

JAPANESE GARDEN ATOP HOTEL ASTOR

Takeo Shiota, Landscape Artist
Who Made It, Tells of
His Art.

A PLANT HOSPITAL, TOO

Designer Says the Idea Is to Carry
Out One's Own Idealized
Scenery.

THE scenery of Japan is the mother of the Japanese garden, according to Takeo Shiota, well-known Japanese landscape architect, who has just completed the latest novelty for Times Square—a tropical garden, which now flourishes on the roof of the Hotel Astor. Mr. Shiota is best known for his landscape gardening in the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, which is said to be the most perfect and most beautiful Japanese garden in America. He has also designed the gardens for many of the large estates in this country.

High above the snowdrifts and driving winds of Broadway, rare and exotic plants thrive despite the Winter's cold. This real innovation in greenhouses is the first to be built in connection with a hotel. Not alone are rare plants grown there, but one section is given over to a plant hospital where the most bedraggled shrubs are brought out luxuriously in a couple of weeks of sunshine and tropical heat.

"In Japanese gardening we have one method—that is to utilize in the best possible way a small space. Like, for instance, the back yard of a city home, in making a beautiful artistic garden," said Mr. Shiota in describing his work. "If one understands how the Japanese garden was born, what it is and how it is made, he is already a Japanese landscape architect. Above all things, one's love of taste of nature will prove to be a kind of teacher in carrying out your ideas on the ground.

"In Japanese gardens we use beautiful flowers, plants, stones, grass or water. But these are not used alone for their own beauty, but to carry out the subject of one's own idealized scenery of landscape or nature. It is the same as the artist paints a scene on the canvas with paint and brush. We use these plants, water and stones to draw a picture on the ground with the shovel. Expression of idealized landscape is what is of value for the Japanese garden—the same as paintings—not the size, color or material. Just the expression of the artist's beautiful thoughts that beautify nature.

"Primarily, Japan is composed of small islands and famous volcanoes, and when one goes into the country there he finds beautiful scenery anywhere he goes. That is, lakes, brooks, waterfalls, pine woods, hills and mountains—so that one has a beautiful landscape of nature at all times, and naturally we grow to love nature. So we can say that the scenery of Japan is the mother of the Japanese garden. Nature beautifies us and we beautify nature and produce it anew—that is the Japanese garden.

"To achieve our miniature gardens we proceed in the same way that an artist draws scenery on a small canvas. The box garden is a sketch of landscape. Some may be two feet by three, but the smaller ones are three inches by five or the size of a china bowl. Some have great scenery, some are small like part of a lake or the edge of a brook, but even such small spaces can be made to show the beautiful scenery of our art. We just need materials that will suit the size of the box—house, bridge, figures and plants.

"If we get a small tree two or three inches high that has the same appearance of an old tree a hundred feet high, then we can make the scenery in the box to a scale of one six-hundredth of the natural. If it is a sketch, may be we can use great scenery, as a sketch is not made to scale.

"The trees for the box garden we grow especially in Japan. We have special room decoration plants called 'bonsai'—dwarf plants. These are cultivated from young plants or seeds with great care, and it takes much patience to grow them and make the shape to one's liking. The idea of the plant is to give the appearance of a tree a thousand years old—yet of wonderful beauty. These trees are from five inches to two feet high and many of them are over a hundred years old. Some cost as much as \$5,000 to \$10,000 and others can be bought for 10 cents.

"To make a garden in a small space we may use any scale of scenery—but for an outside garden we must harmonize it with the house and surroundings—then there will be a limit of scale to fit it. In order to arrange a small garden to give the effect of width and depth, we must use perspective, light and shade and draw on the imagination. When we set the plants and other things in the garden some parts must be planted thick, some parts sparsely or loose, some must be high and some low, some are exposed to view and some covered or set in as if hidden behind the outer plants, and this produces the difference of light and shade and gives the effect of distance.

"For perspective, take a centre spot in the garden—not necessarily the centre of the garden, but a centre spot around which everything else is to be set. For example, when we look through a tunnel everything enlarges to the eye from the centre to outer edge. By proper arrangement of the plants and other pieces we can trick the eye to give the effect of distance. Next we must utilize the imagination. If we put a bridge on a low part we imagine there is a brook where there is no brook. If we put a boat on the white sand we imagine it is a shore. If we put moss on the ground our feeling will be that we are in a deep woods where it grows. Above all arrangement is what one must think of before one starts to make a small garden."

TRAP-DOOR SPIDER.

YEARS ago, when I was collecting and mounting poisonous insects in California, I found it exceedingly difficult to obtain specimens of the male trap-door spiders. The female spider is the architect and builder of the exquisite, white-lined home, with its finely fitting door—one of the finest examples of insect ingenuity and workmanship in existence. The females were very plentiful in some localities but of males that could be secured by the collector's pincers there was a great dearth. Where the males live is a mystery, presumably they crawl into holes and crevices in the ground to while away the daylight hours, for night is day with the trap-door spider. I have taken thousands of females without my eyes being gladdened by the sight of a single male. During my years of collecting experience I only succeeded in taking six male trap-door spiders. Like the tarantula, the male has a smaller abdomen and longer legs than the female, the difference in the appearance of the sexes being quite marked.

Nearly two decades have slipped by since my early-day collecting experiences. Last Winter I was on my way to church during a rainstorm when, upon the flooded sidewalk, I discovered a male trap-door spider. Thinking him dead I picked him up, but he came to life rapidly and—fearing that he might not have scruples against a Presbyterian elder on Sunday—I dropped him quickly. Could I have found that adjunct of civilization, a tin can, I should have saved him and carried him home upon my return from church, but in the absence of any tin-can cage I was obliged to give him his liberty.

Now follows the strange additional experience of the day for, on returning from church, I opened the door of my garage only to find on the floor a very lively specimen of male trap-door spider. I can hardly, by any stretch of imagination, believe that the spider I had discovered on the sidewalk had obligingly preceded me home to await my arrival. This latter specimen now rests peacefully in a bottle, a victim of alcoholism.

This finding two male trap-door spiders in a single day, in a good-sized city, when years of collecting on mesa and plain and ranch in the early days had only yielded six specimens, was a very remarkable happening. But then, even lightning does strike twice in the same place at times—that is, if there is anything left to strike.

G. W. T.