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# pasadena

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## Tokyo in the Arroyo

Restored to its original splendor after a knockabout history, the Storrier Stearns Japanese Garden is ready for visitors

STORY BY // **Adriana Anderson**  
 PHOTOGRAPHS BY // **Deanie Nyman**

As Jim Haddad strolls through the Storrier Stearns Japanese Garden on a bright Spring morning, he recounts the typical reaction of visitors to his family's painstakingly restored Edo-style strolling garden. "They look at the beauty, of course," he says, "but it's more of a realization that this is something different. It's more like a dream than it is a reality."

And he's right. Re-opened in 2011 and just coming into its own as a private and community event space, the Storrier Stearns Japanese Garden has been a dream for countless people over the last 75 years.

For Japanese landscape designer Kinzuchi Fugii, the dream spanned two continents. Fugii was commissioned in 1935 to create the Japanese-style garden by Charles and Ellamae Storrier Stearns. The couple lived in a grand Georgian-style home on an Arlington Drive estate that spanned seven city lots between Orange Grove and Pasadena Avenues. Fugii, a Japanese immigrant who had struggled to find large-scale work when he first moved to Los Angeles, worked on the project for seven years.

Then came the bombing of Pearl Harbor – and Fugii was among more than 100,000 Japanese-Americans sent to internment camps. The garden was just weeks away from completion. Fugii took pictures of the garden and architectural plans for the tea house with him as workers finished the project in his absence.

Fugii's plans for the teahouse, the jewel of the garden, resurfaced years later at the home of his son, who was living in Santa Barbara, and proved crucial to the reconstruction of the tea house after a fire in 1981.

But first, there would be more calamity for the garden. In 1950, Gamelia Haddad Poulsen -Jim Haddad's mother -purchased at auction a portion of the Storrier Stearns estate that included the garden. She lovingly maintained the garden for 26 years, before Caltrans seized a segment of the property for its planned extension of the 710 Freeway to the 210 Freeway. Certain that the garden was lost, and imagining Caltrans trucks running through the property as they constructed the freeway, Poulsen let it fall into disrepair.

In 1990, with the freeway seeming more and more like a slim possibility, Jim and his wife, Connie, decided to reclaim the garden's original grandeur-to "bring it back pictorially," Jim says. Takeo Uesugi, a Cal Poly Pomona emeritus professor of landscape design, joined the efforts. In 2005, the garden was registered as a national historic landmark.

The restoration included replacing over 80 trees as well as resurfacing the concrete pathways with gravel and refurbishing natural elements such as subtle wood stairs. Almost all of the bridges, the bamboo groves, and even some of the lanterns and decorations around the ponds were maintained from the original space.

The biggest job was bringing back the teahouse. The original structure, built in Japan, shipped to Pasadena and reassembled in the garden, was completely destroyed in the 1981 fire, and the new teahouse was constructed from the original architectural plans. It includes a typical ceiling composed of raw silk and cotton that is stretched rather than mounted, and with its span of twelve tatami mats (as teahouses are measured) it is considered quite large. Typical shoji screens form moveable doors, but rice paper covers were excluded so that visitors can view the property from inside the teahouse. Says Jim Haddad, "by the time visitors get to the teahouse, their lives have changed a little bit."

Considered an outstanding example of the category known as a "wet garden," the space was designed by Fugii to represent the feeling of the ocean and Japanese rocky shorelines. But the Haddads have made an effort to keep the garden completely sustainable. For example, a 10,000-gallon cistern collects rainwater from around the property and reuses it during summer. Additionally, all waste is composted in the garden in order to build the ground back up naturally without fertilizer.



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The garden is not currently open to the public daily, but the space is available for weddings and events and in 2012 hosted the City of Pasadena's Historic Preservation Awards ceremony, where it was the first non-house property to receive the award. Excited by the idea of hosting cultural events, musical celebrations and tea ceremonies and bringing more visitors in, the Haddads have opened the Storrier Stearns Japanese Garden to the public on the last Sunday of each month. Reservations are required, and tours can be scheduled, as well.

Another phase of the renovation will begin soon, which will restore a strolling path over a hill, amongst other improvements.

When asked what Gamelia would say if she could see the renovation, Jim pauses to reflect. When he responds, his tone is strong and clear. "She would have liked to have this happen in her lifetime, but by the end she was elderly and still working everyday," he says. "She would be flabbergasted."

The main elements of a Japanese garden are rocks, which are considered the garden's "skeleton"; water, which can be either "wet," meaning actual water, or "dry," meaning that it is simulated by pebbles raked into wavy forms; and, of course, plants. The Storrier Stearns Japanese Garden is a traditional Japanese American garden, which means it incorporates both Japanese and local plants.

The garden has many plants that are available locally, such as black pine trees, several types of Japanese maple trees, azaleas, camellias, bamboo and ferns. Pruning and shaping often is key, with the goal being to have each plant represent an ideal example of the beauty and balance of nature itself.

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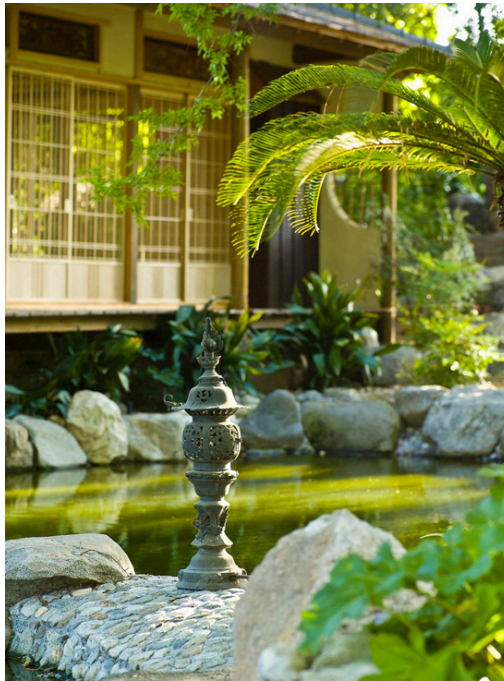
*With rocks, water and plants pruned to ideal proportions, any garden can bring Japanese serenity*

In a Japanese garden, design always takes precedence over the materials used, says Connie Haddad, owner with her husband, Jim, of the Storrier Stearns Japanese Garden.

Placing the rocks is the first step. Varying shapes, sizes and textures of rocks and stepping stones should be used, and small stone, pebbles, or gravel should be used to make interesting patterns.

The Storrier Stearns Japanese Garden is a "stroll garden," designed to create pleasurable or meditative walking experiences and to allow visitors to view the garden from different angles. Even small home gardens can incorporate a walkway — ideally one that zigs and zags, which is thought to ward off evil spirits.

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