

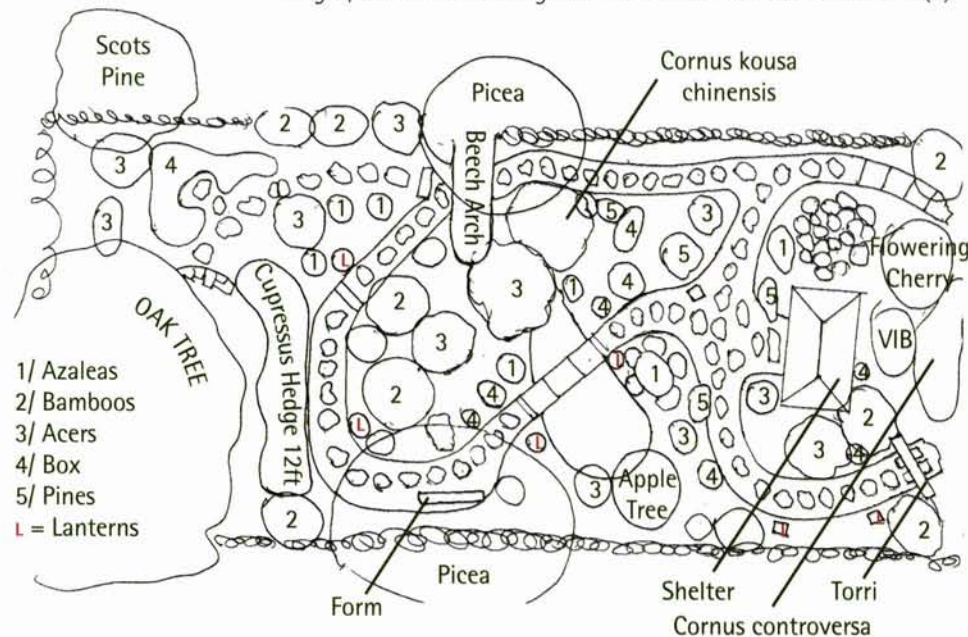
Ichi Ni's Pleasure Garden in Greater Manchester

The garden has evolved over the last 20 years, and although a great deal of planning was put into the various stages, no design was ever drafted out on paper.

The Japanese element of the garden started with just a small corner that was furthest away from the house, and as my interest and knowledge grew, so did the area of the section of the Japanese garden, whereby it now takes up half of the 10.5m wide by 41.5m long plot.

The Japanese Garden area is entered through a timber Tori Gate that is based on a stone Tori gate in the garden of Kondii in Nanzen-Ji, Kyoto. A path then leads to a viewing shelter fabricated from red cedar with a pitched roof, tiled with shingles. The various sections were constructed during the Winter of 2001 - 2002 and then assembled on site in the Spring of 2002: all in all it took in the region of 600 hours to make, and it is surprising what a difference just one component such as this has made to the garden. This shelter was featured in more detail in a previous Shakkei.¹

¹ Wright, Steve. The Building of a Small Garden Shelter. Shakkei 10(3): 10



With the will to obtain the desired effect came the need to remove some of my favourite old established shrubs, and it was with some trepidation that sadly, but essentially, I recently had to uproot an aged "*Cornus controversa* Variegata".

Within the garden there are a wide variety of plants most of which are meticulously pruned to keep an aesthetic balance. One such plant is a 45 year old 5m high "*Chamaecyparis*" that has for the past 15 years been trained into a cloud tree, consisting of some 30 pads, which appear to be floating like clouds upon the ends of its branches. Forming the 30 clouds into their final shapes can take a full days pruning. When I first pruned (butchered) the tree my wife Norma was the first to say what a mess it was, and I must admit I agreed with her (I agreed without telling her I agreed), yet now some 15 years later it is surprising the attention it gets from visitors and it is now one of the focal points of the garden (told you so Norm). All the plants in the garden are pruned and controlled in one way or another and I have recently acquired a pair of Japanese tripod ladders (Kojatsu), to allow me to reach the taller trees.

Ichi Ni's Pleasure Garden in Greater Manchester continued...



These ladders are so sturdy and can be used on uneven or hilly terrain as there is a retractable leg at the back that can be moved and locked in place by means of a pin. All the Japanese gardeners whom we saw pruning the cloud trees in Japan had them (Hachi is dead envious). With plants such as Acers and Pines I often deliberate for many hours whether a particular branch should be pruned or not, I nearly always give in to my instincts and prune it, and often it is better for it, in other words I say just go for it.

There are a few more plants in the garden other than those shown within the diagram, all of which are low growing types. The boundary is mainly of hedging including Beech, Cupressus, Yew, and Bamboo; ground cover is predominantly moss, which in Spring is closely cut, consequently by the end of the season it has usually put on some good new growth. Where the moss has not yet colonized, liverwort is growing: you tend to find that once the liverwort appears, the next

stage is that moss will then begin to invade and get a hold. If an instant moss carpet is required there is an alternative way to acquire it. Whilst visiting a nursery in order to buy some plants, I noticed that carpets of moss were growing in between the poly tunnels. Upon enquiring of the nurseryman as to if he would sell me some of the moss, he stared at me as if I was mad, and exclaimed that almost everybody coming into the nursery asks how they can get rid of it, not cultivate it. He pointed to a spade in the corner and said take as much as you want, so I went back twice that weekend and helped myself to the lot.

Within the design I incorporated a 4.5m x 2.5m pond that is crossed by means of a stone bridge. The pathway leading to the bridge consists of stepping stones set within gravel, and to contain the gravel the path is lined with a thin stone edging. Various sized water worn river boulders, some weighing 4 to 5 hundredweight, have been placed at strategic points within the garden, and because of the hilly nature of the garden and the weight of the boulders, they had to be moved into position by means of rollers, brute force and ignorance. I often visit quarries looking for rocks, as do my mates Shichi and Hachi. If there are any we see of any interest, we get in touch and do a recce. Shichi and Hachi are also members of the Dry Stone Walling Association of Great Britain, and can be found in the winter months blowing like flags up the mountains of the Peak District piling stones one on top of the other. Hachi says that the walls are there to stop dogs worrying the sheep: Ichi Ni and Shichi say that they are there to stop Hachi worrying the sheep (nice wellies Hachi) but that's another story.

Unfortunately, my dear wife Norma now suffers with Alzheimer's and I therefore now open the garden once a year, in aid of the Alzheimer's Society. It's usually a great day, with a lot of questions asked of how and why, and it is surprising how many people say "I bet this is a low maintenance garden?" If only they knew how wrong they were.

Norma really enjoys the working party days at Walkden Gardens, with the freedom of being able to walk safely through the garden and get lost in the bushes. I would like to take this time to thank all the members of the society for caring and talking to her, even though they don't always get many replies.

All in all, our garden has been a labour of love, and next time I write about it in Shakkei don't be surprised if the other half of the garden hasn't turned Japanese.

Ichi Ni (Steve Wright)



