

A Tea Room in Surrey

In the early 1930s an English gentleman, Mr C. H. P. Hay, decided to create a Japanese style garden at his home near Woking: he had lived in the East for some years and having enjoyed the experience wanted a small reminder back home in Surrey. In his quest for authenticity he called upon the services of a Japanese landscape designer living and working in London at the time, Mr Seyemon Kusumoto, to create "a typical Japanese tea house in a typical Japanese setting."¹

Mr Kusumoto exhibited at Chelsea Flower Show in the 1930s and designed and worked on a number of gardens in the south, from those at Du Cane Court in Balham (about 1935)² to another extant garden in Hertfordshire (1923).³

According to an article in *House and Garden* magazine in the mid 1930s, the garden created for Mr Hay consisted of a small rocky hillside with a stream tumbling into a series of pools. One pool was spanned by a curved bridge made of larch and bamboo poles and another was overlooked by a yukimi style lantern. A good collection of stones helped create the tumbling mountain stream. There were existing mature trees on the edges of the garden, including a tall silver birch, with maples, pine, cherry, azaleas, and iris added; the whole being surrounded by a 'peeping fence' with a gate leading to the road. The fence allowed neighbours and passers-by a glimpse into the garden beyond.

The garden was designed to be viewed from its central feature, which was a 4½ mat (yo-jo-han) tea room, built in the main of Japanese cedar, with some pine and bamboo, made in Japan and shipped over by Mr Kusumoto. [Figures 1 and 2]

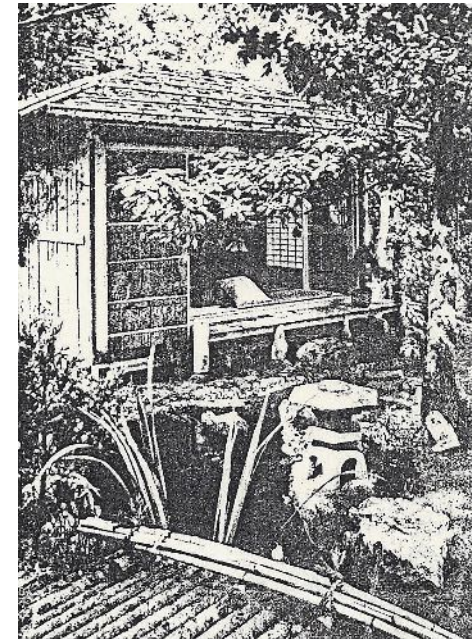
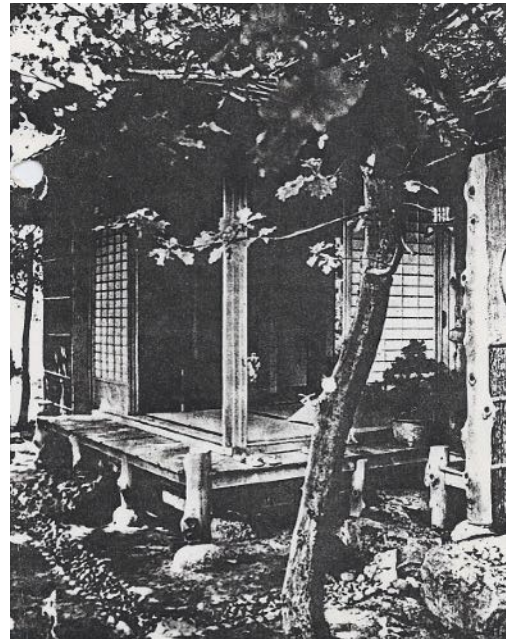


Figure 1 (above) and Figure 2 (right) View of the tea house in Mr Hay's original garden: from *House and Garden*.



Figure 3
Tokonoma and
shelves (2010).

A Tea Room in Surrey continued...

Three of the sides had opening shoji screen walls – one half height, two full height, protected by sliding panels on the outside. These could be fully opened so that the shoji filtered the bright sun leaving the interior still light but without the distraction of outside views. The floor area of 36 square feet, excluding the raised tokonoma, shelves and full height cupboard at one end, was covered by 4 full and one half sized tatami mats. [Figures 3 and 4]

How the garden, or Mr Hay, fared over the next decades is not known but around the late 1950s, early 1960s, the wooden building, lanterns and some stones were sold on and went to a new home in a different part of Surrey. It is doubtful that the 1930s garden near Woking still exists in any form, but the tea room most certainly survived its move with no detrimental effect. This is possibly due in part to the fact that it was held together with wooden pegs alone; there were no metal screws or nails used in the construction.

The shoji and the room inside have been well protected over the years by the wooden shutters, amado, which keep out the weather. When closed all but the last shutter, are locked on the inside by vertical wooden bolts or agezaru. [Figures 5 and 6] The final shutter in place then locks automatically with a spring loaded bolt and secures the building. When opened up the shutters slide into storage boxes attached to the outsides of the building, neatly hidden away until they are needed again.

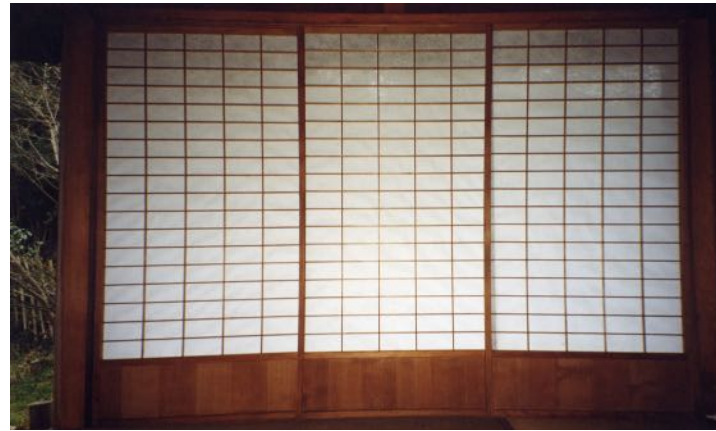


Figure 4 Light filters through a shoji screen wall.



Figure 5 Bark and bamboo cover the storage boxes for the outer shutters when not in use.

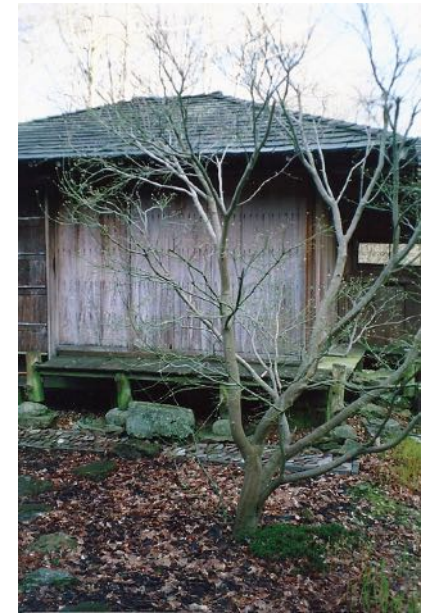


Figure 6 The closed shutters protect the shoji screens.

The building arrived at its new home [Figure 7], that of a professor of Japanese studies, but there is little to suggest that an attempt at a garden in the Japanese style was made, other than depositing the transported stones around and placing two lanterns from the original garden, one in front and one at the side of the building. There was no planting to speak of.

More recently in 2004 it was felt the time had come to try to create a surrounding more suitable for the tea room and with the help of designer Maureen Busby, RHS Hampton Court and Chelsea Gold Medal winner, this was brought about. The whole area was landscaped and re-planted – all but one large existing acer – to give an authentic tea garden 'feel'. A new lantern was introduced – the originals had been sold at auction in the early 1990s – along with a stone basin in keeping with the newly designed tea garden. [Figures 8 and 9]

It is interesting to note that if you care to get down and crawl under the tea house, on the underside of the planking the name and address of Seyemon Kusumoto is plain to see. [Figure 10] The packing case was clearly recycled and used in the construction.

Ann Dobson

Notes

¹Maida Ritchie, House and Garden. Date uncertain, possibly late 1930s.

²Gregory K Vincent A History of Du Cane Court . Woodbine Press 2008

³H Goode The Japanese Garden at Cottered, Herts 1905-33. 1933



Figure 7 The area around the tea house in 2000.



Figure 9 Details following the re-landscaping in 2004/5.



Figure 8 Details following the re-landscaping in 2004/5.

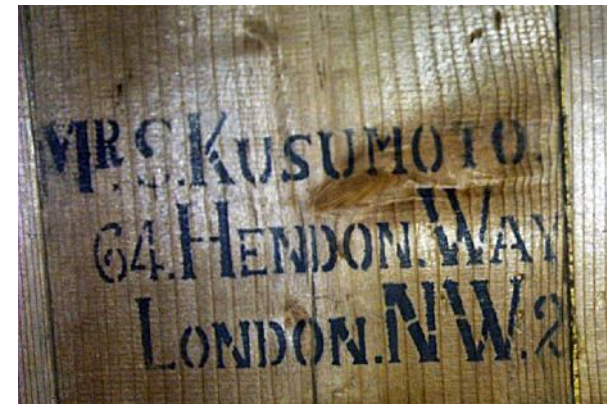


Figure 10 Mr Kusumoto's details could have been printed yesterday.

A Tea Room in Surrey - in Autumn

