



Cheekwood
60 YEARS of INSPIRATION

Blevins
**JAPANESE
GARDEN**

Discover the *new* Cheekwood.

HISTORY

The Blevins Japanese Garden at Cheekwood, originally called *Shōmu-en*, became a concept in 1970, when a small Japanese-style tea garden was created adjacent to the entrance of the newly constructed Botanic Hall. This planted the seed for a Japanese Garden at the original site of the Cheek family's tennis court. In 1977, Betty Weesner, a former president of Nashville's Ikebana International Chapter, pledged a generous gift in support of a Japanese garden at Cheekwood. Soon others followed and, after years of planning and construction, *Shōmu-en* opened to the public in 1990.

DESIGNERS

Shōmu-en was designed by **David Harris Engel**, and though he was responsible for several private projects, it is the only public garden attached to Engel. As the first non-Japanese garden designer to ever study gardens in Japan, Engel spent several years in a close apprenticeship with Tansai Sano, Kyoto master landscape architect. He designed gardens in Kyoto and Osaka before returning to the United States to establish a landscape design business in New York.

In 2019-20, thanks to a transformative gift from the Melba and Bill Blevins family, Cheekwood collaborated with landscape architect, **Sadafumi (Sada) Uchiyama**, Garden Curator at the Portland Japanese Garden in Oregon, to improve and enhance the garden. Uchiyama is a third-generation gardener and landscape architect from southern Japan, where his family has been involved in gardening for over a century. His methods are influenced by a unique blend of traditional Japanese gardening and Western landscape architecture.

With the recent renovation, Uchiyama was respectful of David Harris Engel's original design, planning and executing a fuller enclosure and updating the space for today's standards to be accessible to visitors in wheelchairs or with strollers.

KEY FEATURES

David Engel specifically chose the site to ultimately lead the viewer to a canyon that opens to a grand view of ocean and mountains. The garden is composed of linked segments that make up the entire experience including the Roji, the Bamboo Forest and the Viewing Pavilion.

ROJI

From the entrance gate, guests will stroll carefully through the roji. *Roji* is a tea garden term which translates to *dewey path* and is used to define a transition zone. It is on this narrow path punctuated with unevenly placed stepping stones, that one focuses on their steps and leaves the outside world behind.



BAMBOO FOREST

Descending down the roji and into a darkened thoroughfare of packed yellow-groove *Phyllostachys* presents a second path of transition on the journey. The towering, nodule-d reeds create an enclosure, further removing guests from the chaotic world. The bamboo forest is the last path of enclosure and darkness before entering the courtyard where the Viewing Pavilion stands.



VIEWING PAVILION

Looking out from the pavilion, visitors are shown a highly composed panorama. It is here, standing inside the pavilion, that the journey can be fully appreciated. The pavilion can be interpreted as a delineation between the physical world and that of the otherworld.



Dry Creek Bed

From the pavilion, the visitor is exposed to a 3-D painting, a view of where ocean and mountains meet. The dry body of water is made of raked gravel and large rock formations. Choosing rocks to be placed in a Japanese garden is a thoughtful process. With a powerful influence on the overall design of the scene in which they are placed, shape, size, relation to neighboring rocks and plants, and their individualistic characteristics all play a significant factor in the artist's selection process. In ancient times, it was widely believed that deities resided on mountains and within oceans. These earth forms held mystery and were distant worlds from humankind.



Castle Wall

Looking on either side of the pavilion, the castle wall, a miniature version built in the traditional Japanese style, provides a backdrop for *Shōmu-en's* courtyard and is strictly an element of design. Its straight lines provide a geometrical accent. Though many elements observed within a Japanese garden are often metaphoric and may possess a deeper meaning than what is initially observed, others are purely aesthetic.



HORTICULTURE

Along with fences and walls, plantings also serve as screens to the outside world, providing a tranquil and serene setting without intrusion. The original name of the garden, “*Shōmu-en*”, translates to “pine-mist forest” and this garden transcends cultures by connecting Eastern garden design with our native Tennessee landscape. The plantings include Japanese natives such as camellias, azaleas and cherry trees all interplanted with Tennessee native pines and azaleas. The mist in “pine-mist forest” is suggested by the feathered and light-textured flowers of the smoke bush (*Cotinus coggyria*) as well as the white-flowered muhly grass, both which bloom in late summer. The black pines are pruned to appear windswept; their needles contrasting beautifully with the soft, airbrushed effect of the blooms surrounding them.

LANTERNS

Throughout the garden, visitors will encounter six lanterns. The lantern was introduced into tea gardens during the 16th century, copying the practice of temples lighting the path during evening walks. Eventually the lantern came to represent the philosophical concept of enlightenment.



Japanese-style gardens have the power to educate the public about Japan’s culture while nurturing the spirit and stimulating creativity. Furthermore, these gardens found in North America provide those of Japanese heritage with a statement of goodwill and identity.

