Yin and Yang at Vancouver’s Dr Sun Yat Sen Classical Chinese Garden

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In 2011 a *National Geographic* publication named it the top city garden in the world. That’s quite a claim but, stepping into the Dr Sun Yat Sen Classical Chinese Garden from the bustling heart of Vancouver’s Chinatown, I could see why. It was like walking into a painting, every element carefully positioned. And, like all good Chinese paintings, it was beautiful, calm and timeless.

Looking out at the Dr Sun Yat Sen Classical Chinese Garden from the Pavilion

Building the Dr Sun Yat Sen Classical Chinese Garden

Each element is chosen for its individual significance

Opened in time for Vancouver’s Expo 86, the Dr Sun Yat Sen Classical Chinese Garden was the first of its kind to be built outside China. It is a traditional scholar’s garden, of a kind found in the Ming Dynasty, an era when harmony in the home and the garden were essential to a scholar’s work and existence. The garden embodies the principles of yin and yang, with a perfect balance between light and dark, indoor and outdoor, rough and smooth. The individual elements – architecture, plants, rocks and water – work together to form a whole. And every feature, even the rocks and gravel, has been carefully chosen for its symbolic or philosophical significance.

The garden is named after Dr Sun Yat Sen, the “father of modern China” and the country’s first president. Its creation was a two year enterprise, involving Chinese architects and craftsmen, imported materials and traditional building techniques. This was a joint venture between the Republic of China and the people of Vancouver, both Chinese and non-Chinese, opening in time for Expo 86. Another example of yin and yang: in combining a modern co-operative effort with the values of the Ming Dynasty the Garden becomes both contemporary and immutable.

The tearoom is full of Chinese calligraphy and artefacts

Exploring the Dr Sun Yat Sen Classical Chinese Garden

Views of the garden are framed as you walk around the buildings

It is possible to take a guided tour, where the symbols and significance of individual elements are explained in detail. But we preferred simply to walk around and enjoy the unfolding vistas and the peaceful atmosphere. We walked through the wooden rooms, full of exquisite artefacts and with doorways that offer framed views of the gardens beyond. Then we stopped for a cup of Chinese tea and took the opportunity to practice some traditional calligraphy.

It is said that the Garden can be seen at best advantage in the rain. On Vancouver’s frequent wet

watch the water falling “in beaded curtains” from the tiles above. We managed to miss this, having timed our visit for the only dry afternoon in our entire stay in the city! So I had to use my imagination, and to marvel at a world in which even the most unpredictable elements had their own fixed place.

days you can stand on the covered walkways and

My attempt at some Chinese calligraphy

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