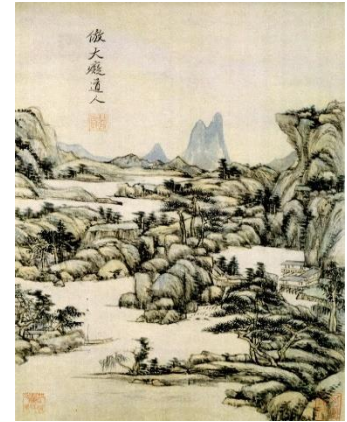


## Education of a Gardener Part 2

### A Lesson from the Gardening History of Chinese Gardens

I have always been fascinated with Chinese paintings and the symbolism that permeates them and think of them as abstract pictures coming from very imaginative people's minds. Then, in 1983, I visited China. The countryside, particularly our visit to Guilin, was a real eye-opener. There, in real life, were the same strange shapes and misty scenes as in the paintings. The paintings were not abstract but accurate representations of the landscape!

Fascinated by the landscape, I visited about a dozen gardens. It became apparent that the gardens were designed as miniature landscapes mimicking nature. Life in the Guilin valleys is lived between the mountain and the river, and the Chinese gardener inspired by them draws on the rich history of designs dating back to 1046 BC.

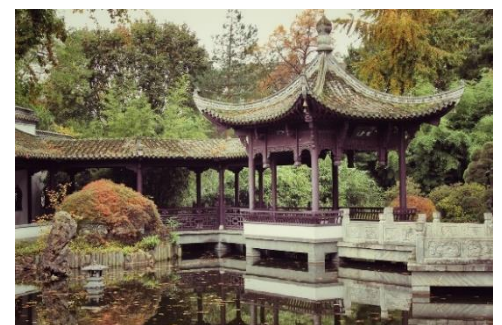


*Chinese Painting*



*Guilin Countryside 1983*

In contrast to the Persian gardener's goal of defying the harsh nature, the Chinese gardener's goal is to find nature's essence and represent it through the symbolism of rocks, pools, and trees and flowers. To my eyes used to the Persian garden's symmetry, the lack of symmetry was particularly notable. In each garden we visited, I was delighted to see water in a central lake surrounded by buildings and trees, crossed by bridges that lead to small human-made islands in the lake with twisting paths, symbolizing the zigzag path of life. The water was still and calm. The significant trees were bamboo, pine, catalpa, and my favorite mulberry. As children, we always loved the mulberry trees, which provided food for our silkworms (silkworms and marbles were our currency; they usually cost three to five marbles for each silkworm.) The primary lesson for me was to understand the yin/yang of blending human-made and natural elements. These gardens are intimate spaces designed for reflective meditation. They captured the cool breezes in the hot summer, making lingering in the garden pleasant. Usually, the gardens were enclosed with white walls that provide the perfect backdrop for the plants. Rocks of all craggy shapes and sizes dominated and naturally provided art in the garden. Whenever possible, borrowed scenery from the world outside the garden was incorporated into the design; human-made items blended seamlessly with nature and architecture blended with the garden. A lot of small scenes, texture, shape, color and fragrance surrounded by still water each taught a lesson in design.



*A Garden in Guilin*

My education as a gardener continued. The contrast with the Persian Garden was clear. Yet they each perfectly reflect their environment, and both are designed to take us to a different quiet and meditative world where the dust of daily grind is washed away and peace and serenity return.