

New Oak Gate at Ichi ni's Tsubo-niwa

by Steve Wright and Joe Daly

Being that tsubo-niwa are courtyard gardens, it had never crossed my mind when drawing up the plans for my garden that from within the house most of my garden can be seen. Garden design has never been one of my stronger points as I've always preferred to allow things to evolve, therefore, technically, this space was not enclosed and would not be considered a courtyard garden [Figure 1].



Figure 1: The garden from the house

Unlike the outlook from within the house, when the space was viewed from the outer garden the courtyard looked complete, therefore some form of enclosure was required. I considered that whatever structure was to be built it would need to be light and airy so as to maintain some aspect of a view beyond, whilst creating a noticeable division. Whilst considering the sourcing of materials I remembered a farm in the Cheshire area that I regularly cycled past that always seemed to have a huge stack of tree trunks.

I had contemplated on a few occasions whether to build some form of structure out of oak and, upon contacting the owner of the farm, I was assured that he could supply

the quality and quantity required. So it was now time to draw up some sort of plans for the structure.

In the past most of my plans / drawings have been sketched out on old envelopes, and I was beginning to get a name for being a careful Christian, or in other words tight fisted therefore, on this occasion, I reluctantly dove into the wallet (pushing aside the moths) and bought a sketch pad. Hachi (Joe Daly) still maintains he saw the Queen blink as the crisp fiver saw the light of day for the first time. Over the next couple of days I began

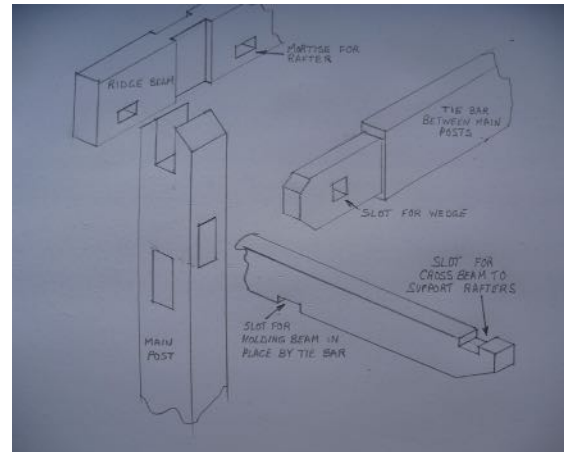


Figure 2: Plan for gateway

to design the structure, proposing to incorporate within the design a chumon (inner garden gate) and a sode gaki (sleeve fence) having adopted these and other ideas from a book titled "Living In Japan" from Taschen's Lifestyle Series'. The roof concept came from a photograph from the Go'o Shrine on Naoshima Island in the Inland Sea, most other designs are my interpretations of what Japanese craftsmen would design and build into these types of structures [Figure 2].

Having a passion for the fretwork that the Japanese Craftsmen incorporate into their balustrades and fences I designed and cut out a few heavenly elements, such as the "moon", "stars" and "clouds" into the upper tie bar which is above you as you pass through the Chumon [Figure 3]. The gate was finished off with small extension



Figure 3: Fretwork in upper tie bar



Figure 4: Latch on gate

fences to either side of the main uprights and an ornate gate that is locked with a wooden latch [Figure 4]. As can be seen [Figure 5] some of the ornate work was



Figure 5: Use of dining room as workshop!

carried out within the house the reason being that the build took up most of the winter months. Now completed it has made a vast difference to the Tsubo-niwa. Although some tweaking has been necessary, all that remains now is to await the toning down of the oak - which may take a couple of years. On a technical note for any DIY enthusiasts, all joints are mortise and tenon or simple lap joints. The gate (with

its 92 mortise and tenon joints) is an adaptation of an antique Chinese panel used in Iori Nishirokkaku-cho Machiya in Kyoto and glued together using Polymite powdered resin glue. Unlike the Tenon Joints the Lap Joints in the uprights of the fences are held together with screws.

On completion the overall effect to enclose the tsubo-niwa was achieved. So for now: Kampai, Ja Mata Et Sayonara.

¹Living in Japan. Alex Kerr and Kathy Arlyn Soko. Taschen (2013) ISBN-13: 978-3836535007



Figure 6: Completed gateway