



About the Overseas Japanese Garden Restoration Project

Background and Reasons for Deciding to Undertake the Project

There are many Japanese gardens located outside Japan. Kumamoto-en (located within the San Antonio Botanical Garden) is a traditional Japanese-style garden that opened in San Antonio, Texas, USA (hereinafter referred to as “San Antonio”) in 1989 after the two sister cities concluded an agreement.

Some 30 years have passed since the garden opened, and although repair work has been carried out twice, the second time was 15 years ago, and the facilities were aging.

Also, the late Noh actor Kano Shuho, who had resided in Kumamoto City, donated the only all-cypress Noh stage outside Japan to the city of Aix-en-Provence, France (hereinafter referred to as “Aix”), which has exchange agreements with Kumamoto. This Noh stage is located in the Saint-Mitre Park, which is managed by the city, and a concept was born for redeveloping the area surrounding the stage as a traditional Japanese garden themed on the landscape of Kumamoto City—Aix’s exchange city—with the aim of providing a space where park visitors could experience a sense of serenity on a more daily basis as well as experience Japanese culture. (This garden was later named “Kumamoto-en”).

Accordingly, these two cities requested Kumamoto, their sister city/exchange city, to provide technical support for restoring these traditional Japanese gardens. With Japan’s largest festival of flowers and greenery, the “38th National Urban Greening Fair: KUMAMOTO GREEN VISION EXPO” (abbreviated to “KUMAMOTO FLOWER EXPO”) beginning in March

2022, and with Kumamoto consequently being selected for the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism’s Overseas Japanese Garden Restoration Project, Kumamoto City decided to undertake these two restorations in cooperation with the Kumamoto City Landscape Architecture and Construction Industry Association.

Project Outline

Firstly, with San Antonio’s Kumamoto-en, the Japanese garden is enclosed with four kinds of bamboo fencing representative of Japan: *katsura*, *otsu*, *kennin-ji*, and *daimyo*. Inside the garden are *shin*, *gyo*, and *kusa nobedan* pavement styles; as well as three kinds of stone lanterns lighting the way along the paths—*oribe*, *mizubotaru*, and *sanko*. In addition to double trout-shaped fountain-style *chozubachi* (water basins for rinsing the hands) showing respect for cleanliness, the garden also has an *azumaya* pavilion.

With regard to greenery, consideration was given to trees and plants grown locally. Existing pine trees were utilised and trees/plants that could be procured in the USA—including maple trees, bamboo, bamboos shoots, and grass—were incorporated. Special stone materials such as stone lanterns, pavements, and *tsukubai* (wash basins); bamboo processed materials, and wooden materials were imported from Japan and installed.

Some 15 years have passed since the previous restoration work, and the *azumaya* pavilion, bamboo fences, and other structures have aged. On-site surveys were carried out in preparation for new

restoration work, and with regard to the *azumaya* pavilion, which had sustained particularly severe damage and was in danger of collapsing, emergency measures were implemented, and the decision was made to urgently rebuild the structure. However, travelling between Japan and the USA was limited by the worldwide spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the timing of the restoration is currently being rescheduled.



Technical guidance on how to tie together a bamboo fence (San Antonio, USA)

With regard to the Aix garden, the city employees actually in charge of the garden's design came to Kumamoto, visited Mt. Aso and numerous traditional Japanese gardens, and also experienced tea ceremony, *bonseki* (miniature landscapes on black trays), and other aspects of traditional Japanese culture. The inspiration they received from these experiences was reflected in the Aix garden's design.

Specifically, the garden's design was based on a circuit-style strolling pond garden design, represented by Kumamoto's Suizenji Garden. The view of Aix's symbol Mont Sainte-Victoire, which is visible from the garden, was borrowed to represent Kumamoto's Mt. Aso, and within the garden artificial hills were modelled on the Kometsuka scoria cone, which is located within the Mt. Aso caldera. Furthermore, the image of the Shirakawa River winding its way through Kumamoto City to the Ariake Sea has been incorporated into the garden, and the design also incorporates numerous other

ingenious elements. Construction began in February 2020 and was completed in August 2021.



The traditional Japanese garden was completed in July 2021.

Project Features and Innovation

For many of the overseas Japanese garden restoration projects carried out previously, materials and equipment were brought into the country from Japan and Japanese engineers carried out the restoration work on-site.

Consequently, Japanese landscaping techniques were not passed on to local engineers, with the result that many of the Japanese gardens were not appropriately maintained and managed, ultimately requiring restoration.

For these restoration projects, therefore, materials suitable to the local climate were procured locally as much as possible. Implementing this method will enable local non-Japanese staff to maintain and manage the gardens appropriately utilising materials and equipment with which they are familiar.

In particular, Aix has a Mediterranean climate that is dry due to extremely low rainfall, and so it is difficult to grow plants that are often used in traditional gardens in Japan—in some cases, in fact, there is a high possibility that the plants would wither and die.

For this reason, landscaping materials that could be obtained locally rather than trees brought in from Japan were considered, and adjustments such as incorporating many French plants with a Japanese

feel were implemented to make it easy to continually manage and maintain the garden through replanting and other measures.

Results of the Project

In making these overseas trips, because the local staff are carrying out daily garden maintenance and management based on information obtained from books and the internet, the Japanese engineers also provided technical guidance.

Local workers were shown how to prune trees in styles appropriate for traditional Japanese gardens, and with regard to repairing the bamboo fences, the workers were taught how to tie bamboo fences together. Thus, the restorations provided good opportunities for the Japanese landscape engineers to pass on their expertise and skills.

Issues and Responses

In order for traditional Japanese gardens constructed overseas to also be maintained and managed appropriately after they have been built, it is necessary for the non-Japanese engineers who will be managing the gardens to understand how to maintain and manage a traditional Japanese garden as well as carry on these methods.

Accordingly, for Kumamoto-en in San Antonio, after returning to Japan the Japanese engineers compiled a Japanese-English bilingual manual for maintaining the garden and created a video of tree pruning methods. These resources are now shared by the two cities.

Future Developments (Anticipated Results, Outlook for the Project, Issues, etc.)

Completed in August 2021, Aix's Kumamoto-en is being used for various programmes related to the dissemination of Japanese culture, such as using the garden's bamboo grove to introduce Japan's Tanabata festival during the unveiling ceremony that was held in France on 7th July (known as "Tanabata" in Japan).

It is anticipated that in the future, the Japanese garden will be proactively utilised to not only enable Aix residents visiting the park to experience and become familiar with Japanese culture on a daily basis, but also deepen French people's understanding of Japan and Kumamoto through Japanese cultural experiences and events.

Furthermore, in the spring of 2022, Kumamoto City will be hosting Japan's largest festival of flowers and greenery, the "National Urban Greening Fair: KUMAMOTO GREEN VISION EXPO", and representatives of both San Antonio and Aix are participating as members of the fair's organizing committee. When the National Urban Greening Fair is being held, information about not only these garden restoration projects but also the appeal of the cultures and music, etc., of France (Aix) and the USA (San Antonio) will be disseminated, thereby further expanding exchange with both cities and countries.

Reference URLs

<https://kumaryokkafair.com/fascinations/>

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Key Terms