



DR. SUN YAT-SEN CLASSICAL CHINESE GARDEN

GARDEN INFORMATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

An introduction to Dr Sun Yat Sen Classical Chinese Garden before your Group Tour

Modeled after the famous Ming Dynasty Scholar's homes in the city of Suzhou and built using the traditional tools and techniques of that period, 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.

What is this place?

Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden is an oasis of tranquility and reflection amid the bustle of urban life. Modeled after the Ming Dynasty scholars' gardens in the city of Suzhou, it became the first authentic full-scale Chinese garden built outside of China upon its completion in April 1986.



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

Today, Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden is a registered museum and one of Vancouver's top tourist attractions. It is also a unique venue for cultural programming and events, including guided tours, concerts, festivals, exhibitions, receptions, and educational programs.

Why do we have a Classical Chinese Garden in Vancouver?

Our Garden is situated in the heart of Chinatown. As long as there has been non-native settlement in Vancouver, there has been a Chinese presence in our city. In the late 1960s the City abandoned plans for a freeway connector system that would have meant large scale demolition of Chinatown. It became clear that a tangible reminder of the cultural and historical importance of Vancouver's Chinatown was needed and so in 1972, the Chinese Cultural Centre was built and discussions about building a traditional Ming dynasty Classical Chinese Garden began.



In 1985, fifty-three artisans from Suzhou spent an entire year in Vancouver constructing the Garden. The materials, tools and techniques used in the construction were almost identical to those used centuries ago and most of the materials were shipped from China. The Garden opened in April 1986.

Who would have lived in a place like this?

This is a Garden Home, where a Scholar and his family plus his 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.

A Scholar is a man who would have pursued an arduous course of study in the Chinese classics, art and literature in preparation for the civil service examinations. If he passed the final examination, he entered government service as an official at the highest level.



A Scholar's home was organised around inner courtyards with high walls for privacy and retreat. Spaces in the home were connected by walkways that zigzagged to give the impression of space and to reveal otherwise hidden views. Some areas in the home would have been hidden behind doorways. The most important people in the family (the Scholar and the elders) would have rooms on the north side facing the south for more light, while lesser family members and servants were housed on the South side.



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What will we see in the Garden?

Nature

The Scholar's Garden shows an idealised form of nature and landscape in a small space. The large pile of rocks symbolizes a mountain, the small pond a lake, the bamboo grove a forest and so on. The Garden is designed to hide and reveal views as guests travel through, making the space feel larger than it is.



Yin and Yang

A classical Chinese garden reflects the Daoist philosophy of yin and yang. The black and white symbol shows that everything and everyone requires the balance of two sides to be whole. To find harmony, there must be balance between opposites.

Examples of Yin and Yang in the Garden include:

White walls balanced by black roof tiles

Curved shapes and patterns (= feminine) balanced by geometric ones (= masculine)

Plants (flexible, living, soft) balanced by rocks (rigid, non-living, hard)

Symbolism

Almost everything in a Chinese Garden and Scholar's home has symbolic significance. Meaning is found in shapes and patterns, the plants, the rocks, the roofs and so on. Every aspect of the Garden has been thoughtfully planned out for its symbolic and/or cultural significance.

Examples of symbolism in the Garden include:

Bat shapes, which symbolize good luck

Bamboo, which symbolizes flexibility and resilience

Round doorways which represent the moon and symbolize unity and wholeness

Turtle shaped rocks (turtles represent longevity)



A Tour Around our Garden with Groups

Our facilitators will adapt the Garden Tour materials to the timing of your program, so the information above might not all be included in your tour. If there is anything specific you would like us to focus on during the tour, please let us know in advance. Group leaders are also very welcome to come to our Garden before their visit to pick up a self-guided map at Visitor Services.

These basic concepts are covered in the tour (not necessarily in this order):

What this place is

Who lived in a place like this

What each of the rooms are

How the home was organised (its layout and how the family used the spaces)

Symbolism: animals and other shapes

Yin and Yang

Nature in miniature

Importance of calligraphy and art in the Scholar's education

Contact the School and Group Tour Coordinator for more information or with any questions:

education@vancouverchinesegarden.com

We look forward to welcoming you and your group!