



DR. SUN YAT-SEN
CLASSICAL
CHINESE
GARDEN

GARDEN GLOSSARY

Here are some of the words you might hear on a visit to our Garden.

A Classical Chinese Scholar's Garden is built along strong philosophical lines and is rich in symbolism and contrasts. It intends to capture elements of the natural landscape and bring them together in a small space.

This is also a home, where a Scholar and his family plus servants would have lived during the Ming Dynasty era (1368 – 1644). Scholars used their gardens as a personal retreat, in order to find inspiration for painting, calligraphy, poetry as well as meditation and contemplation.



Bats are a symbol of good luck in China. Throughout our Garden you will find bat shapes; for example on roof tiles and door handles.

Calligraphy is considered an art form and valued for its ability to allow self-expression and creativity. All educated men were expected to be proficient at calligraphy, which came to prominence during the Han dynasty (206 – 220 BCE) when artisans first perfected the manufacturing of ink, brushes and paper. You can see the inkstone, ink, brush and paper that a Scholar would have used in our Scholar's Study and various examples of calligraphy throughout the Garden.



Camphor wood was used as a building material and it is used for the ceilings of our rooms. Its scent wards off insects. It is still in use today as an essential oil and in cough and cold medicines.



The cloudy green colour of the pond water is created by a special clay that lines the pond. Cloudy water makes beautiful reflections and green is the colour of jade which symbolises purity and wisdom.

The Scholar's family would have used their courtyards to enjoy views, chat with visitors, have tea, play games such as weiqi (Go) and listen to music played by visiting musicians.



The ginkgo tree is the national tree of China. We have one on our Main Courtyard, right next to a maple tree which symbolizes Canada.

Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden became the first authentic full-scale Chinese garden built outside of China upon its completion in April 1986. Modeled after the famous Ming Dynasty scholars' gardens in the city of Suzhou, it was built using the traditional tools and techniques of that period.

The characters used in the Chinese word for landscape mean 'mountains and water' (山水). The Scholar wanted his Garden to resemble the natural world, so the pile of rocks represents a mountain, a bamboo grove represents a forest, the small pond a lake and so on.



Koi symbolize wealth, perseverance and strength. They are also said to be 'living jewellery' as they glint in the sunlight like precious stones.

There are 43 leak windows around our Garden, each one of them unique in design. They are intended to frame small views whilst allowing air and sunlight to 'leak' through.



Classical Chinese gardens often contain arrangements of miniature trees and rockeries known as penjing. Penjing literally means 'potted landscape'. This living art form aims to recreate nature in an idealized landscape on a smaller scale.

The railings that are found in the Garden were intended as a place for people to sit gracefully and relax, enjoying the views from a comfortable seated position.



The rocks in our Garden are from a lake in China called Lake Tai. They are limestone and their shapes are formed by erosion. The Scholar would have enjoyed showing off these valuable rocks to his visitors and used them as inspiration for his artwork. There are smaller versions of these large rocks in the Scholar's Study.

Our Garden is the home of a Scholar and his family. A Scholar would have studied Chinese classics, philosophy, art and literature in preparation for the Imperial Examinations. If he passed the highest level of examination, he entered government service as a top official. This top level exam was very difficult and only a few men passed.



Confucianism influenced Ming Dynasty society and was reflected in all areas of life. It placed a high value on benevolence, education, and respect for elders and superiors. In the family, parents and the older generation were given the most respect. Homes were designed to reflect that hierarchy, with the brightest, most attractive rooms reserved for the senior members of the family.

Daoism influenced the Chinese cultural view that one must strive for balance and harmony with nature, for example by finding a balance between Yin and Yang energies.

When exploring the Garden, you will see Yin and Yang manifested in the juxtaposition of colours, patterns and textures. Look out for opposites balancing each other; for example, hard rocks next to soft plants or curved shapes on one side of the Garden and the geometric shapes on the other.



The Ting is on top of the 'mountain' of rocks. The family would go there for some solitude, to admire the views or catch a breeze. The roof is upturned to allow a wider view.

The hand-crafted terracotta tiles on the edge of the roofs are known as 'dripping water tiles'. When it rains, water runs down to the point at the bottom of the tile forming large drops that create a beautiful beaded curtain of water. The garden is a place in which to admire nature in all weathers.



Turtles symbolize longevity. You may be lucky and spot them in our pond in summer; if not, the rocks that are used as steps in the Garden symbolize a turtle's shell and therefore give long life to all who step on them!

Our Garden is full of views both large and small. The Scholar designed his space to be a series of views that were revealed as people walked around. The long view over to the Dr Sun Yat- Sen Park fits in with a Chinese saying: "if your neighbour has a great view, borrow it!"

Classical Chinese Garden zigzag walkways are designed to open up new views every time a visitor turns a corner. This helps to make the Garden feel a lot larger than it actually is.

