

# COASTAL LIFE

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## CLOSE TO HOME: A SPACE OF BEAUTY

Portland Japanese Garden offers rare tranquility, solace

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FOR COAST WEEKEND

*"In Wilderness is the Preservation of the world"*

— Henry David Thoreau

To a large degree, I follow Thoreau's famous dictum much as a coyote travels after scent, nostrils flared, eyes wide open. I love the deep green

blades, a clear brook running through with the sensuous gurgle of sweet water music. I love the size and girth of a 1,000-year cedar, a Western or Redwood. They don't talk or walk, but certainly they present an aura. And sometimes, something more, something that approaches magic.

Shut your eyes and listen. Remember, as Thoreau put it, "It's not what you look at that matters. It's what you see." A quiet spot in a grove of great redwoods is a haven of peace and tranquility.

So why was I so taken, almost smacked, by a manicured garden in Portland, there, behind the Rose Garden (no slouch itself) in the West Hills overlooking Rip City? The Portland Japanese Garden, to define the place, nestled into an artistic landscape like quail eggs tucked safely inside a woven grass nest.

Here, human hands touched and manipulated; shaped, crafted and designed. Here is a refuge carved inside a major city of nearly a million people. One of the Long Beach Peninsula's own, William Clearman, crafted wood here — delicate railing, curved wooden bridges, turned cedar caps the tops of fences and railings, each splined with Japanese hand tools.

The garden introduces us to a Mecca of subtle sophistication and beauty. Buddhism

and Taoism are pervasive religions in Japan, and in this garden of wonders, an undefinable Tao seeps from the plants and landscaping and from the cool damp earth of the Pacific Northwest.

And I have little doubt this may be one of the most exquisite gardens in America.

We might call the garden a living sculpture, because every square inch seems, well, sculpted.

Dry streambeds run wild with river stones, little round ones

that we might wish to stick in our pockets. Pines shaped and contorted until their limbs illuminate haunting silhouettes, delicate sculpted shapes that sends our imagination reeling. All the while, songbirds dart through, their tiny songs, beacons of joy and hope.

Koi slow-float through waterways, their fins delicately dancing through quiet cur-



David Campiche

**Koi fish at the Portland Japanese Garden.**



David Campiche

**Pond and flowering trees at the Portland Japanese Garden.**

rents. The atmosphere seems cloudlike, their black and orange body paint exudes nocturnal amblings, dreams to come.

The garden is littered with uniquely shaped stones, big and small. They squat like frozen stone soldiers, like a small army of guardians.

The gardens and the forest of home are uncommon sanctuaries. Most of the old growth has been shaved by chainsaws. At the Japanese Garden, you stumble upon an artist with tweezers and scissors who trims miniature Bonsai trees or picks buds from twig-like limbs. These miniature plants and

trees seem to express the same invigorating stranglehold as a 300-foot Redwood. Herein lies the miracle.

A walk through an ancient forest can unleash your senses. Drive to Portland's West Hills and free your imagination. Remember, it's not what you look at the matters, it's what you see. Thank you, Mr. Thoreau.

*The Portland Japanese Garden, 611 SW Kingston Ave., is open Mondays from noon-7 p.m. and 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday. For more information visit, [japanesegarden.org](http://japanesegarden.org) or 503-223-1321* 