yangtze Delta with the Yellow River system to the north. The slow but economic distribution of goods by waterways, in use for over 2000 years, still serves as one of the primary means of shipping in the Yangtze Delta.

a scholar seated in a garden (figure 3). Although the scene recalls Marie Antoinette playing milkmaid, it must be remembered that the Chinese Son of Heaven was often a man of learning. The picture probably shows a corner of the imperial garden in the Forbidden City in Peking. Built by Jia Qing's father, the emperor Qian Long, after his abdication in 1796, this garden was modeled upon those in Jiangnan, or "South of the Yangtze River"—particularly those in Suzhou, in modern Jiangsu Province—and used rocks from Lake Tai to represent mountain peaks, one of the essential elements of Chinese garden design.

The number of private gardens in Jiangnan grew steadily after the Southern Song dynasty moved its capital to Lin'an (modern Hangzhou) in the twelfth century. Both the temperate climate and the great agricultural and commercial wealth of the region encouraged the members of the upper class to lavish their resources on the cultivation of garden arts. During the period of the Mongol conquest in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, many men of letters, or *wen ren*, in Jiangnan, found official employment both disagreeable and hard to come by and therefore sought a life exclusively devoted to the arts. Such men as Ni Zan and Gu Ying, wealthy patrons as well as leading poets and artists, spent huge fortunes on building elaborate garden studios and pavilions in order to entertain friends and hold



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poetry meetings, nightly feasts, and drinking parties. This manner of luxurious artistic living continued to flourish through the Ming period.

The city of Suzhou, located near the northeastern shore of Lake Tai, China's "Great Lake," and on the Grand Canal near the point where the main north-south waterway crosses the Yangtze, was the economic and commercial hub of the lower Yangtze basin, the most fertile land in China. By late Ming times, in the early seventeenth century, the city had a population of about half a million. Gu Yanwu, the renowned seventeenth-century scholar, estimated that the prefecture of Suzhou contributed as much as one-tenth of the total annual tax revenue of the country at that time. Enormous fortunes, accumulated from agricultural products, silk, cotton, commerce, and banking, led to increased conspicuous consumption. Great households, according to Gu, sometimes had as many as two thousand servants and retainers. Since merchants, however rich, were despised, and mere material possessions were considered vulgar, the excess wealth was poured into cultural and artistic activities. Suzhou's cultural superiority was reflected in the large number of degree candidates from that area who passed the imperial examinations. In due course, the successful Suzhou-born scholar-official would retire to his native city or to the surrounding countryside, characteristically devoting his personal fortune to the cultivation of a garden and the other artistic accouterments of an elegant life.

The concept of *ya*, or "elegance," used in contradistinction to that of *shu*, or "vulgar ostentation," governed the scholar's taste. Instead of devoting himself to building grand monuments as manifestations of his

5. The Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician (Zhuo Zheng Yuan) is a scholar-official's garden of grand scale. An idyllic world unto itself, the elaborate scheme features waterways, pools, and streams that divide and reflect the beautiful buildings. Built by a wealthy imperial censor, the Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician is famous for its association with the Ming-dynasty artist and scholar Wen Zhengming (1470–1559), who had a studio there and who painted it many times.

6. In the Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician a moon gate faced with gray terra-cotta tiles frames a long vista across a lotus pond. The lotus blossom is a symbol for purity since it grows from the mud of the pond yet unfolds to reveal unstained petals. Visible at the far end of the water is a distinctive square building with a moon gate on each side.

success, the Chinese garden owner wished only to create refined surroundings in which he could seek the peace and solace of nature to escape worldly vexations. The purpose of having a garden in the city, according to Ji Cheng, the author of the *Yuan Ye* (a treatise on gardens that was completed in 1634), was to “live as a hermit even in the middle of a marketplace, enjoying a better view than you would have from nesting in the trees.” In a well-planned urban garden, writes Ji, “even if the neighborhood is somewhat vulgar, all noise is shut out when the gates are closed.”

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II.

Wang Shi Yuan

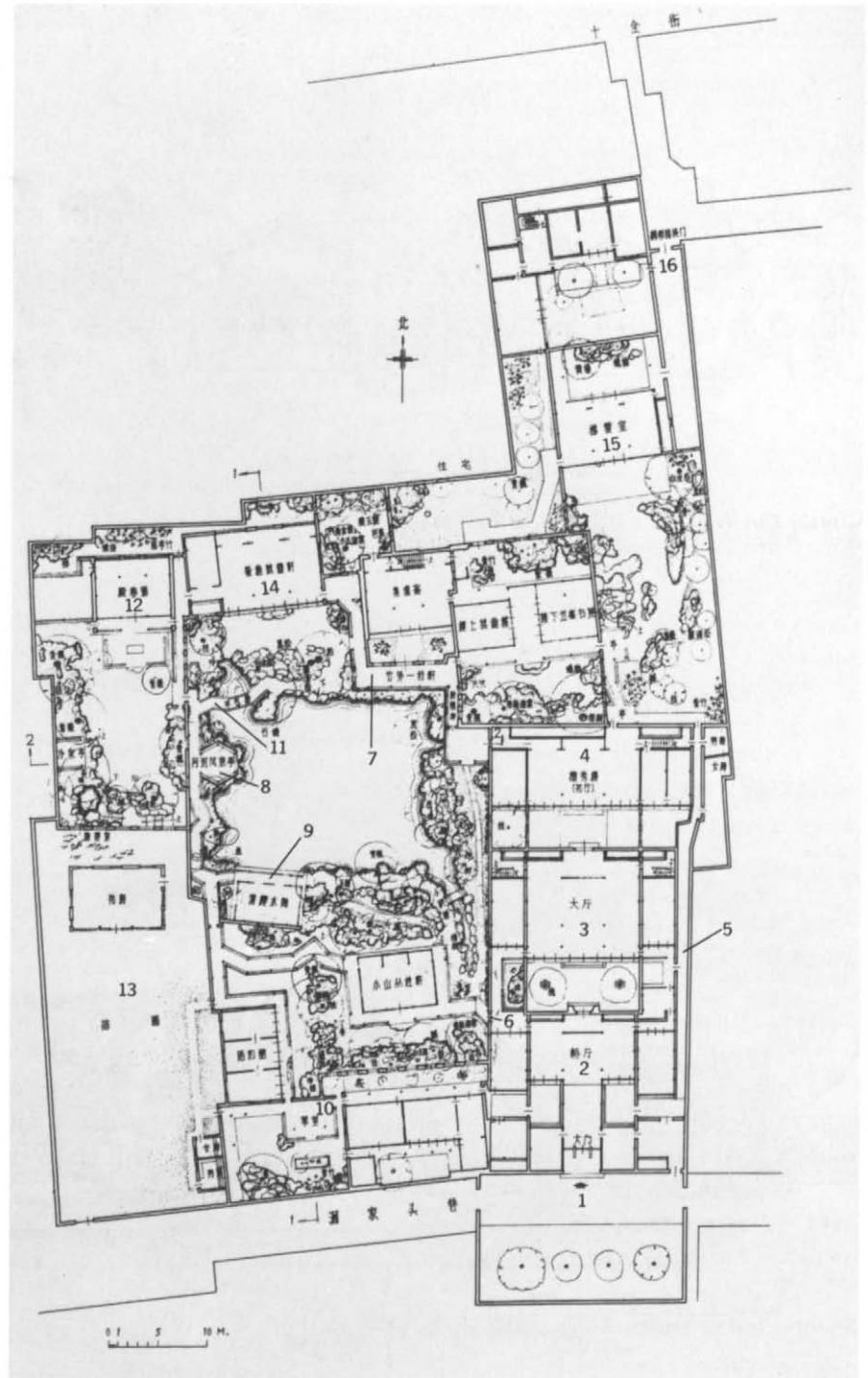
The Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets

The design of the Astor Chinese garden court is based on a small courtyard within a scholar's garden in the city of Suzhou called Wang Shi Yuan, the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets. Like all old monuments in China, the Wang Shi Yuan has had many incarnations. It was first built in the twelfth century by Shi Zhengzhi, an official who, burdened by the cares of administration, named his garden-residence Yu Yin, The Fisherman's Retreat, in admiration for the pure and uncomplicated life of the fisherman. Yet his home was anything but a humble hut: records indicate that it housed his extensive personal library, the Studio of Ten Thousand Scrolls.

By the fifteenth century the garden had fallen into disrepair; little is known of its transformations through the Ming dynasty, but during the reign (1736–96) of the Qing-dynasty emperor Qian Long, it was completely rebuilt by Song Zonghuan, vice-director at the Court of Imperial Entertainments. Song planned the garden-residence, which he purchased around 1760, as a retreat for his retirement years. His sobriquet was Wang Shi, Master of the Fishing Nets, and in choosing this name for his residence, he made a playful allusion to its original title. After Song died, the garden was neglected: most of the large trees and ancient rocks were lost or badly damaged, leaving only the deep, crystalline pond unaffected. (A generous supply of fresh water from innumerable springs and wells is a major reason why Suzhou's gardens were repeatedly rebuilt on the same sites, and why they have flourished for so many centuries.)

Toward the end of the eighteenth century the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets had another owner, Qu Yuancun. Qu carefully studied the natural assets and proportions of the modest property and redesigned it accordingly. The piled rocks, pavilions, and residential quarters one visits in Suzhou today are essentially his successful composition. While craftsmen and laborers were hired to execute his designs, Qu was his own architect, determining how and where the pavilions would be built, how the earth of the garden would be shaped, and how it would be landscaped. He also selected the names, rich with historical allusions, for the various buildings.

It was not unusual in China for a scholar trained in the classics and literature to design his own house and garden. To hire professional designers was to miss an exciting creative challenge. The eighteenth-century poet Yuan Mei, when advised to buy a house and garden in perfect condition rather than incur the expense of repairing his old garden, adamantly refused, saying that no other would suit him "because there would be nothing of myself in it." The major reconstruction of the Garden of the Fishing Nets in the eighteenth century was followed by successive alterations and refurbishings by nineteenth- and twentieth-century owners, each



7. Densely arranged on barely 1 1/3 acres of land, the Wang Shi Yuan is an outstanding example of a small urban garden surrounding a residence. Key: 1 front gate; 2 chair hall; 3 reception hall; 4 Hall of Gathering Elegance; 5 corridor; 6 door to garden; 7 A Branch beyond the Bamboo; 8 pavilion overlooking pond; 9 Washing Cap-Strings; 10 Lute Room; 11 zigzag bridge; 12 Late Spring Studio (The courtyard below it on the plan was the model for the Astor Court.); 13 nursery; 14 Hall for Viewing the Pine and Seeing a Painting; 15 Hall of Ascending to the Clouds; 16 modern entrance. From *Suzhou Gudian Yuan Lin* (Peking, 1979).

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of whom put "something of himself" in it. In the last thirty years repairs have been made and sections rebuilt or expanded. Because of these embellishments, the present garden is more complex than that of the eighteenth century, but the design principles and vocabulary remain the same.

The Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets is densely but harmoniously arranged on one and one-third acres (figure 7). Besides the residence and some dozen smaller buildings, there is a spacious central pond. Handsomely proportioned courtyards flank the east and west sides of the

main garden. Ten tiny gardens are tucked in among the buildings, and a generous area is set aside for cultivating trees and plants in pots.

The compound's exterior, with its plain, whitewashed walls, looks no different from most of the buildings that line the streets of Suzhou, and effectively conceals the magic world within. Similarly, the simple gate offers no clue to the interior of the compound; it could as easily open into a simple residence or a small factory (figure 8).

Originally, the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets was entered through the front gate of the house at the southeast corner of the complex. Within the house, which was aligned on a north-south axis, the public and formal rooms were to the south, and the more private rooms at the back to the north. The gate opened onto a broad hallway, which led to the chair hall, the waiting room for sedan chairs and their carriers. Guests passed around a screen at the back of the chair hall and continued north, down a few steps, and through a small interior courtyard, where, echoing the symmetry of the house, trees grew on the left and right. Ascending a few steps on the north side of the courtyard, one entered the reception hall, where the strict rectilinear arrangement of the furniture established the room's formal tone. Guests on more intimate terms passed around a screen at the back of the reception hall and, proceeding through a small courtyard, came to the Hall of Gathering Elegance, a less formal area connected to the garden. Side rooms provided work space for servants to attend to their duties unobtrusively. An

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8. The high whitewashed walls and plain doorways of residences in Suzhou lend an additional measure of privacy in giving no indication of what lies inside—a shop, a factory, or a shimmering landscape. The modern entrance to the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets is set back from the street and is unobtrusive to the point of being easily missed. From the street the visitor can see only a few yards into a narrow corridor and must make a 90-degree turn to the right to enter the series of courtyards that make up much of the garden.



9. From the pavilion on the bank of the pond one looks east to the distinctive undulating profile of the side wall of the house. The false latticed windows and horizontal tile trim are architectural details designed to enliven the otherwise overwhelming mass of the wall. Artfully placed rockeries and plants create visual planes that increase the feeling of depth.

enclosed corridor running the length of the east wall of the residence allowed members of the household to travel unobserved from the front gate to the back garden or from room to room inside the house. The living quarters were on the second floor, reached by three enclosed stairways.

From the first-floor halls, it was possible to pass through rooms on the west into the garden beyond. The formality of the subdued interiors and predictable symmetry of the house gave no hint of the abundant surprises of the garden, with its light-hearted informality and inviting brightness (figures 9, 10).

The pond is the main focus as well as the physical center of the garden. About 420 square yards in area, the pond has a roughly square shape with coves at the southeast and northwest corners. These coves, which are spanned by stone bridges—an arched bridge at the southeast, a zigzag one at the northwest (figure 15)—give the illusion that the water continues to flow on to unseen sections of the garden, a skillfully planned *trompe l'oeil*. The yellow rocks that line the pond's edge were arranged to create caverns and stony overhangs which heighten this sense that the water is flowing beyond the viewer's range of vision. The lotus and water grass so common to Chinese garden ponds are not grown here; nothing disturbs the full play of light, sky, and reflected images on the surface of the water.

Three buildings overhang the pond, each different and distinctive in architectural features. On the west side a hexagonal open-sided pavilion stands on a modest rise. On the north bank is poised the three-sided



10. Emerging from the dimly lighted interiors of the residence, the visitor looks across the bright pond, the physical center of the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets. The *ting* on the opposite bank carries a name that suggests the delectable pleasures of a summer's evening: Pavilion of Moon Arriving and Breeze Coming. Open pavilions, ubiquitous in Chinese gardens and scenic spots, are positioned to focus attention on especially fine scenery (see figure 9).





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structure, A Branch beyond the Bamboo, whose windows and moon gate frame views of the garden (figure 11). The delicacy of its architectural detailing makes it one of the most appealing buildings in the garden. At the southwest corner of the pond is Washing Cap-Strings (figure 12), a pavilion whose name was taken from an ancient song. Placed on stone piers, the pavilion, especially inviting in hot weather, is cooled by the water beneath and by breezes passing through its perforated walls. Each of these structures looks out on a different view, offering a fresh perspective.

Buildings virtually ring the pond. Besides the three at the water's edge, there are two more a short distance from it—and yet these structures do not overwhelm the vistas around the pond. Carefully positioned with respect for the landscape, the buildings are never placed opposite each other and their moderate heights leave the pond open. Where buildings are set back from the water, surrounding layers of rocks, plants, and trees increase the impression of depth and remoteness.

Water is an indispensable visual and symbolic element in Chinese gardens: without it the landscape (in Chinese, literally “mountains and water”) would be incomplete. The Chinese speak of water as nourishing, enriching, and restorative. It often represents that which is pure and noble and, beyond all else, that which is true to its own nature: following its own path, seeking its own level, water—like the wise man—does only what is completely natural.

Water immediately brings to mind the Yin-Yang duality so fundamental to Chinese thought. In nature, the Yin characteristics of coolness, darkness, softness, moisture, weakness, and yielding are seen in a dynamic continuum with the hot, bright, hard, dry, strong, unyielding Yang characteristics. Both aspects are always present, and as one achieves its most extreme expression, paradoxically, the potential of the other to reappear is felt most strongly. Thus night gives way to day, winter to summer, heat to cold, in a continuous process of cyclical movement and transformation, rather than one of achieving balance or stasis.

11. On the north edge of the pond a small open structure provides a place to linger and enjoy the garden. The windows and doorways, each of a different shape, frame views on all sides of A Branch beyond the Bamboo. The name describes the framed view of a single pine branch as seen through the bamboo-filled courtyard to the rear of the porch.

12. The pavilion at the south edge of the pond is called Washing Cap-Strings, a phrase from a famous story recorded in one of the Chinese classics. Confucius and his students overheard a small boy singing: “When Cang Lang’s waters are clear, I wash my cap-strings, / When Cang Lang’s waters are muddy, I wash my feet.” Confucius interpreted the song for his students: whether confronted with an ideal or adverse situation, one must respond appropriately. The clear waters came to suggest propitious circumstances and the name was given to buildings and ponds as well as to the Cang Lang Pavilion Garden in Suzhou.



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13, 14. The Yin-Yang complementary polarities of dark and light, soft and hard, void and mass, are to be seen everywhere in Chinese gardens. If the design is successful, the contrasts will be infinite and subtle with neither aspect predominating. The all-embracing system—so utterly simple in principle—finds endless manifestations such

as the sunny courtyard seen from the dark Hall of Ascending to the Clouds (a metaphor for earning an official degree) in the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets, above, or the rough-patterned brick walkway of dark tonality against the smooth, white wall in Lingerin Garden (Liu Yuan), below.

In the garden the principle is visible in the juxtaposition of a shadowy hall with a bright courtyard, in the covering of hard rocks by soft moss, in the contrast of smooth plaster walls with rough stony paths (figures 13, 14). Less visual, more conceptual contrasts are also savored: the relationship of stillness and motion can be seen in the shimmering reflection of a rock in the pond, and the cyclical character of time is brought to mind by the shifting intensity of light through the day, the phases of the moon, or the winter plum, a harbinger of spring, blooming in the snow. Strolling through the Garden of



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the Master of the Fishing Nets one is continually aware of the pleasing contrasts of such complementary pairs. Both consciously and unconsciously they contribute to the pleasurable variety of the experience.

At the south end of the garden is a grouping of small buildings and courtyards. In complete seclusion, the Lute Room faces south onto its own garden with bamboo and rockeries. One can easily explore the complex for hours without realizing that this little garden is there.

Proceeding past the central pond, over a small zigzag stone bridge and through the gate of the wall that borders the pond on the west, one comes to a modest courtyard, measuring $45\frac{1}{2}$ by $71\frac{1}{2}$ feet, in front of a room called Late Spring Studio (Dian Chun Yi) (figures 16–19). The utter simplicity and harmonious proportions of this courtyard suggest an early date for its basic plan. Because of its appropriate size, the Late Spring Studio courtyard plan was adapted for the Astor Court at the Metropolitan Museum. The Suzhou courtyard's main architectural features are a half-pavilion on the west wall (which was rebuilt in the 1950s) and a short covered walkway along the east wall. A spring-fed pool called Deep Emerald Green Spring (Han Bi Quan) is found among the rocks at the southwest corner, and beautiful Taihu (Lake Tai) peaks are arrayed along the south wall in front of elaborate fretted windows that look onto the plant nursery outside the south wall. At the

15. The zigzag bridge spanning the pond in the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets is of smooth white marble. The views and details in the garden must be seen slowly and from many viewpoints to be fully apprehended, and the elegant bridge arrests the visitor's pace and encourages a pause. The bridge, gracefully proportioned and integrated with the surrounding scenery, sits just above the water. From the north shore of the pond it leads toward the Late Spring Studio and courtyard (figures 16–19).

16. The courtyard in front of the Late Spring Studio is graced by this half-pavilion reconstructed in the 1950s. In this courtyard, used as the model for the Astor Court, architecture and nature are interwoven. The wall is a backdrop for the fantastic rocks and luxuriant plants, while the pavilion is both a place from which to view the garden and a showcase for the exhibition of a fine rock.



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17. The wall at the far end of the Late Spring Studio courtyard conceals the area for cultivating plants. Inside the Metropolitan Museum this wall was made considerably taller. In adapting the design for the Astor garden court other motifs were simplified to conform more closely to the aesthetics of the Ming-dynasty scholar: the pavilion was given lighter proportions, a pattern of bricks used for the floor, and the number of rocks reduced.

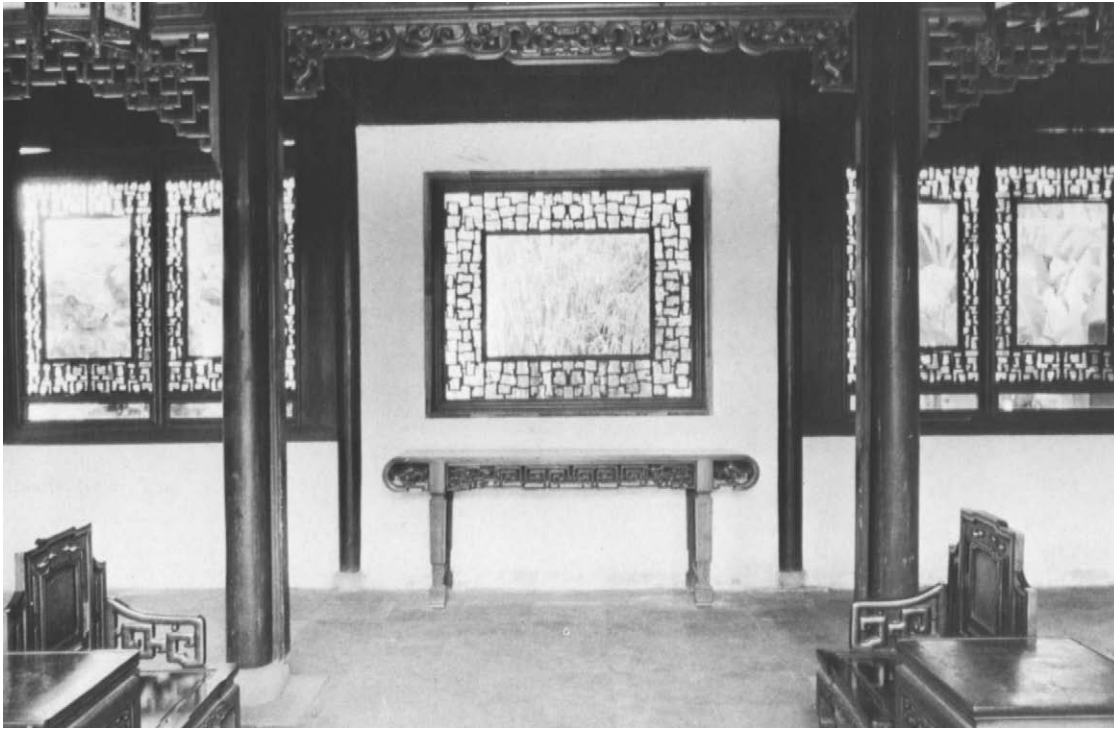


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18. The Late Spring Studio (Dian Chun Yi), with its tall lattice doors opening to the south, is situated at the north end of the courtyard. The moon-viewing terrace in front is an inviting place to watch the moon rise on an autumn evening or to linger in the sun on a winter's afternoon. During the 1930s this, the most remote corner of the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets, was the studio of the renowned landscape painter Chang Da-chien.



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court's north end lies the Late Spring Studio, with its south-facing porch. A second smaller studio adjoins it to the west; there the renowned modern painter Chang Da-chien resided and worked for a time before the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937. The north wall of these two rooms opens to a shallow garden of fantastic rocks and bamboo visible through large fretted windows. The shallow well of space permits air and light and, in the summer, crosscurrents of breeze into the rooms, and it hints that there is possibly another garden, only partially glimpsed, beyond.

In every corner of the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets the space is ingeniously divided to create interesting shapes, and always to suggest more space. To savor fully the complicated multiple relationships, the contrasts, the unexpected juxtapositions, the surprises, and the varied views that each position in the garden affords, one should, as the writer George Kates recommends, wander quietly and a little aimlessly, allowing the garden to work its magic.

19. Behind the lattice-framed windows of the Late Spring Studio a shallow garden is planted with bamboo. Because it keeps its green leaves long into winter, and bends but never breaks in a storm, bamboo came to be a symbol of the man of integrity who holds to his ideals even through adversity. Glimpsing the plants and rockeries through the windows gives a feeling of depth and space, while the high white wall behind them ensures privacy.

20. In this detail of the Wangchuan Villa, Wang Yuanqi has illustrated Wang Wei's poem "The Deer Fence," which contains the lines "In empty mountains no one is in sight/Yet human voices are heard clearly." Wang Yuanqi's painting would evoke a feeling of remote tranquility for the viewer familiar with the poem. Wang Wei was a superb painter as well as a great poet, and his villa inspired his efforts in both arts. The fluid exchange between verbal and visual imagery fascinated Wang Wei and later artists. An 11th-century critic summarized it this way: "Savoring Wang Wei's poems, one finds painting in his poetry. Contemplating Wang Wei's paintings, one finds poetry in his painting."

III. *The Poetic Imagination*

Steeped in classical learning, the Chinese garden-builders found great satisfaction in bringing antiquity alive through the names chosen for their creations. The subjects for poetry and painting, gardens enriched these artistic traditions, and also drew upon them. All Chinese gardens, as well as their principal structures and vistas, were given names with long poetic and historical associations, which helped to guide and stir the visitor's imagination. Without this rich interplay of allusions, the historical flavor and intellectual stimulation of the garden would have been greatly diminished.

The names of certain vistas of Wang Wei's eighth-century Wangchuan Villa, for instance, were prominent in Chinese cultural thought. Two of



them—the Deer Fence (figure 20) and the Bamboo Studio—became known to every literate Chinese through Wang’s poems. About the Deer Fence Wang wrote:

In empty mountains no one is in sight,
Yet human voices are heard clearly,
As the evening glow entering the deep forest
Shines again on the green moss.

And of the Bamboo Studio:

I sit alone deep in a bamboo grove,
Strumming on my lute while singing a song;
In the deep forest no one knows I am here,
Only the bright moon comes to shine on me.

These works, which establish the image and mood of the scholar-recluse in both poetry and painting, exemplify Wang Wei’s genius at “painting” in words. In “The Deer Fence” the evening glow shining on the green moss evokes “red and green” (*danqing*), a poetic term for painting. While the first two lines suggest activity in stillness, the last two describe tranquility in movement. This short poem, indeed, paints a picture that would defy the powers of the most able artist. “The Bamboo Studio” presents a lutist in a bamboo grove, an archetypal image of the scholar-recluse, which is also seen in *The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove*, an early sixth-century representation found on a set of tiles excavated at Nanking. The last two lines of this poem portray the scholar’s solitary splendor—with the bright moon as his sole companion—and surpass all pictorial depictions of the subject.

Although these poems speak of loneliness and solitude, an important aspect of a recluse’s life was the good fellowship he found among kindred spirits, the shared enjoyment of good food, wine, and landscape (or garden) scenery. When scholars gathered, they strolled in the woods or gardens, tasted new tea or wine, lingered over striking views, composed poems, or painted. Among Wang Wei’s frequent visitors at Wangchuan, was Pei Di, who wrote poems responding to Wang’s. Here is Pei’s contribution on “The Deer Fence”:

At sundown in full view of a cold mountain
I am your only guest;
I know little about deep forests,
But I see deer tracks.

And at the Bamboo Studio Pei wrote the following verse:

I come by the Bamboo Studio,
Having grown more fond of you each day;
Only mountain birds enter and leave here,
No worldly man is found at this secluded place.

Pei’s lines elaborate upon Wang’s thoughts. Indeed, through poetry, the Chinese scholar carried on conversations not only with his friends, but also with great poets from the past. Thus a rich literary tradition grew as new poems were written to recapture memorable moments. When visiting a garden, a site named the Bamboo Studio would bring to mind not only Wang Wei’s Wangchuan Villa, but also words of past poets—and, of course, the vivid image of the solitary scholar playing the lute in the cool silvery moonlight.

An historical allusion even more prominent in the Chinese imagination



21. In A.D. 353 forty-two scholars met at the Orchid Pavilion where they vied with each other composing poems. In the larger detail from Qian Gu’s (1508–74) interpretation of the event, six poets are struggling with their compositions, occasionally drinking wine from the cups drifting by on leaves. At the end of the afternoon, when all were in a decidedly mellow mood, the master calligrapher Wang Xizhi recorded the day’s poetic production, astonishing even himself with the effortless freedom and unsurpassed beauty of his calligraphy. That the friends met in the countryside is significant, for they drew on nature not only for inspiration, but for creative energy as well. The Orchid Pavilion gathering established an ideal for the literary meeting that has been remembered and celebrated in China, Korea, and Japan ever since. Handscroll, 1560. Ink and color on paper, h. 9 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches. Gift of Douglas Dillon, 1980.80.



21



than Wang Wei's Wangchuan Villa and similarly linked with painting and gardens was the Orchid Pavilion. It was at the Orchid Pavilion that China's most celebrated literary gathering took place in A.D. 353. The renowned calligrapher Wang Xizhi (307–65) and his friends met to celebrate the spring festival of purification by a mountain stream. "This place has lofty mountains with steep cliffs, luxuriant forests and elegant bamboo, and there is also a clear stream gushing forward, branching to the left and to the right, flowing swiftly. . . . On this day, the sky is bright and the air pure, and a gentle breeze wafts softly," wrote Wang Xizhi. In a handscroll by Qian Gu (1508–74), dated 1560, representing this literary event (figure 21), cups of wine float down the stream, as the poets lined up on both sides help themselves freely and struggle to complete their poems. When their time was up, eleven men had finished two poems, fifteen finished one, and sixteen (Wang Xizhi's son Xianzhi among them) failed to come up with anything, and were penalized by having to drink three additional cups of wine.

The Orchid Pavilion was a popular subject in painting and often appeared in the landscape compositions of the late Yuan and early Ming scholar-painters, who painted essentially about themselves, their solitary lives, and their friends. Among their other favorite topics were mountain retreats and literary gatherings.

Following the late Yuan tradition, Ming painters in the Suzhou area continued to see landscapes through the eyes of the scholar-recluse. Wen Zhengming (1470–1559), for instance, devoted himself to painting scrolls depicting scholars' pastimes, such as *Sitting Leisuredly in a Valley* (1519),

Conversation under Green Shade (1523), *Tasting Tea* (1531), and *Sitting under Luxuriant Pines by a Clear Stream* (1542).

Thematically, while a single scholar seated under trees harks back to the pre-Tang image of the scholar-recluse, a group of them among trees and mountain streams inevitably brings to mind the Orchid Pavilion. In fact, it is difficult to imagine that a Ming scholar-painter could ever create a picture of a gathering of friends in a landscape setting without thinking of Wang Xizhi's Orchid Pavilion with its "lofty mountains . . . steep cliffs, luxuriant forests and elegant bamboo, and . . . clear stream." An early landscape by Shen Zhou (1427–1509), in the National Palace Museum, Taipei, bears the title *Lofty Mountains and Elegant Bamboo*. Wen Zhengming's *Cascading Waterfalls in the Pine Ravine* of 1531 (figure 22), is in fact an Orchid Pavilion composition, since on a similar work, dated 1550, Wen inscribed the following poem:

Steep cliffs and lofty mountains are covered with luxuriant forest,
A gushing stream winds around dividing earth and dust;
Those people chanting their poems by the rapids,
Are they not the likes of Wang Xizhi?

Wen Zhengming was the preeminent Ming painter of gardens. Returning to Suzhou after an unhappy stay in Peking in 1527, he was given a studio in the renowned Zhuo Zheng Yuan, or the Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician, then being created by his friend, the retired censor—and unsuccessful politician—Wang Xianchen (see figures 5, 6). Repeating the creative process of Wang Wei eight centuries before, Wen Zhengming translated the garden into painting and poetry. In 1535 Wen produced an album of thirty-one views, each accompanied by a poem and a note describing the site. In a long inscription at the end, he gives an account of the whole garden, and its history. A second album by Wen, dated 1551 and representing eight of the Zhuo Zheng Yuan views, is now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Its fourth leaf, *The Banana Tree Railing*, shows a scholar seated in a room looking out at a banana tree near a large Taihu rock (figure 23). On the facing leaf Wen wrote:

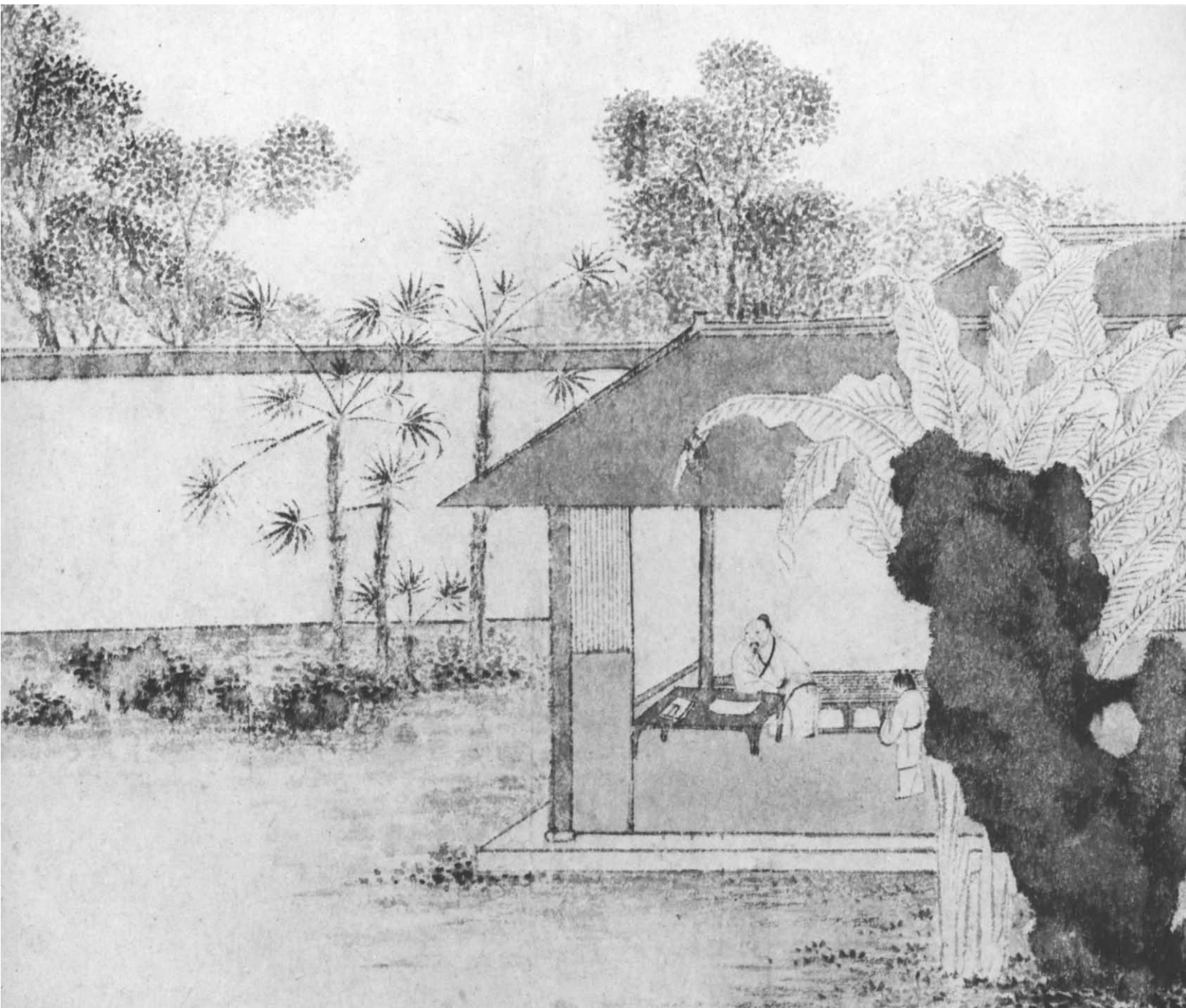
The new banana is more than ten feet tall;
After rain it is clean as though washed.
It does not dislike the high white wall,
It elegantly matches the curved red balustrade.
Cool autumn sounds come to my pillow,
Green morning colors are seen through the windows.
Let no one take to the heedless shears,
Leave it until its shade reaches my house.

With characteristic restraint, Wen chose to use only ink, making, as the ninth-century painting historian Zhang Yanyuan put it, "the phoenix look colorful without the use of the five colors." Aided by the poem, the quiet and exquisite painting easily transports us to that magical autumnal moment in the garden.

22. The irresistible allure of good friends, fine wine, and beautiful scenery to inspire poetic talent, and the shining precedent of the Orchid Pavilion gathering led to thousands of similar meetings and occasioned the creation of countless paintings. *Cascading Waterfalls in the Pine Ravine* by Wen Zhengming shows scholars beneath the pines in a poetry meeting that parallels the Orchid Pavilion gathering. Hanging scroll, 1531. 42½ x 14⅞ inches. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

22





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23. In painting the Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician, Wen Zhengming reduced the riot of color and detail to a simple monochromatic design. His spare rendering focuses attention on the stillness of the moment as the scholar gazes out at his garden. The Garden of the Unsuccess-

ful Politician was rebuilt after Wen Zhengming's lifetime, so definitive correspondences between Wen's album leaves and the present-day garden in Suzhou are difficult to find (see figures 5, 6). Album leaf D, 1551. Ink on paper, 10½ x 10¾ inches. Gift of Douglas Dillon, 1979.458.1.

IV.

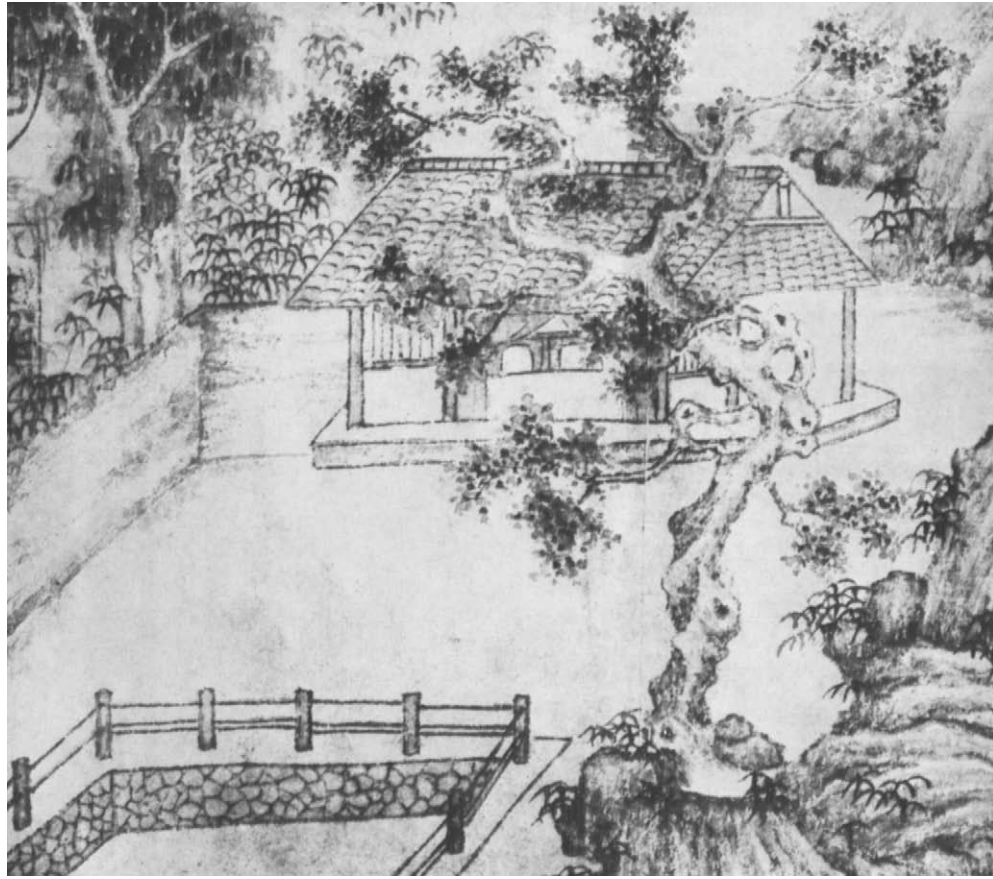
Painting and Garden Design

In the *Yuan Ye*, Ji Cheng remarks that “even in a tiny structure of a few small rocks and a little room, I feel I must express fully the extraordinary ideas stored in my bosom.” He goes on to remind the reader that in “building a garden the owner must make nine-tenths of the decisions, leaving only one-tenth to the builder.” Thus, a garden is very much a portrait of the owner, revealing his personal taste and knowledge—“If the owner has peaks and valleys in his bosom, then his design can be either complex or simple.” Garden design therefore, a reflection of the ideas and qualities of the creators, is emphatically a fine art.

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25. This painting by Xu Ben, of about 1375, is one leaf from an album that is an early systematic record of the major sites in a garden—in this case, the Lion Grove Garden in Suzhou. One of the principles of garden design—planning a building around a particular view—is illustrated here. The small hall is positioned to provide a view of a gnarled cypress tree. Lest a visitor miss the focus, he is guided by the name: Hall for Pointing at the Cypress. In the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets a building is named Hall of Viewing the Pine and Seeing a Painting—the ancient pine framed by the architecture resembles a painting.



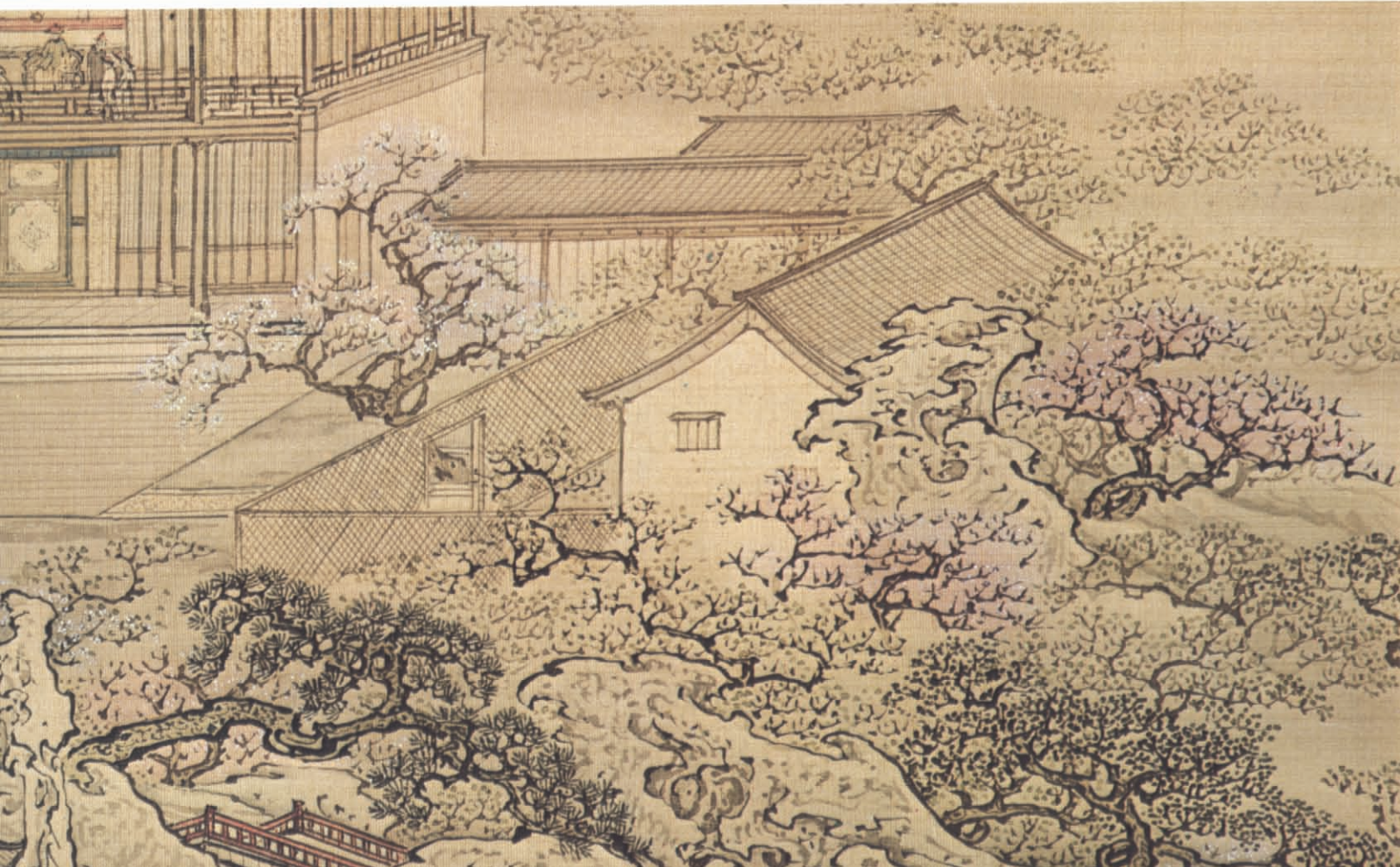
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24. Arranging rocks in a garden can be analogous to painting, the white plaster of the wall becoming the background against which the rocks are composed. This stunning configuration of Taihu rocks, the work of a Ming designer, was recently removed from an abandoned garden near Tiger Hill at the north perimeter of Suzhou and reinstalled in the Astor Court at the Metropolitan Museum. The main peak resembles the imposing arching boulders found in the Lion Grove Garden in Suzhou. The other two rocks of the set are the base beneath the peak and the “foothill,” to the bottom left, that balances the rightward-leaning peak.

In China, landscape painting and garden design are closely related, each discipline frequently influencing the other. Ji Cheng (born 1582) was himself a former landscape painter who consciously tried to emulate in his garden compositions the styles of Jing Hao and Guan Tong, the two leading landscape masters of the tenth century. The Chinese garden, like a painting, is meant to represent an ideal or “true” (*zhen*) landscape; it does not imitate nature. But, as Ji Cheng cautions, “even though [the garden] is the work of human hands, it must look as if it were created by heaven.”

The most obvious parallel between painting and garden design is the piling of rocks to create a landscape (figure 24). Ji, acknowledging this similarity, instructs the garden builder to “take the whitened wall as the painting paper, and paint it with rocks.” Since most Ming and Qing painters were also interested in gardens, their pictures invite comparison with rock compositions. Dao Ji (1641–about 1710), the great master of mountain peaks, is said to have been the creator of the Mountain Studio of Rock Fragments Garden in Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province, and, indeed, in his paintings the mountains resemble garden rocks.

The painter’s eye is also used in laying out the architectural elements of a garden. An important building is usually planned around a certain prospect or scene. In Xu Ben’s album of the Lion Grove Garden, of about 1375, it is clear that the structures look out onto picturesque topographic highlights, such as a fine rock, an interesting vista, a stand of trees, or a particularly noteworthy single tree. Album leaves depict a *Lion Peak*, a *Bamboo Valley*, and an old cypress that provided the name for a building,





26. Here an elaborate garden in Yangzhou, just north of the Yangtze River, is illustrated by Yuan Jiang (about 1670–1724), who shows the heavier roof style more typical of northern China. In the painting above one can see every type of garden architecture: the covered walkway (*qu lang*), single-story hall (*xuan* or *tang*), two-story hall (*lou*), open terraces (*tai*), bridges (*qiao*), and pavilions (*ting*). The fantastic Taihu rocks so essential to the Chinese concept of landscape, are piled in profusion. The detail at the left shows gentlemen seated in a *lou* gazing down upon the spring foliage. The peach trees recall the ancient story of the fisherman who stumbled upon a valley dense with blossoming peach trees where the people were unaware of the turmoil in the real world. He left the valley, but despite repeated attempts, failed to find the Peach Blossom Spring, as it was called, a second time. This garden designer perhaps was hinting that the elusive utopia might be found in his garden. Details from a handscroll, about 1700. Ink and colors on silk, h. 20½ inches. Private collection.

Hall for Pointing at the Cypress (Xhi Bo Xuan) (figure 25).

The garden designer, like the painter, must be selective; he must “borrow” views from the larger landscape setting and isolate them for the visitor’s enjoyment. Ji writes:

The borrowed views are among the most important in a garden design. There are borrowings from distant scenes and from nearby scenes from above and from below, and borrowings at different seasons of the year. When touched by objects and emotions, our eyes are caught and our hearts leap. It is like a painting in which ideas are suggested beyond the brushstrokes.

When there is water, the natural terrain is sculpted and augmented with rocks to suggest a landscape of mountains and water. Garden structures are positioned at both high and low points to take in different aspects of the setting. And while buildings frequently mark fixed vantage points for carefully composed views, the walkways and paths throughout the garden are planned for enjoying the landscape in a changing, or moving, focus.

A good example of a large formal garden with a complex series of views was the original sixteenth-century Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician, in Suzhou, which had thirty-one named sites. The names followed certain conventions: a tall building was for enjoying a “cozy dream”; a bridge arched like a “rainbow”; a pavilion by the water was called the Cang Lang Pavilion,

after the famous Cang Lang Pavilion in Suzhou; others were named for various trees and flowers, or favorite garden motifs such as fish, cranes, and deer. According to Wen Zhengming (see p. 24), the original garden had two principal buildings on the south and north sides of the pond—both facing south as do most major garden structures—the one-story Rustic Hall and the two-story Dreaming Hermit's Loft, names that alluded to the traditions of the scholar's rustic retreat. Furthermore, the garden had sites such as Fishing Rock, Pavilion of Deep and Clean Retreat, Listening to the Sighing Pines, Peach Blossom Banks, Bamboo Grove, and Banana Tree Railing.

A handscroll of about 1700 by Yuan Jiang shows an elaborate garden design in a panoramic view, in which the division into “zones” is particularly striking (figure 26). The enclosed garden, with the walls and the buildings oriented along the north-south axis, is divided into two large areas, a pool surrounded by pavilions on the one side and a courtyard on the other. The areas are further divided by terraces, walkways, gardens within gardens, and pavilions with their own carefully planned surroundings.

Although the garden designer deals with spatial problems, he may be directly influenced by the compositions of scroll and album paintings. From any given vantage point in the Chinese garden, say from the veranda of a hall, the visitor sees a fixed view as in an album leaf, but as he moves from one point to another, as along a walkway, the scenery unfolds as it does in a handscroll.

In Lu Hong's scroll *Ten Scenes of a Thatched Hut*, as well as in Wang Wei's *Wangchuan Villa*, individual scenes are treated as “episodes.” This monoscopic, or episodic, treatment goes back to the earliest Chinese pictorial representations. It may be seen in Han-dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) mural paintings as well as in later handscrolls or albums. In the British Museum's *Admonitions* scroll, attributed to the fourth-century artist Gu Kaizhi, scenes alternate with texts explaining them—as they do in the *Thatched Hut*—while at Dun Huang, Cave 428, of the mid-sixth century, the various episodes of a narrative are arranged sequentially through the use of linked mountain motifs that form “space cells”—as in the Wangchuan scroll. Individual scenes are also depicted in series on album leaves as in Xu Ben's *Lion Grove Garden* and Wen Zhengming's *Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician*.

A second, continuous method of representation derives from archaic bronze or mural decorations showing processions of figures, animals, or birds. In early handscrolls this type of composition is exemplified by *Snow Clearing on the River* attributed to Wang Wei, in the Ogawa Collection, Kyoto, and *Early Snow on the River* by Zhao Gan (about 961–75), in the National Palace Museum, Taipei. In both of these, the composition traces the course of a journey over time. The handscrolls representing tours of actual garden or city sites, such as Li Gonglin's *Mountain Villa*, of the late eleventh century, in the National Palace Museum, and Wang Hui's *The Emperor Kang Xi's Southern Tour*, of about 1695, in the Metropolitan, combine the episodic with the continuous format.

In both landscape painting and garden design, the Chinese employed principles that reflect the Yin-Yang conceptualization of cosmic forces. In a seventeenth-century essay on landscape painting, Wang Yuanqi (1642–1715) cites the “dragon vein” in a composition as the basic “principle” (*ti*) and sees its “application” (*yong*) in a multitude of complementary Yin-Yang situations, such as “opening-and-closing” and “rising-and-falling” movements. Wang writes:

27. The main entrance to the Astor Court is the moon gate in the south wall. Looking through the moon gate to the north one sees only parts of the garden and primarily zones of darkness and brightness, a manifestation of the complementary pairs of Yin and Yang. The eye moves from the white wall to the dark vestibule, to the sunlit garden, to the dark Ming Room, and on to the bright windows at the far end. The contrasts create a sense of rhythm, distance, and space.

Text continued on page 40

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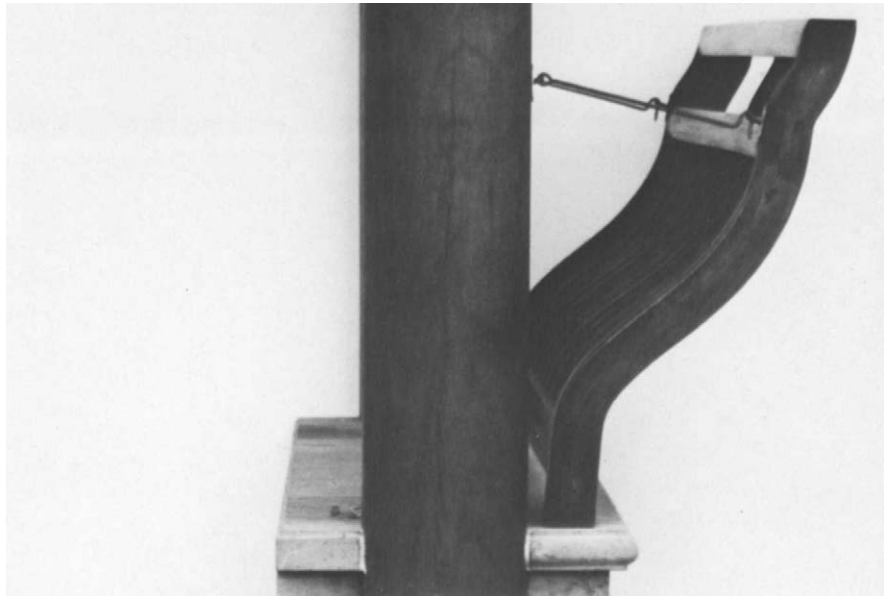
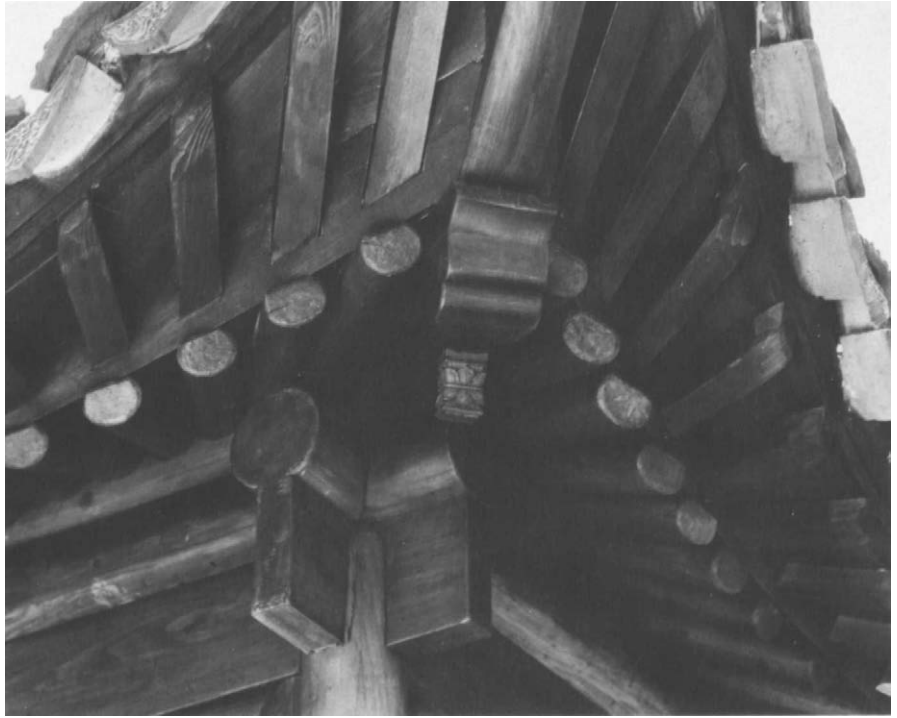






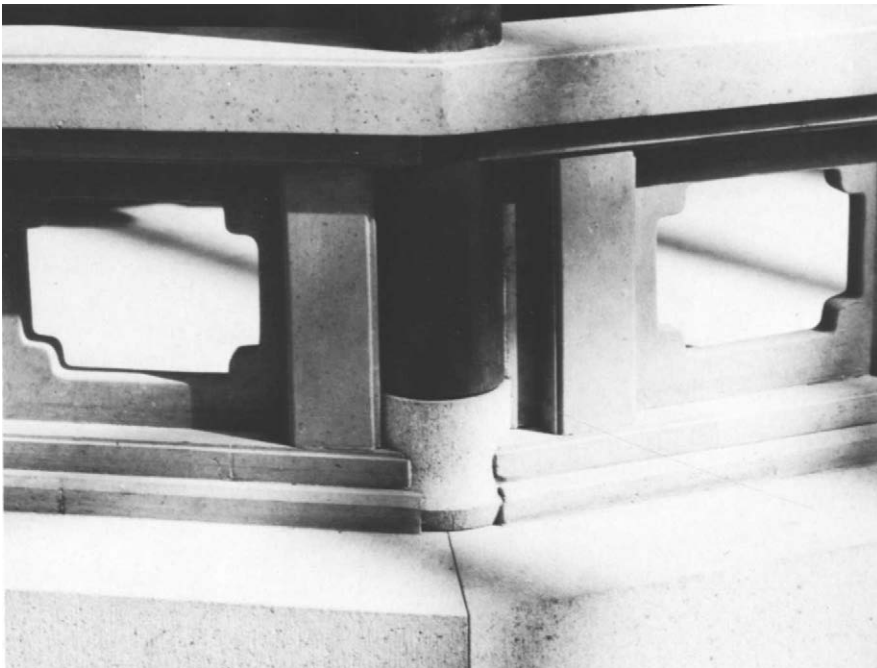
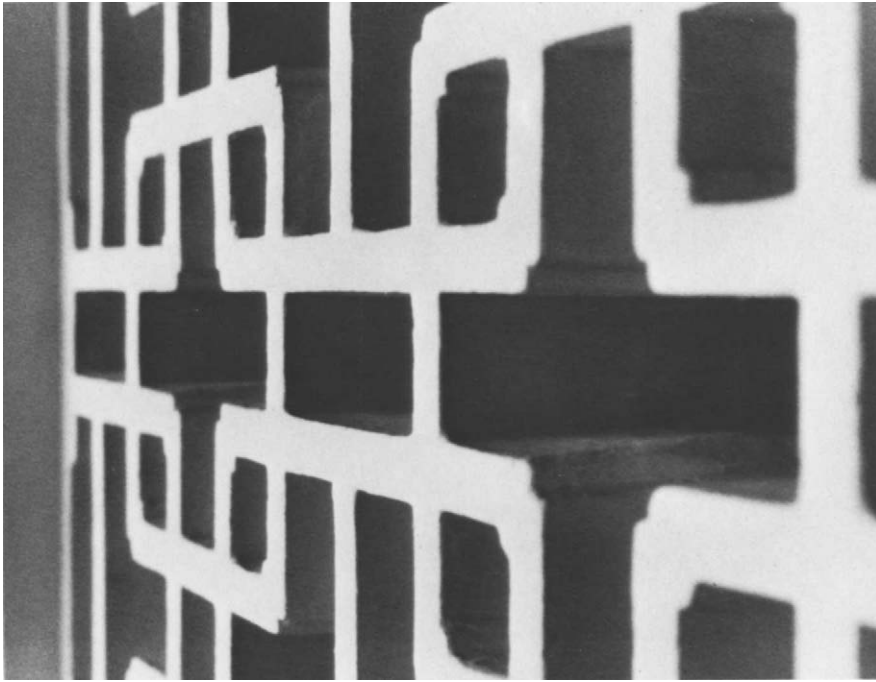
28. At the north end of the garden court lies the moon-viewing terrace and the Ming Room. As in its model courtyard in the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets, the tall lattice doors and windows can be completely opened to merge the garden and interior spaces. The high wall with a roof ridge of terracotta tiles suggests that the Ming Room is part of a larger building complex. The bricks of the courtyard floor, placed in alternating squares of four, were made at the imperial kiln at Lumu, not far from Suzhou.





29. The west wall of the courtyard is crowned by the half-pavilion with its exuberant upturned eaves. The gracefully curved bench back is called the Beautiful Lady Balustrade after the women who delicately leaned against it. In contrast to the walkway on the opposite wall, which encourages a moving survey of the garden, the pavilion provides a place for the visitor to contemplate it from a fixed point of view.

The half-pavilion takes its name—the Cold Spring Pavilion—from the little spring that bubbles up out of the rocks and flows into a pool to the left of the structure. The Chinese went to great lengths to find pure, fresh water for their tea. Spring water, considered the purest, is naturally cool, so to have a cold spring is to have especially fine water.



30. An important element in Chinese garden design, the covered walkway, guides the visitor to the most interesting views, while providing a pleasant refuge from the rain or scorching sun. In large gardens, covered walkways often rise and fall, winding around hills, but even on level ground they are given added interest with angles and

bends. In the Astor garden court the jog in the walkway creates an alcove for a tall sleek rock called a "bamboo shoot;" a visual pun on the surrounding live bamboo. The railing is constructed of gray terra-cotta tiles all made in 1978 except for the pillars on either side of the step, which were salvaged from an old garden.







31. From the moon-viewing terrace one looks along the covered walkway to the moon gate entrance and the south wall dominated by a spectacular Taihu rock and four latticed windows. The lattice patterns—each different lest the eye

become bored with the repetition of one design—were taken from the 1634 garden manual, *Yuan Ye*. From left to right, they are the simple hexagon, complex hexagon, elongated octagon, and octagon.



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The “dragon vein” represents the principal “breath-force” in a painting; its course may be oblique or symmetrical, rounded or fragmented, broken or continuous, hidden or apparent. . . . There are “opening and closing” and “rising and falling” both in a large composition and in its parts. These principles can be used either to simplify or elaborate, according to need. When the “dragon,” in its many oblique or frontal, unified or broken, obscured or apparent, interrupted or continuous positions, is lively and vivid the painting will be true (*zhen*). When one masters this thoroughly, small bits will naturally grow into masses. How can such a painting fail to be wonderful!

In laying out a garden, the designer divides a large space into small areas, then uses many devices to make small spaces look large and interesting. The basic approach lies in the proper juxtaposition of contrasting and complementary qualities in shapes, forms, colors, textures, and spaces, such as: large and small, high and low, open and closed, sparse and dense, void and solid, light and dark, straight and crooked, hard and soft, rough and fine, dynamic and static. To understand how the Chinese garden works is to understand the Chinese view of the workings of the universe.

According to the Chinese, the pairing of Yin and Yang concepts implies their very interdependence and interaction; their combinations and permutations guarantee infinite change as well as ultimate harmony in the universe. It is the small that makes the large look larger, the dark that makes the bright seem brighter, the incomplete that makes us imagine the complete, and so on. Each of these supposed opposites is the half that awaits the other half to complete a statement; and together, the multiplicity of qualities achieves a harmonious oneness through infinite metamorphosis.

The Astor Chinese garden court and Ming furniture room, which adopt the design of the courtyard and the Late Spring Studio of the Garden of the

32. The large wood plaque that hangs in the Ming Room gives its name: Ming Xuan. It is carved in the calligraphy of Wen Zhengming, the preeminent painting and calligraphy master of the 16th century. The plaque was designed by Wen Fong with characters taken from authentic Wen Zhengming calligraphy in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, and enlarged to appropriate scale. It was carved by craftsmen in Suzhou.

Master of the Fishing Nets, incorporate a simple plan in keeping with the Yin-Yang principle of alternation. Similar elements, such as plaster walls, wood structures, or rocks, do not face each other. Viewed from outside the entrance at the south end, a circular moon gate frames a rectangular doorway, through which successive spaces defined by colonnades and an alternating pattern of light and dark may be seen (figure 27). The complexity of space is achieved not by willful contrivance, but through an orderly use of Yin and Yang opposites: the circle versus the rectangle; the small dark vestibule leading to the sunlit courtyard, which in turn leads to the dark main hall with its backlit windows that suggest deeper spaces beyond; the symmetry of the main hall broken by the pillars of the walkway on one side; the straight line of the walkway interrupted by a jog from the wall; and the hard lines of the architecture contrasted to the soft lines of rocks and plants.

In the garden court, as in a larger garden complex, there are principal vantage points from which to view it, each marked by a stepping stone of Taihu rocks on the pavement: from the entrance vestibule; from the center of the jog in the walkway; from the moon-viewing terrace at the north end; and from the half-pavilion on the west wall (figures 28–31).

As one enters the courtyard and starts down the walkway, views change with each step. For example, at first, to the right of the half-pavilion, there are to be seen two peaks rising from the flower bed, but as one moves down the walkway, a third emerges from behind the central peak. Different window patterns, with different types of plants growing behind them, add to the variety of scenes.

To guide the visitor, there are terra-cotta plaques giving the name or theme of each “site.” At the entrance, over the moon gate, the plaque, with characters in the archaic seal script, reads “In Search of Quietude” (Tan You); that over the doorway leading to the left end of the veranda in front of the main hall, “Elegant Repose” (Ya Shi). The plaque in the half-pavilion gives the name Cold Spring Pavilion (Leng Quan Ting), and in the main hall, a large wooden plaque identifies it as the Ming Room (Ming Xuan) (figure 32). These last three have been designed with characters taken from the calligraphy of the famous Ming painter and calligrapher Wen Zhengming.

V. Garden Architecture

The many buildings in Chinese gardens are a reminder that gardens were meant to be lived in as well as viewed. Urban garden designs are in part based on domestic architecture. The formula for domestic architecture, repeated over thousands of years, was to build rooms around a central courtyard that provided light, air, and a view of the outdoors to each room. South-facing rooms, which enjoyed the most sunshine angling under the overhanging eaves in the winter, were reserved for the senior members of the family. Suites on the east and west sides of the courtyard were for

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33. The Chinese character for “wall” and “city” is one and the same. Cities and compounds were secured with massive walls that continued to be built long after they ceased to serve a protective function. Walls gave tangible form to the symmetrical division of space and the north-south orientation fundamental to Chinese cosmology and city planning. To have a garden without a wall is almost unthinkable. Even this remote mountain compound, in a detail from Wang Yuanqi's Wangchuan Villa handscroll, is spatially defined by its surrounding wall.

34. Even in densely built neighborhoods, families living in traditional-style houses with courtyards can enjoy privacy, light, air, and the outdoors. The photograph above shows a neighborhood near the North Temple Pagoda in Suzhou.

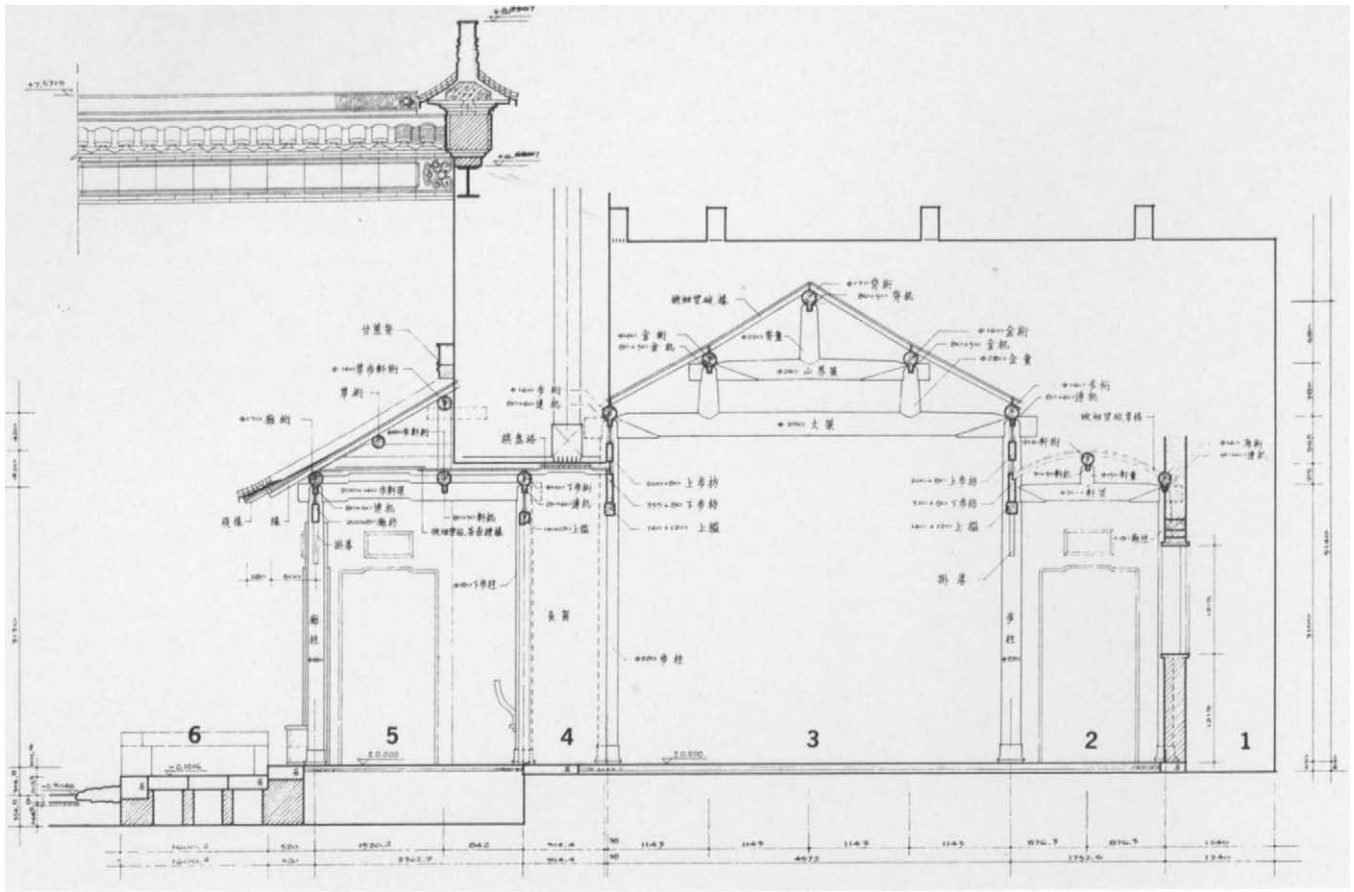
35. The *ting* is an open structure with a roof supported by pillars. Frequently pictured in Chinese landscape paintings, the *ting* provided minimal protection from the elements and an unobstructed view of the surrounding landscape. Figure 21 is an illustration of the literary event at the Orchid Pavilion, where Wang Xizhi wrote his most famous piece of calligraphy. This detail of a handscroll by Qian Xuan (about 1235–1300) shows Wang Xizhi gaining inspiration for his calligraphy by studying the graceful movements of geese. H. 9½ inches. Gift of the Dillon Fund, 1973. 120.6.



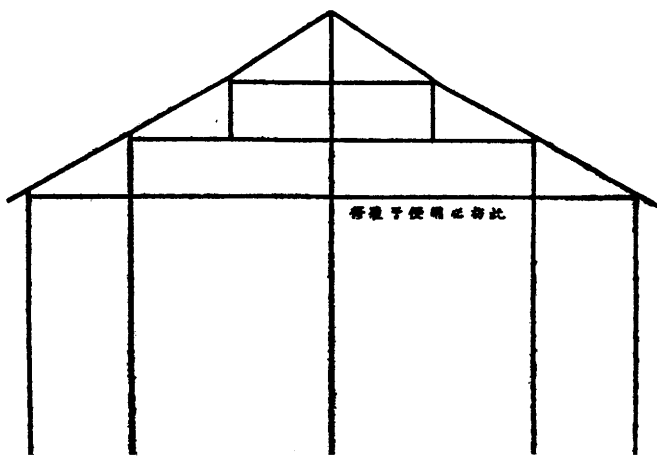
children and guests. A modest home might have one courtyard and one set of rooms. A prosperous family simply added courtyards and sets of rooms as desired. The courtyard served as an extension of the house and provided additional space for everything from cooking and washing to studying and entertaining. And, of course, the courtyard was a place for the cultivation of small trees, plants, and flowers.

The scholar's garden begins with domestic architectural forms and adds to them the wildness of nature. By enlarging courtyards and buildings, by increasing the plantings, by adding rocks and water, the scholar created a microcosm of the natural world. The many buildings incorporated into garden designs are not an intrusion, but evidence of the view of man's indisputable place in the natural world. The garden might be a sprawling complex of elaborate rockeries, hills, and waterfalls, but architecture was always a major element. The most characteristic ornamental and recreational garden structure is the open pavilion, or *ting* (figure 35). With a large roof and upturned roof corners, the pavilion can be square, round, hexagonal, octagonal, quatrefoil (begonia), or fan-shaped. A building by the water with windows all around is a *xie*. A large hall is a *tang*, and a small one, a *quan* or *xuan*. A two-story structure is a *lou*; one with windows all around on

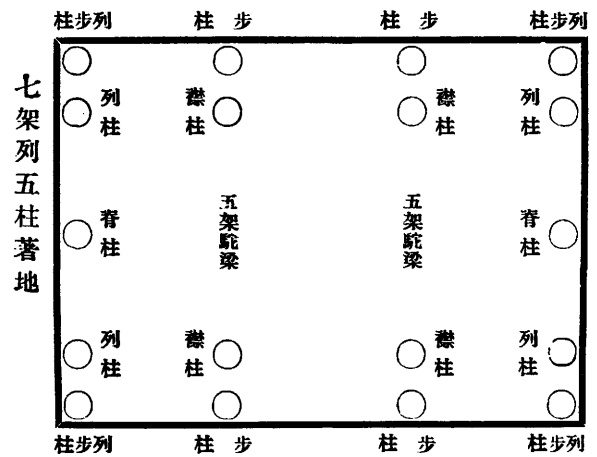




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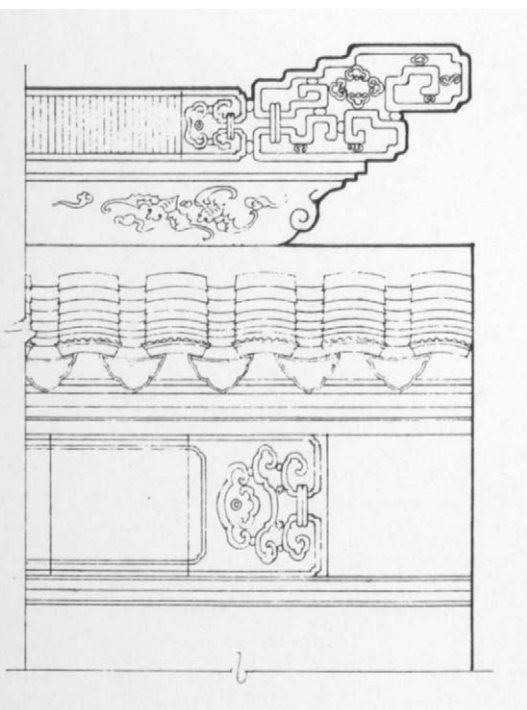
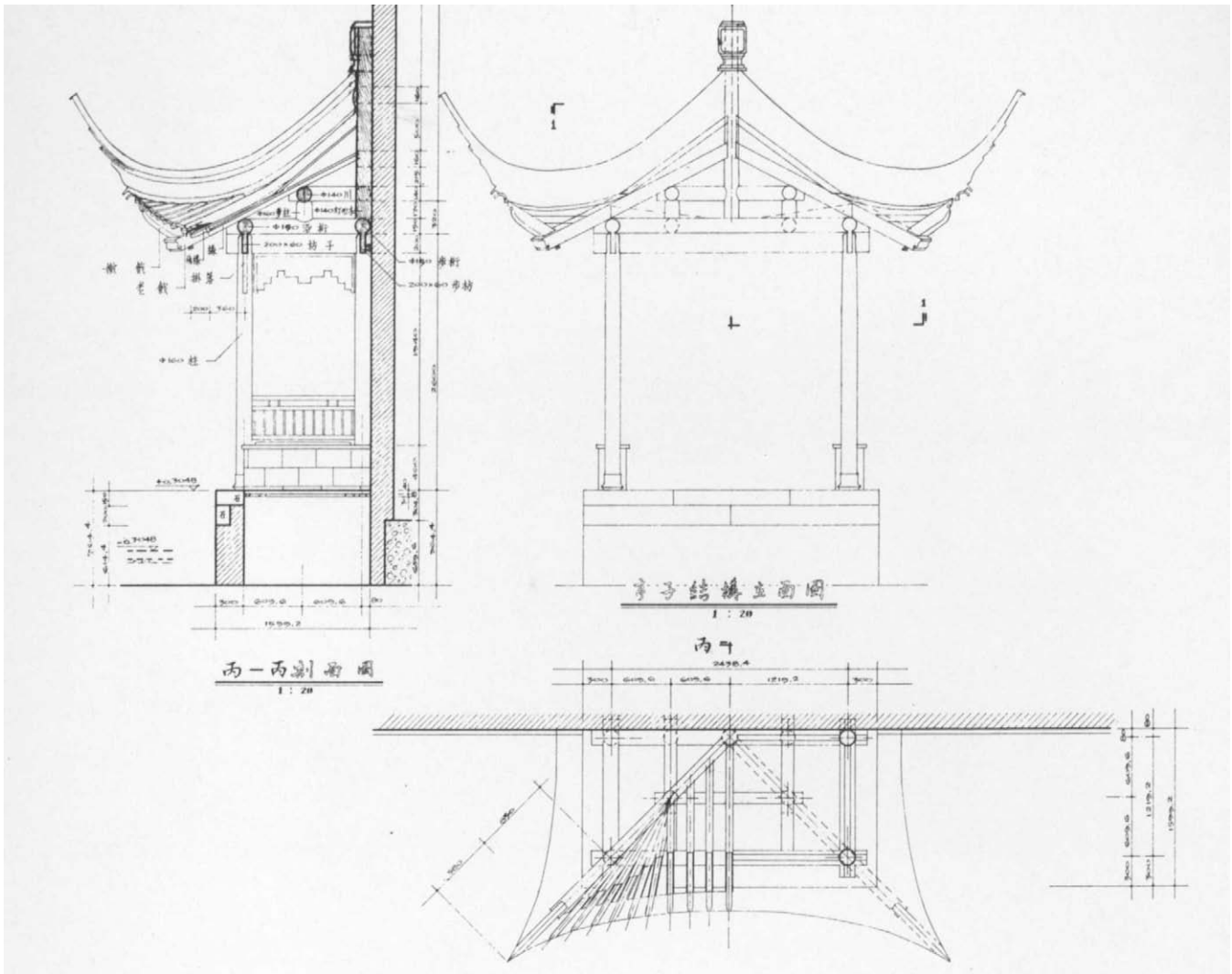
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36. The engineering drawing of the view looking west through the Ming Room shows from right to left: 1 the garden behind the windows on the north wall; 2 the back section of the Ming Room with its doorway leading into the painting galleries; 3 the main area of the Ming Room; 4 the pillars from the Museum's 1913 structure; 5 the walkway at the front of the Ming Room; and 6 the moon-viewing terrace.

37, 38. The *Yuan Ye*, written by Ji Cheng in the early 17th century is the only extant treatise on traditional Chinese architecture and garden design of the Ming dynasty. Its text and diagrams were used in planning both the overall design and small details such as lattice patterns. The floor plan and structure of the Ming Room are based on these simple drawings. The "seven-support structure" on the left above is named for the number of pillars supporting the roof. Above right, the "five-pillar plan" is combined with the seven-support design.

39, 40. Many of the engineering drawings for the garden court are sensitively rendered. These for the half-pavilion show the delicacy of the construction and the basic features of the design, such as the radiating roof supports.

Below, the *pao fang*—projecting tile work—and the roof ridge are embellished with designs of scrollwork and bats. The Chinese word for bat (*fu*) is a homonym and an emblem for happiness and good fortune. The vertical pattern results from setting tiles on end. The openwork design at top is borrowed from the Lion Grove Garden.



the second floor, a *ge*. A balustraded terrace on the water is a *tai*. And linking some of the buildings and other points of interest are covered walkways, or *lang*. All of these structures can be found in Yuan Jiang's handscroll (figure 26).

The Astor Court consists of three kinds of typical garden structures: a *ting*, a winding walkway, or *qulang*, and a small main hall, or *xuan* (see figures 28–31). The small hall lies at the north end of the garden, and as it was designed for the display of the Museum's collection of Ming-dynasty hardwood furniture, it is called the Ming Room. Although the Late Spring Studio in the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets dates from the late nineteenth century, and, indeed, little Ming-dynasty garden architecture remains in Suzhou today, the engineers of the Suzhou Garden Administration, who supervised the design and execution of the construction, took great care to carry out all architectural details in an appropriate Ming style. In traditional fashion, the Ming Room faces south, and its tall lattice windows and doors open onto the garden. The furniture is formally arranged for receiving guests and viewing the garden, as it might have been in a typical sitting room (figure 46). The Ming Room is rectangular with crossbeams and



41

42



41. While there are practical explanations for the sweeping eaves of southern Chinese architecture—to run the rain off and to admit more light—the majesty of line and the intricacy of the wood construction suggest aesthetic criteria as well. Buildings with upswept eaves have been compared to a phoenix about to ascend. In this corner detail called “a spear boosted by a second spear,” each support must be tailor-made for its position in the radiating bracket system.

pillars dividing it into three bays. Except for the adaptation along the south side of the room to accommodate the massive square pillars of the Museum’s 1913 structure, it is what the Yuan Ye describes as a “seven-support structure,” referring to the vertical supports for the ceiling (see figures 36–38).

Ming garden architecture maintains a careful balance between function and aesthetic expression, restraint and playfulness. From the functional point of view, southern Chinese architecture employs deeper projecting eaves than buildings in northern China to keep out rain and summer sun. The upturned curve of the eave not only helps to direct rainfall from the house, but also serves to admit more light. Aesthetically, the exuberant upturned corners of pavilions are a distinguishing characteristic of Suzhou garden architecture. The Cold Spring Pavilion at the Astor Court shows the typical construction method of this delightful motif, traditionally called “spear boosted by a secondary spear” (*nen qiang fa qiang*) (figure 41).

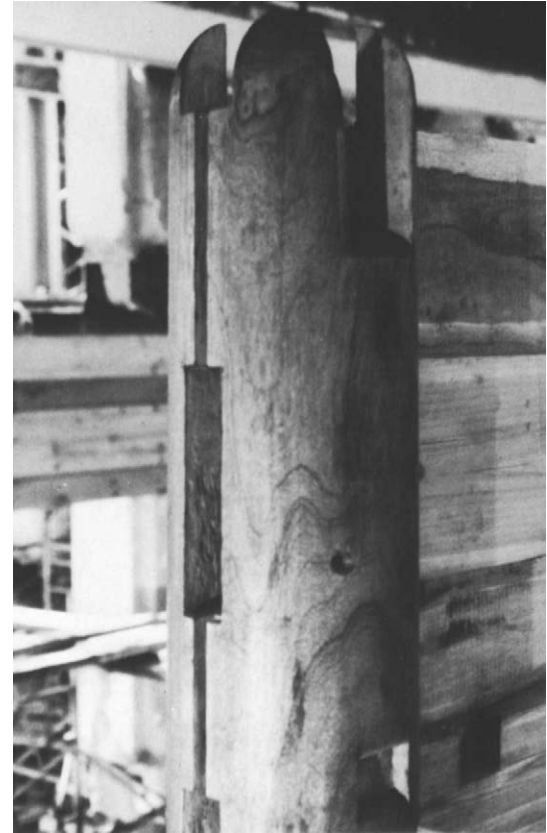
43



42. Drip-tiles draw rain water into streams that run off the pointed ends. For the Astor Court, researchers at the Suzhou Garden Administration provided an authentic Ming design that carries decorative forms representing the three happinesses: *fu* (good fortune), *lu* (wealth), and *shou* (long life).

43. Mitered joints are usually angled at 45 degrees as in the corner of the 15th-century side table above. Ming and early Qing hardwood furniture is generally of sleek design unembellished by carving and finished to bring out the natural beauty of the wood. *Ji zhi mu* (chicken-wing wood) was used for this table. Purchase, The Vincent Astor Foundation Fund, 1976.193.5.

44



44. One of the most important techniques of traditional Chinese architecture, wood mortise-and-tenon joints are not illustrated in manuals, nor in the engineering drawings done for the Astor Court. The wood joinery is thoroughly understood only by the craftsmen who practice the art. The head of this pillar is joined without nails to over fifteen architectural members and secured with wood pins.



45

Similarly beautiful and functional are the triangular end-tiles decorating the edges of the eaves that serve to direct the water down the gullies between the curved roof-tiles, turning it into a curtain of raindrops (figure 42). The best available woods in China have been used for the architecture of the Metropolitan's garden court. The pillars, fifty in all, are made of wood from the now-rare *nan* tree, a broadleaved evergreen of southwestern China. The horizontal beams and some of the rafters are made of fir; the curved rafters in the back of the Ming Room and the balustrades are camphor wood; and window frames and fretwork are made of the hard ginkgo wood.

The hallmark of Chinese wood construction is its supremely accomplished joinery. To join two pieces of wood, carpenters carved projecting tenons for insertion into correspondingly shaped holes, or mortises (figure 44). The ancient Chinese employed this mortise-and-tenon system in constructing buildings, furniture, and utensils. Glue was used only sparingly and nails not at all. When joins needed additional stability, wood pins or pegs were passed through the wooden members to hold them in place. Mitering, a handsome way to abut pieces of wood, was also used in both architecture and furniture (figure 43).

These joining techniques appeared during the earliest stages of Chinese civilization. In the seventeenth century B.C., Shang-dynasty bronze workers employed the mortise-and-tenon system in assembling the piece-molds used for casting ritual bronze vessels. The very idea of matching positive (Yang) and negative (Yin) shapes—which also lies behind the decorative designs of Shang ritual bronzes—is quintessentially Chinese. Wood furniture, dated as early as the fourth century B.C., discovered by archaeologists at Xinyang in Henan Province, already shows perfected mortise-and-tenon and miter joints.

In the construction of the Ming Room, craftsmen first set pillars in place on stone plinths and then fitted the tenons of the beams into the mortises at the tops of the pillars. The pillars, rafters, and wall panels interlock with the precision of a Chinese puzzle, sliding together with only the encouraging tap

45. The brass hardware on the tall lattice doors of the Ming Room have small handles that depict a pair of fish. Since fish were thought to be completely content in their own element and free from restraint, they became a symbol of harmony and freedom, and an evil-averting charm. Like the other materials in the Astor Court the brass fittings were made in Suzhou.

46. Fine Chinese furniture can stand on its own aesthetic merit in any museum gallery, but placing furniture in an authentic architectural setting allows a better understanding of its function and cultural significance. The furniture shares materials, techniques, and design patterns with architecture. The arrangement of furniture also reflects the basic architectural principle of north-south orientation with the most important seat facing south. The large clothes cupboard dates to the 15th-16th centuries and is made of Indian rosewood. The table beneath the far window was at one time a family ancestral altar with the drawers and bottom compartment used for storage.

46



of a wooden mallet. When a wooden member refused to slide into place, the pieces were disassembled and the proportions of the mortise improved. To prevent shifting when the assemblage was in place, round wooden pegs were passed through the different members. Similarly, in the fretwork of the windows and the decorative aprons under the eaves, all the parts, crafted of the hard and fine-grained ginkgo wood, were fitted together by mortise-and-tenon, neatly mitered one to another and occasionally pegged for additional strength. Curved elements were carved and sculpted, never steamed and bent, to the desired shape.

Only when Chinese hardwood furniture is viewed as part of Chinese wood architecture, can its beauty be fully appreciated. Furniture and architecture have in common their choice of material: beautiful wood finished to a satin luster. All four used in the construction of the Ming Room—*nan*, fir, camphor, and ginkgo—have also been used in the manufacture of furniture. In Suzhou dialect, furniture is referred to as “the intestines of a house.” In design and principles of construction, there is little difference between traditional building (in Chinese, “large woodworking”) and furniture making (in Chinese, “small woodworking”). Thus, in the Ming Room, such elements as the balustrades are built-in furniture, while the lattice patterns of the windows and such details as the “teapot-lid” contour of the rafters over the walkway (frontispiece), in turn find clear echoes in the designs of the best Ming furniture.

The hardwoods from southern China and Southeast Asia so popular in the manufacture of furniture are given to expanding and contracting with changes of temperature and humidity. The mortise-and-tenon join allows for a certain amount of expansion and contraction. A tabletop may be constructed of a four-sided frame, with a free-floating panel in the center edged with a narrow projecting tongue that rides in a groove cut into the frame. Pleasing in design, the floating top is eminently practical: in the humidity of summer a tabletop may expand to fill the frame, while in the dryness of winter the wood shrinks, leaving a narrow crack between top and frame. During the Ming period, hardwood furniture design reached a peak of perfection. The early sixteenth-century Indian rosewood (*huang hua li*) side table and the set of four red sandalwood (*zi tan*) armchairs on display in the Ming Room (figure 46) are masterpieces of functional simplicity and elegance.

Contrasting with the rich brown tones and ornamentation of the woodwork are the smoothness and the cool color of the floor and ceiling tiles. The floor of the roofed areas, the trim around the door and window openings, and the decorative low balustrades along the walkway are smoothly ground, bluish gray terra-cotta tiles, made from local Suzhou clay. The stonework of the terrace and other trim was cut from local Suzhou granite from Mount Jin. The courtyard is paved with small rectangular gray bricks also made near Suzhou. They are stood on edge and arranged in alternating square patterns (*jian fang*).

Along the east garden wall to one side of the walkway and continuing on the south garden wall behind the rock composition, there is a row of square terra-cotta openings with fret designs through the thick plaster wall. Behind the openings, which are backlit, bamboo and other plantings can be seen. Contrary to the Western sense of visual unity, the Ming garden designer, intent on showing variety within uniformity, chose a different fret design for each opening (see figure 30). Similarly, the spaces between the pillars along the walkway, and between the window openings are intentionally uneven to enhance the symmetry with asymmetrical counterpoint.

47. Many of China's mountains are limestone formations that rise abruptly without preparatory foothills. Their imposing height and ruggedness earned them reputations as places of concentrated natural forces—lightning did strike them more often—and magical powers. Thought to be the homes of immortals, mountains were considered sacred in their own right. China's worship of nature, with mountains and rivers as the central focus, spawned an iconography almost as rich as that of Buddhism.

VI.
Rocks and Plantings



To the Chinese, who created the greatest tradition of monumental landscape painting, rocks are replete with representational, symbolic, and magical importance. Whether a configuration of many rocks piled together (artificial mountains, or *jia shan*), or a single monolith (a peak, or *feng*), the rocks so characteristic of Chinese gardens are meant to evoke the grandeur of nature. A “good” rock reminds the viewer of the drama of mountains visited and stimulates the imagination with repeated examination. Described in literature as the “bones of the earth,” the rocks in a garden can symbolize the Five Sacred Mountains of China. Set in water, the rocky masses become islands in the Eastern Sea, the home of the Taoist immortals. To those inclined to Buddhism, a rocky island might represent Potalaka, the home of Guanyin, the bodhisattva of compassion. The meaning of the rocks, in other words, lies in the beholder’s mind. While the fantastic garden rocks are usually suggestive of mountains, the Chinese also enjoy them as natural sculptures that bring to mind such images as a lion, a predatory bird, a Buddhist deity, bamboo shoots, or a dragon.

Admiration for stone can be traced back to China’s earliest glimmerings, but the passion for fantastic rocks first reached a fever pitch in the Tang dynasty (618–906). Wall paintings from Tang imperial tombs show rocks decorating gardens and featured in *pen jing*, the forerunner of the Japanese bonsai. The eleventh-century poet and official Su Shi paid 100 gold pieces for a miniature stone named Nine Peaks, and he cherished two rocks from Chou Chi, a mountain in Gansu Province, more than any of the paintings in his collection. When approached by another collector who was determined to have the Chou Chi rocks, Su set as their price two works by Han Gan, the incomparable Tang master of horse painting. The pictures were not proffered, and we can suppose that Su was just as pleased to keep his rocks.

In the early twelfth century the emperor Hui Zong (reigned 1100–25) launched a search for the finest rocks in the empire to embellish a magic mountain he was building to the northeast of his palace. Zhu Mian, the minister in charge of the procurement of rocks, carried out his task with zeal, infuriating the populace and nearly bankrupting the empire in the process. Zhu Mian, a native of the city of Suzhou, was especially interested in the marvelously eroded rocks of Lake Tai, west of Suzhou. The discovery of a monumental forty-foot “peak” in this area posed a problem of transportation to the capital, Kaifeng, over 400 miles away. The official history of the Song dynasty records that Zhu Mian pressed into service a large warship and several thousand laborers to transport the rock. As this convoy moved through the countryside it caused extensive damage to water gates and bridges. Holes were smashed through city walls in order to get the rock past. When it finally arrived in the capital, the delighted emperor bestowed upon it a name: Divine Transport and Shining Merit.

The most comprehensive of the early descriptions of rocks is *Yun Lin Shi Pu* (Stone Catalogue of Cloudy Forest) by Du Wan, written and printed between 1126 and 1130. In it the author lists 114 places where exceptional stones can be found, for utilitarian as well as decorative purposes, and discusses their color, texture, hardness, and other characteristics. The Taihu rocks, the most prized of all garden rocks, were limestone boulders “harvested” from the bottom of Lake Tai, where through the action of water and sand they acquired worn and eroded surfaces. If craftsmen were not satisfied with a rock, they did not hesitate to improve upon nature’s handiwork; after sculpting, it would be left in turbulent water for several years to age and cure.



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48. Admiration for mountains and rocks led Lan Ying (1585–1664) to paint this portrait of a rock called Red Friend. Strangely faceted rocks—thought of as miniature mountains—had been treasured by collectors since the Tang dynasty (618–906). This red-tinted rock is painted without surrounding garden elements, freeing the viewer to imagine its size and context. Hanging scroll. Ink and light color on paper, 58½ x 18¾ inches. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Earl Morse in honor of Douglas Dillon, 1979.26.

By the late Ming period, because of the popularity of garden building, there was a shortage of good Taihu peaks. Ji Cheng wrote: "Since ancient times, they have been over gathered. Today they are extremely rare." In later garden making, therefore, older collected rocks and rock compositions were incorporated in new designs. In the Yu Yuan in Shanghai, there is a gigantic Taihu peak—full of beautiful recesses and "eyes"—of a type called "ringing jade pendants," or *yu ling long*—which is said to have been selected for the emperor Hui Zong's garden in Kaifeng, but left in Suzhou because it was too large to be moved. Another great peak, also reportedly left behind by Hui Zong's emissary and named Peak Capped by Clouds, or Guan Yun Feng, is now in Suzhou (figure 49).

49. Peak Capped by Clouds from Liu Yuan in Suzhou and another peak in the Yu Yuan in Shanghai are said to have been left behind during the expedition undertaken in the early 12th century to provide spectacular rocks for the imperial park in Kaifeng. Transportation proved too great a problem for even the indefatigable imperial rock commissioner Zhu Mian. This peak, about 30 feet in height, stands as the *pièce de résistance* of the Liu Yuan Garden. The visual and intellectual pleasures provided by these hoary monoliths may help to explain the low esteem in which figural sculpture was held in the late imperial dynasties.

Traditional criteria for a great peak are expressed in three words: *tou*, or "passing through"; *lou*, or "eyes"; and *sou*, or "leanness." *Tou* means "there are walkable passages" throughout the eroded surface, so that it resembles a fantastic landscape in which one may mentally climb or ramble. *Lou* means there are holes, or "eyes," in the rock so that when struck, it rings like jade pendants (*ling long*). *Sou* means "rising like a wall against the sky, lonely and unsupported"; a rock should be wide on the top and tapering towards the bottom, so that "it looks dangerous, but there is no risk."

The taste for fantastic garden rocks first paralleled, and later influenced, the development of landscape painting. In a handscroll by Zhao Yuan (active 1350–75) (figure 50)—the late Yuan artist who with Ni Zan painted the Lion Grove Garden in Suzhou "in the manner of Jing Hao and Guan Tong," the tenth-century northern landscapists—fantastic mountain peaks modeled after garden rocks recede into the distance like archaic



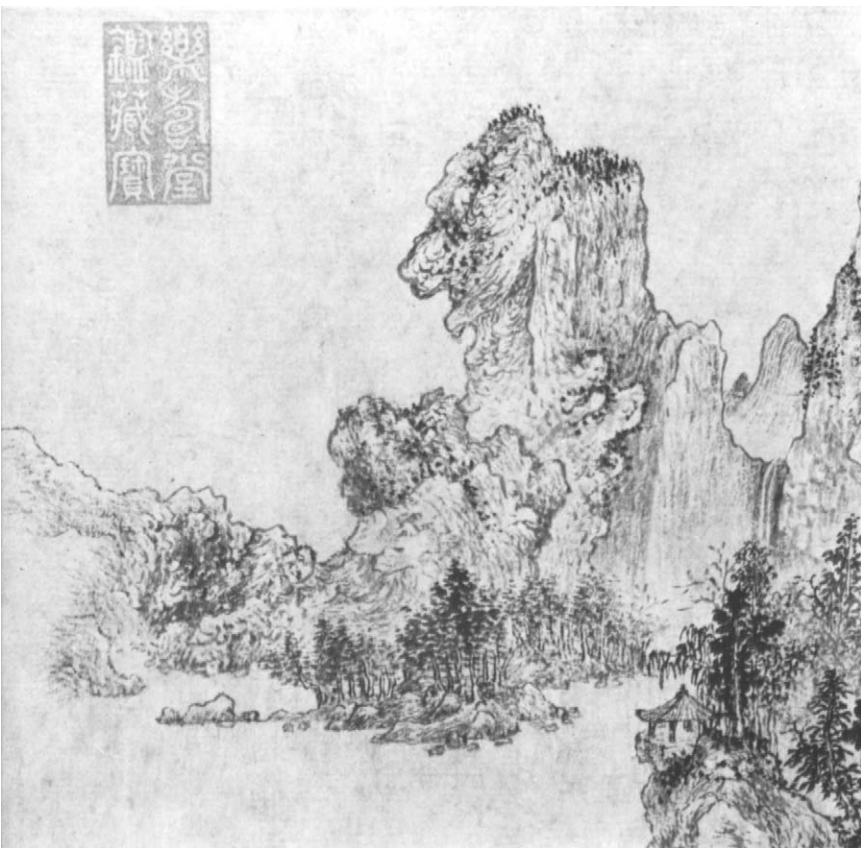
cloud-scrolls. By the late Ming period, this spirited way of representing towering peaks became firmly associated with the names of Jing and Guan, whose works were no longer extant. Without models to follow, the late Ming southern artists who tried to simulate the monumental northern-style landscapes rendered mountains that looked more and more like great fantastic garden rocks.

At the Astor garden court, a *ling-long* peak with “eyes” dominates a flower bed against the south wall (figure 52). A second tall peak, this time flanked by two smaller peaks, rises from another flower bed to the right of the Cold Spring Pavilion (see figures 24, 51). This second peak, which resembles one of the famous “lion” peaks in the Lion Grove Garden in Suzhou, came from the site of a Ming garden near Suzhou’s Tiger Hill. In arranging the subsidiary peaks around it, inspiration was found in a leaf of *The Luofu Mountains*, an album by Dao Ji, entitled “Three Peaks of the Heavenly Realm” (figure 53). The three peaks, a principal or “host” peak flanked by two “guest” peaks, first appeared in the archaic pictographic form of the written character for mountain, *shan* (山), and they dominated Chinese landscape painting throughout the centuries. In a three-dimensional rock composition, such as this one to the right of the pavilion, the relationship between the three peaks must be considered from multiple points of view. Zhu Guanghui, the rock expert of the Suzhou Garden Administration, pointed out that the small peak on the right should be placed close to the wall with its most interesting silhouette to the front. Furthermore, when viewed from the side, it should not line up with the other small peak. The problem was how to satisfy these requirements from the side and achieve an effective composition from the front. The small peak on

50. While rocks were set up in the scholar’s garden, smaller, equally strange versions graced his desk. This detail of a 14th-century handscroll by a Suzhou artist is more likely an imaginary mountain inspired by a table or garden rock than one taken from a real landscape. Zhao Yuan (active about 1350–75). Ink on paper. Anonymous loan, The Art Museum, Princeton University.

51. The large peak below dominating the group of three on the west wall admirably meets the criterion that a peak should be narrower at its base and wider at the top. This view shows it in its most characteristic profile, the advantageous angle a painter might have chosen in capturing its likeness.

52. The eroded surface, the irregular cavities, and especially the holes in a rock are important qualities to the connoisseur. The rock’s proportions are also important: it must appear lean and bony, and despite its weight (the monolith at the right is over one ton) it must seem to rise from the earth. The success of this peak lies in its interesting perforations and crisp silhouette, which are placed in counterpoint to the lattice pattern of the window.







53

53. Immediately readable as the pictograph for mountain (山), the *Three Peaks of the Heavenly Realm* is one of Dao Ji's (1641–about 1710) imaginary paintings of the Luofu Mountains in Canton Province. Known for spectacular vistas, the Luofu range is said to have 432 peaks and promontories. Dao Ji's album leaf was used to guide the arrangement of the three peaks on the west wall (see figure 24), with the peaks at the lower right and lower left corresponding to the two small rocks in the Astor garden court. Album leaf B, probably 1701–05. Ink and color on paper, 11 1/8 x 7 3/4 inches. Arthur M. Sackler Collection, The Art Museum, Princeton University, 67–17.

the right was to “talk” to the central “lion” peak, and together, the three peaks had to interact from a variety of angles.

Viewed from the terrace of the Ming Room, the “lion” peak on the right side is balanced by the *ling-long* peak at the south end of the courtyard. In the preliminary version of the Astor Court built in Suzhou, the peak at the south end appeared too heavy for the composition. When a lighter peak was chosen and brought to New York, there was the interesting problem of playing its “eyes” and its silhouette against the white wall and the trceries of the window openings. Suspending it from a pulley, Zhu and his assistants tried the peak in a number of positions, finally settling on the present one that shows its entire left side and the central “eye” clearly against the white

wall. When the peak was set in its base, Zhu discovered that, viewed from the Ming Room terrace, the silhouette of the rock was lost amid the tracery pattern, which coincided with the sloping top and eyes of the rock. The entire assemblage had to be dismantled and raised about two inches.

Unlike the large gardens in Suzhou, which employ a variety of yellow and bluish rocks as well as Taihu peaks, the Astor Court uses only Taihu rocks for its rock compositions. In earlier times, when a glutinous rice and tung oil mix was used to bind piled rocks, great care was exercised in selecting and shaping rocks that would fit securely and still look harmonious together. Although cement is now used for strength and durability and therefore fit is less critical, Zhu and his colleagues took meticulous care in matching the color and texture of the rocks, making every articulation as natural and seamless as possible.

A mixture of clay, soil, sand, and peat moss to complement the color of the Taihu rocks fills the flower beds, completing the rock compositions. Because the Astor garden court is an interior space maintained at a constant temperature, those plants that need climatic changes to thrive are moved in for only short periods. Along the edges of the rocks and between them grows mondo grass (*Ophiopogon japonicas*). Behind the “lion” peak is a large banana tree, recalling Wen Zhengming’s painting *The Banana Tree Railing* from the Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician (figure 23). Three large deciduous trees (one maple and two crape myrtles), bamboo, pomegranate, juniper, and black pine complete the year-round planting. Behind the window openings, potted plants—quince, cherry, apricot, Chinese magnolia, camellia, peony, lotus, persimmon, and others—will be rotated. Finally, potted seasonal flowers such as azalea and chrysanthemum will add color to the flower beds.

Plants in Chinese gardens—like rocks—are appreciated for more than their appearance. Certain types of plants have longstanding literary and historical associations. For instance, the narrow-leafed mondo grass, a favorite in Chinese gardens and paintings, grew in profusion around the house of Zheng Kangcheng (A.D. 127–200), a famous scholar and teacher of the Four Books of the Confucian Classics. His neighbors referred to the grass as Kangcheng’s bookmarks, which evolved into the name bookmark grass (*shu dai cao*). Nine-hundred years later Su Shi (see p. 52) wrote: “Beneath the pavilion the bookmark grass grows, / Causing me to think of Zheng Kang-cheng.”

The characteristics of some plants evoke the paragons of the past and their exemplary behavior. The pine, bamboo, and prunus (or quince) in the window compositions are admired by the Chinese as the Three Friends of Winter (*suihan sanyou*) because they manage to retain their true characters despite difficult climate. Confucius used the pine and cypress to emphasize that in extreme adversity men of integrity stand out from the crowd: “Only when the cold season comes, is the point brought home that the pine and cypress are the last to lose their leaves.” Bamboo similarly symbolizes the qualities of a noble man: upright and modest, yielding but never breaking, and enduring through wintry days. Thus the twelfth-century philosopher Zhu Xi wrote of Su Shi:

As for old Su Shi, he possessed lofty and enduring qualities and a firm and immovable nature. One might say that he resembled these “bamboo gentlemen” and “rock friends.” After a hundred generations when men look at [his] painting, they will still be able to see him in their minds.

VII. *Building a Garden Court in New York*

In the early 1970s the Metropolitan Museum embarked upon a program of enlarging its Far Eastern collections and reinstalling the permanent galleries for Asian art. When these plans were discussed, Mrs. Vincent Astor, the chairman of the Visiting Committee to the Department of Far Eastern Art and a trustee of the Museum, suggested that a garden court could provide a scene of repose in the midst of conventional galleries. Mrs. Astor, who spent part of her childhood in Peking, remembered the serenity of the traditional Chinese garden court and thought that such a court would be ideal as the focal point for the permanent installation of Far Eastern art.

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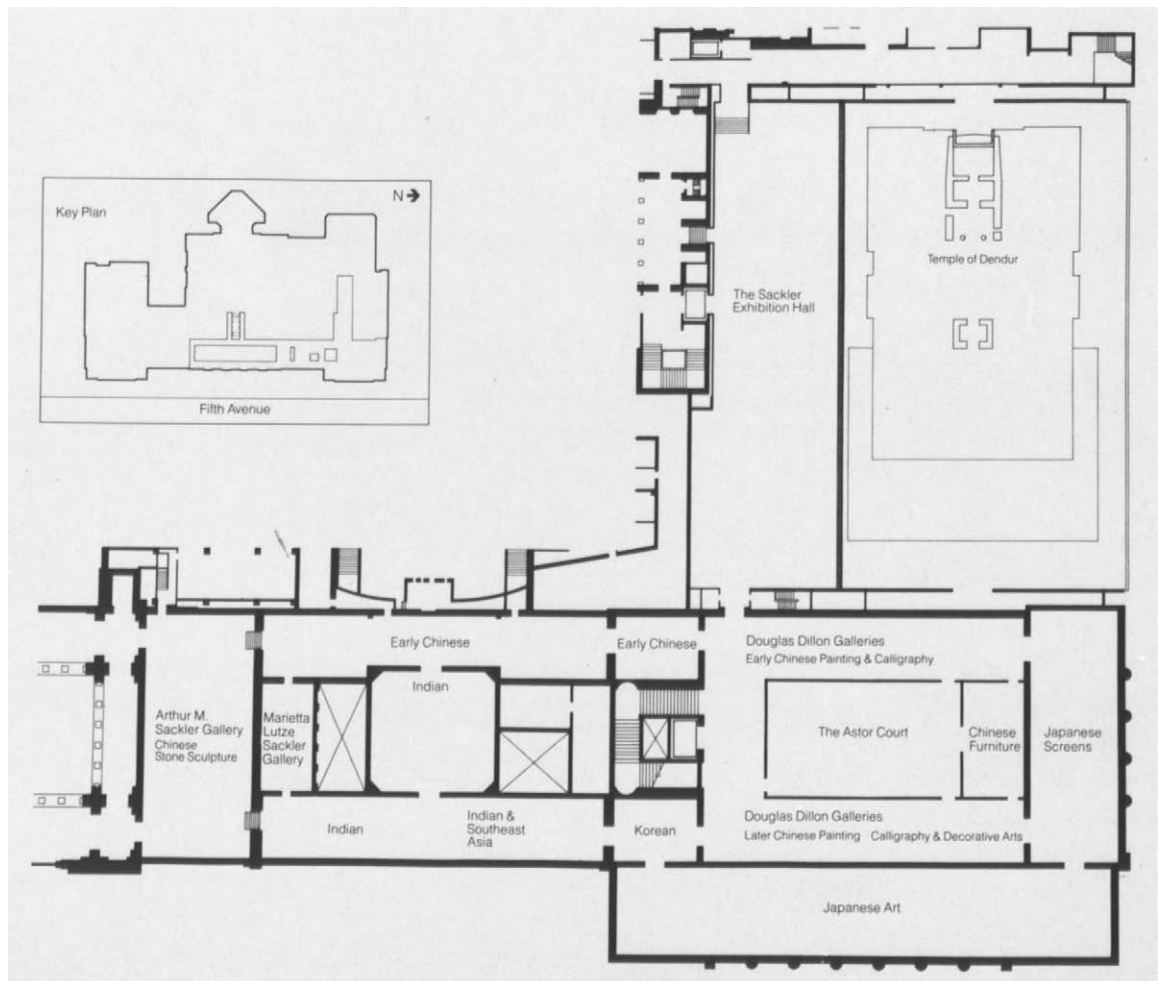
54. Using a traditional tripod, Chinese workmen maneuvered the large Taihu rocks into place. "Artificial mountains" were arranged along the walls as well as in small planters such as this one.

In time, it was decided that by placing a concrete floor slab in an existing light well on the second floor of the Museum's north wing, a space 40 by 59 feet could be created for this purpose (see plan). The gallery at the north end of this space could be used as a room for displaying a group of Ming-dynasty hardwood furniture that the Museum had acquired in 1976 with the help of the Vincent Astor Foundation. To match this furniture, both the Astor garden court and the furniture room were to be executed, using traditional methods, in the best style of the Ming dynasty.

In the fall of 1977, Wen Fong visited the People's Republic of China, with a delegation of American scholars, to study Chinese paintings. There he met a well-known Chinese architectural historian, Professor Chen Congzhou of Tongqi University in Shanghai. Chen and Fong spent a day visiting gardens in Suzhou, and together they decided that the garden court in New York should be based on the Late Spring Studio courtyard at the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets (see figure 7). After Fong returned to the United States, he formally proposed the project to Wang Yehqiu, then the director of the Cultural Relics Bureau, suggesting that the structure be built with precision and authenticity, and that the bureau's restorers for ancient architecture be asked to execute this project. Subsequently, at the recommendation of the Cultural Relics Bureau, the National Committee on Basic Construction assigned the project to the restoration team of the Suzhou Garden Administration, which is thoroughly familiar with the Suzhou style of garden construction.

55. The Astor Court is located at the center of the galleries of Far Eastern art, which occupy the second floor of the north wing of the Museum. At the south end of the court, Chinese sculpture will be displayed. On the east and west sides are the Douglas Dillon Galleries of Chinese painting. The Astor Court echoes many of the themes found in works in these galleries.

Meanwhile, from a preliminary sketch made by A. Perry Morgan, a



Princeton, New Jersey, architect, and from photographs and research on garden construction prepared by Fong, a set of drawings and a detailed model were made in New York by Ming Cho Lee, the artist and stage designer, under the direction of Arthur Rosenblatt, the Museum's vice-president for architecture and planning. The model was sent to the Cultural Relics Bureau in Peking in February 1978. In June 1978, Fong and Lee went to Suzhou and met with a panel of Chinese garden architectural experts to discuss the plans. In November of that year, a delegation from the Suzhou Garden Administration, led by its deputy director Zhang Biaorong, came to New York, bringing with them a revised model incorporating suggestions and new research provided by the Chinese experts, and photographs of the Taihu rocks proposed for use in the garden court. Upon approval by the Museum's trustees, a contract for carrying out the project was signed by the end of that year between the Museum and the Suzhou Garden Administration.

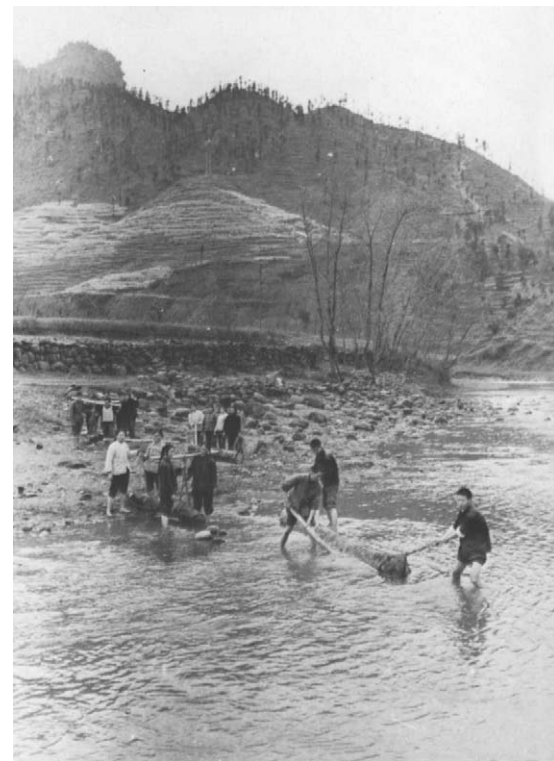
In January 1979, the Museum's director, Philippe de Montebello, inspected the site chosen in Suzhou's East Park for building a full-scale prototype, which will remain there as a permanent exhibit. Already, intensive preparations were under way in China to gather and fabricate various materials needed for the construction. One of the more dramatic projects was the logging of the *nan* wood for making the fifty pillars in the New York garden court (figures 56, 57). The *nan* tree is a broadleaved evergreen of the cedar family found in the interior southwestern provinces of Sichuan and Yunnan. A special team of loggers was dispatched to steep valleys in Sichuan in the early months of 1979 to locate, cut, and transport *nan* trees of suitable size. Known for its fine texture and coloring and admirable characteristics of resisting warping, insects, and deterioration, the *nan* was nearly felled to extinction during the Qing period in a flurry of garden and palace building. When the powerful imperial favorite He Shen was sentenced to death by suicide in 1799, one of his twenty offenses was the extravagant use of *nan* wood in building his palatial city residence in the north of Peking. Since the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, *nan* wood has been used in only a handful of projects, including the Memorial Hall for Chairman Mao Zedong and now the Astor garden court.

A second major undertaking was the reopening of an old imperial kiln in the village of Lumu, outside Suzhou, to make the various kinds of tiles needed for the Suzhou prototype and the New York courtyard. When the emperor Qian Long retired in 1796 to build a Suzhou-style garden in the Forbidden City in Peking, all the tiles used came from the Lumu imperial kiln (figure 59). Made of local clay, the tiles are fired by burning rice husks. After the tiles have cooled slightly, water is poured on them, turning them from the more familiar terra-cotta red to a bluish gray color. To commemorate the reopening of the kiln each large terra-cotta tile used in the Astor garden court and furniture room was stamped on the back with a seal (figure 58), which may be translated "Newly made in the Suzhou Lumu imperial kiln in 1978."

In May 1979 Arthur Rosenblatt, accompanied by the architects Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo—who developed the consolidated plans for the design of the Astor Court and its integration into a newly constructed interior space—visited Suzhou and inspected the finished prototype. A second inspection was carried out in June by Mrs. Astor and other Museum staff members, who made final suggestions for changes in the choice of the Taihu rocks and other design details. The crafting of the materials for use at the



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56, 57. The *nan* trees felled for the Astor garden court came from a valley in Sichuan not far from the provincial capital, Chengdu. Of the trees cut down, almost half were unusable because of knotholes and irregular twists of the grain. Teams of workers carried the timbers out of the steep valley to a tributary of the Yangtze River. Freshly cut *nan* wood is light in color and pungent. The color gradually deepens to a warm brown and the fragrance lingers for years.

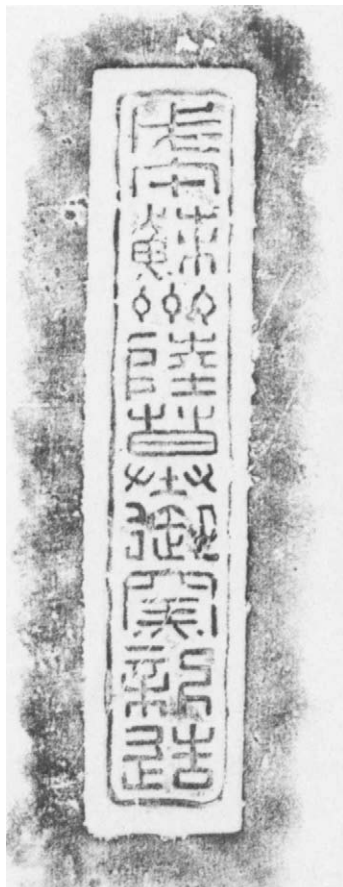
Metropolitan followed immediately, and all the components were received in New York in early December. On December 30, 1979, a team of twenty-seven engineers and craftsmen from the Suzhou Garden Administration, led by Zhang Biaorong, arrived in New York City, and the work of assembling the Astor garden court began in early January 1980.

Through successful negotiation between the Museum and AFL-CIO labor officials, construction of the first permanent cultural exhibit in the United States from the People's Republic of China began with a warm ceremony, held on January 10, during which the Chinese and American workers exchanged hard hats. This was to set the tone of smooth collaboration between the Chinese and American workers. In four and one-half months a bare shell of concrete pillars and floor, air-conditioning ducts, and electrical circuits was transformed into an elegant and meticulously finished Ming-dynasty garden court and sitting room. Divided into teams of carpenters, masons, tile workers, and rock experts, the Chinese craftsmen were supervised by four university-trained engineers and one foreman; the most experienced of them were in their seventies. With masterly skill and obvious pride, they pursued authenticity in every detail with traditional tools and methods. The Chinese craftsmen were responsible for the entire project with the exception of the preparation of the shell, the staining of the wood, the plastering, and the painting, which were done by Americans.

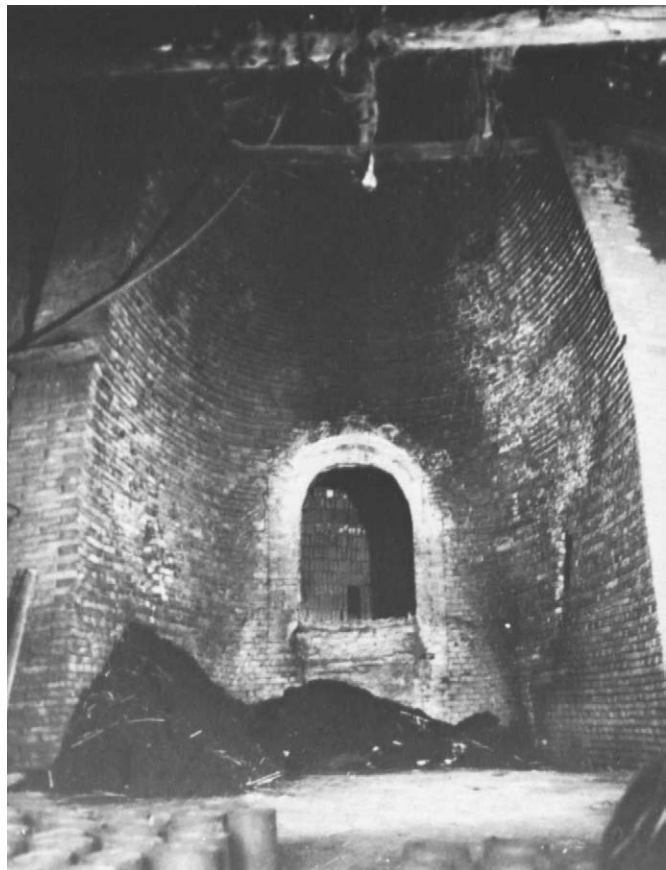
The work began with on-site dressing and finishing of the materials that the Chinese had prepared in Suzhou. Since every piece had been carefully numbered, the assembly of some of the components seemed amazingly

58, 59. The Lumu kilns, about ten kilometers northwest of Suzhou, had specialized over the centuries in manufacturing traditional bricks and tiles, but they fell into disuse in modern times. This large imperial kiln was created during the reign of Emperor Qian Long (1736–96) to produce large terra-cotta tiles and bricks for the imperial palace in Peking. For the Suzhou prototype and the Astor garden court in New York, several hundred thousand tiles and bricks were fired. A seal reading “Newly made in the Suzhou Lumu imperial kiln in 1978” was impressed on each of the floor tiles made for the Astor Court.

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quick and effortless. The entire frame of pillars and beams of the Ming Room, for instance, went up in several days, and with amazing precision. The woodworkers, using a frame handsaw and bow hand drill, were more like cabinetmakers than carpenters. By contrast, the laying of the terra-cotta floor tiles in the Ming Room took five men about two weeks. A layer of sand was spread on the floor and then sprinkled with water to pack it firmly. The four bottom edges of each tile were chipped for a better grip in the sand. These large floor tiles were held together with a mixture of finely ground lime, bamboo fiber, and tung oil, which was prepared in a stone mortar with a wooden pestle. The corner tiles around the bases of the pillars were cut with a frame handsaw, which was daily sharpened by painstaking hand-filing. After the mortar was left to cure for two weeks, the surfaces of the tiles were ground with a block of carborundum to an impeccable smoothness. The stonework was done with similar precision. The fine texturing lines of the granite terrace, steps, and ramps were chipped by hand with a sharp-edged hammer.

For absolute authenticity, the Chinese would have preferred to apply their own powdered wall surface (made of lime, paper, straw, and mud) over brick. But the prospect of the weight of such an enclosure on a second story gave pause to even the best modern engineers. Instead, plaster was applied to a wire mesh. For maintenance as a museum display open to the public, the plaster wall had to be painted rather than whitewashed in the traditional manner. A rare Ming technique described in the *Yuan Ye*, the “mirror surface,” which calls for polishing the lime wall with beeswax, was briefly discussed and abandoned. The Chinese reluctantly agreed that a washable

60–62. The floor tiles must be perfectly square and flat to fit tightly together. The clay, local to Suzhou, was thoroughly kneaded before being pressed by foot into wood frames. The upper surface of the damp clay was scraped flat; after firing, the tiles were planed on all six sides.

Most of the materials for the construction of the Astor Court were finished in the workshop next to the North Temple Pagoda in Suzhou. Above, a beam for the Ming Room is being carved out of fir.

63, 64. The terra-cotta tile floor was laid on hard-packed damp sand (right, above). Two weeks after the tiles were set, the mortar was hard enough to be polished with abrasives.

The embellishments on the roof ridge (right) and half-pavilion were the creation of a Suzhou craftsman. In designing and executing these motifs—usually symbols of good fortune (here, bats)—the craftsman followed local and family traditions.

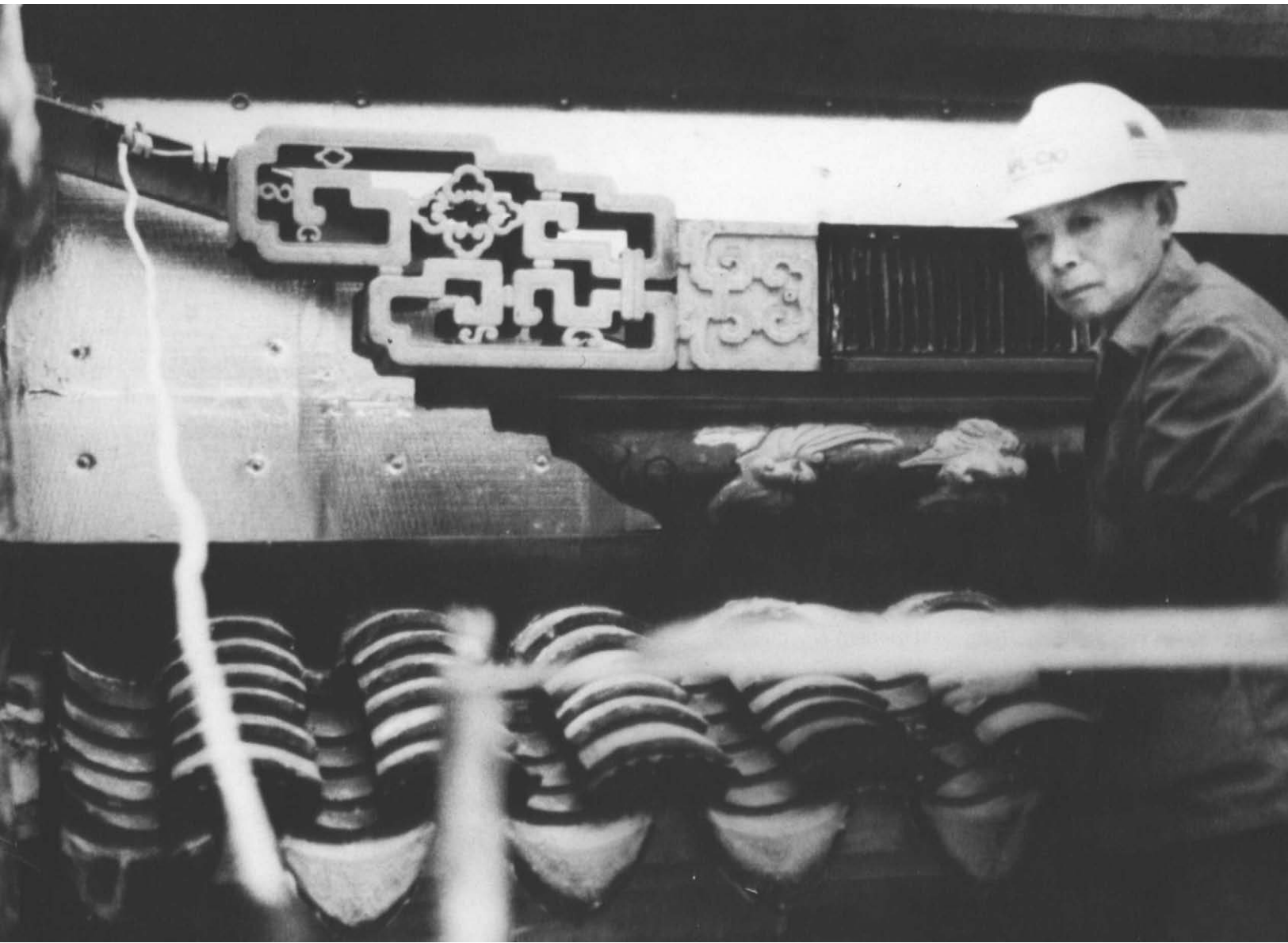


painted surface was a necessary concession to modern practicality in an otherwise meticulously accurate Ming-style installation.

The completed Astor Chinese garden court and Ming furniture room provide an authentic setting for the display of Ming-dynasty furniture and an area of rest and contemplation in the center of the Far Eastern galleries. Entered from the south from the Douglas Dillon Galleries, the garden court leads to the Ming Room at its north end, and from both the veranda of the Ming Room and the back of the room itself there are doorways leading to the Douglas Dillon Galleries on the east and west sides. Even as the courtyard in classical Chinese architecture enlivens and integrates the living spaces around it, the Astor Court unites the Chinese paintings galleries on its sides. And, in recreating a setting in which many of the masterworks of painting and calligraphy on display were created, the Astor Court adds a new dimension to our understanding of artistic life in traditional China.

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NOTES

I p. 4 James Robert Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien* (Oxford: Clarendon Press of Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 130. p. 9 Ji Cheng, *Yuan Ye* (Garden Building), preface dated 1634 (Peking: Jing Cheng Yin Shu Ju, 1931), 1:4b, 1:4a.

II p. 10 A history of Wang Shi Yuan is given in *Suzhou Fuzhi*, Tong Zhi era (1861–74) edition, which includes Qian Daxin's *Wang Shi Yuan Ji*, preface dated 1795, 46:17–18. See also *Suzhou Gudian Yuan Lin* (Classics of Suzhou Gardens) (Peking: Zhong Guo Jianzhu Gongye, 1979), pp. 65–66 and 400–401, and Chen Congzhou, "Suzhou Wang Shi Yuan" (The Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets in Suzhou), xerox copy on file in Marquand Library, Princeton University; Arthur Waley, *Yuan Mei, Eighteenth Century Chinese Poet* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), p. 69. p. 20 H. S. Ch'en and George N. Kates, "Prince Kung's Palace and its Adjoining Garden in Peking," *Monumenta Serica* 5 (1940), p. 50.

III p. 22 Zhao Diancheng, ed., *Wang You-cheng Ji Jian Zhu*, 2 vols. (Shanghai: Zhong Hua, 1961), pp. 243, 249. For translations of all the Wangchuan poems see G. W. Robinson, *Poems of Wang Wei* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1973); see *Gems from Chinese Fine Arts (Yi Yuan Duo Ying)* 5 (Shanghai: 1979):44–45. p. 23 For full translation of Wang Xizhi's *Lanting* preface see J. D. Frodsham, "The Origins of Chinese Nature Poetry," *Asia Major* 8, part 1 (1960). pp. 23–24 See National Palace Museum, *Ninety Years of Wu School Painting*, plates 95, 106, 116, 147. p. 24 *Ibid.*, plate 18 (Shen Zhou), plate 171 (Wen Zhengming, composition of 1550); Wen Zhengming, album of 1535: Kate Kerby, *An Old Chinese Garden: A Three-fold Masterpiece of Poetry, Calligraphy and Painting* (Shanghai: Chung Hwa Book Co., 1922), n.p.; see Roderick Whitfield and Wen Fong, *In Pursuit of Antiquity* (Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1969), pp. 66–75 for reproductions of all leaves in the album of 1551; Zhang Yanyuan, *Lidai Ming Hua Ji*, completed 847, ch. 2, section 3. For translation see William Acker, trans. and annot., *Some T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts on Chinese Painting* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954), p. 185.

IV p. 26 Yuan Ye, 1:1b, p.ii (colophon by Zheng Yuanxun, dated 1635), 1b (author's preface). p. 27 Yuan Ye, 1:2a, 3:23a; Chen Congzhou, "Yangzhou Pian Shi Shan Fang—Shi Tao dieh shan dzo pin," (The Mountain Studio of Rock Fragments in Yangzhou—a piled mountain by Shi Tao), *Wen Wu* 1962/2: 18–20. p. 29 Yuan Ye, 3:32ab. p. 40 Wang Yuanqi: *Yu chuang man bi*, reprinted in *Yi Shu Cong Bian*, vol. 14. For translation see *In Pursuit of Antiquity*, pp. 185–86. p. 41 Wen Zhengming calligraphy is taken from the following: *ya shi* and the Zhengming signature from "Elegant Pleasures of Groves and Springs," handscroll dated 1554, National Palace Museum, Taipei; *leng* from "Poems," album dated 1543, The John M. Crawford, Jr. Collection, New York; *quan* and *ting* from "Poems," handscroll dated 1557, Lin Po-shou Collection, National Palace Museum, Taipei; *ming* from "Springtime Wandering," handscroll dated 1544, National Palace Museum, Taipei; *xuan* from "The Du Le Gar-

den," handscroll dated 1558, National Palace Museum, Taipei.

V p. 48 See Wen Fong, *The Great Bronze Age of China* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980), pp. 30–31; Henan Provincial Cultural Relics Work Team No. 1, "Xinyang Chang Tai Guan fajue yi dzo Zhan Guo da Mu," (An Excavation of a Large Warring States Tomb at Xinyang, Chang Tai Guan), *Wen Wu Cankao Zi Liao* 9 (Peking, 1957): 21–32.

VI p. 52 *Song Shi* (Official History of the Song) (Peking: Zhong Hua Shu Ju, 1977), ch. 47, pp. 13684–13685; see Schafer (see Sources and Further Readings). p. 53 Yuan Ye, 3:26b, 3:24b; for a reproduction of the Lion Grove Scroll see Sherman Lee, *A History of Far Eastern Art* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall and New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1964), plate 546. p. 57 *Su Shi Shi Xuan*, annotated by Chen Erdong (Peking: Jenmin Wen Xue, 1957), pp. 106–7; Zhu Xi on Su Shi: Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037–1101) to Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555–1636)*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Studies 27 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 103. p. 60 He Shen: Ch'en and Kates, p. 38. p. 62 Yuan Ye, 3:10b.

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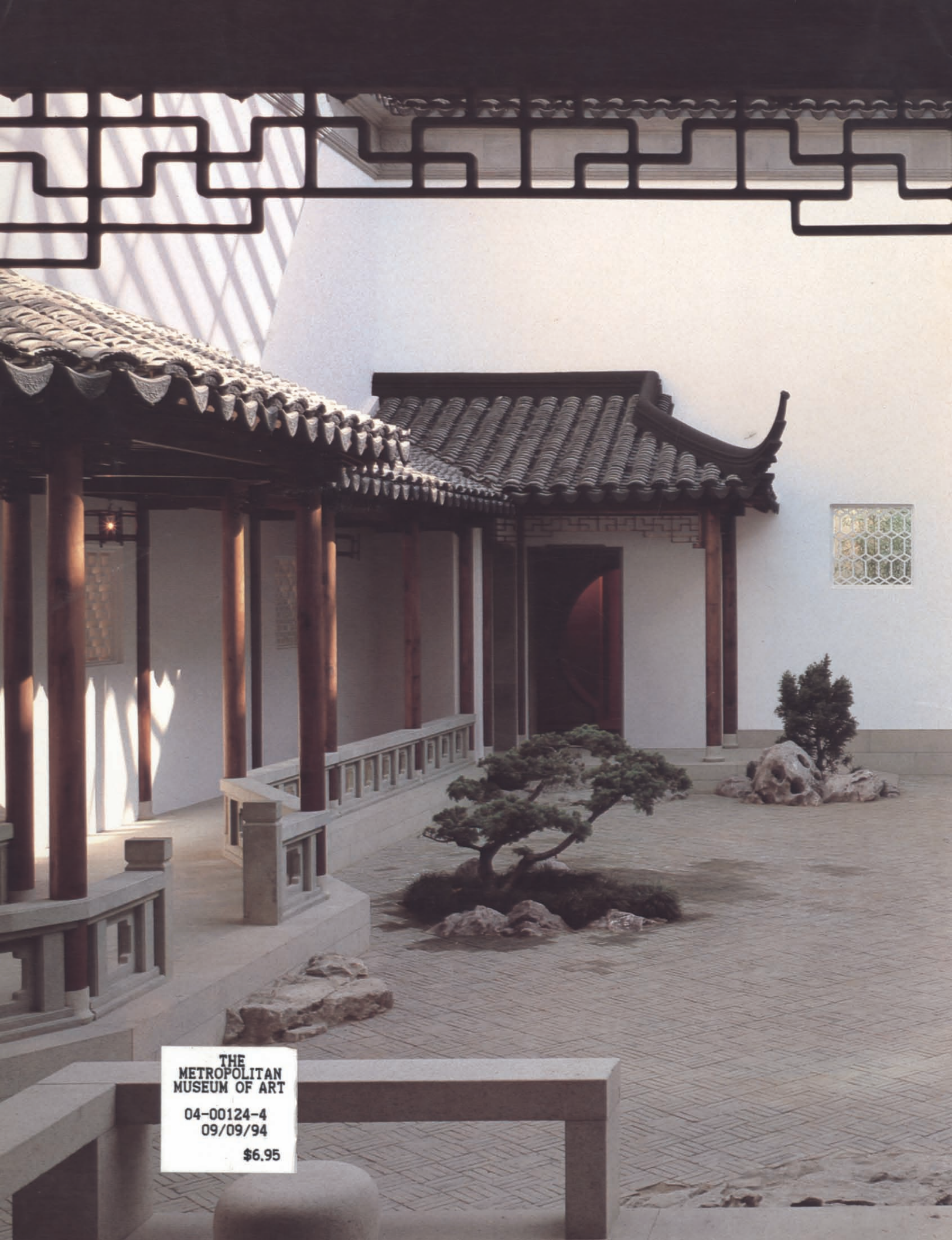
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