

## Heiwa En (Garden of Peace) Roosevelt High School Japanese Garden, Los Angeles



The Japanese garden at Roosevelt Senior High School (RHS) has been constructed three times as a result of various forces at work within the community. Located in Boyle Heights, this area was known as one of L.A.'s most heterogeneous areas between 1920 and 1950. It was during this time that Shigeo Takayama, president of the RHS Japanese Club, led the construction of a Japanese garden on the campus. In 1935, with the help of fellow Japanese students and parents the garden was completed. Later these students were forced to abandon their homes as a result of executive order 9066 and the Japanese internment. Many of them were unable to graduate from high school. The original garden built by these students was destroyed after the bombing of Pearl Harbor by war hysteria and feelings of anti-Japanese sentiment.



*USS Shaw exploding*



*USS Arizona burning*

One reason the students probably chose to create a Japanese garden on the grounds of their high school was in an attempt to soothe racial animosity towards the Japanese, especially as the conditions leading up to World War II worsened. "Aware of both the hostility facing them and of the popularity of Japanese-style gardens, Japanese immigrants built gardens as a way of smoothing the path of acceptance in American society by emphasizing the most attractive manifestation of their culture" (Brown, 12-13). Often times the creation of a Japanese garden was used to promote aspects of Japan that Americans found culturally attractive while at the same time turning thoughts away from the more negative associations. "...at times when tensions denigrate Japan's image internationally, gardens are an effectively indirect way of creating a positive impression. The beauty, serenity, and age-old tradition of gardens countermand the threatening image of the modern industrial nation and economic competitor trumpeted in newspaper headlines" (Brown, 16).



*Full size examples of formal the formal Japanese garden & Zen (Rock) garden*

Unfortunately these feelings of appreciation for the beauty and peace offered by the Japanese garden were not enough to spare it from the outrage caused in wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Over fifty years after the garden's initial destruction, students of RHS who learned about the Japanese internment in their history class decided to take action against the injustices inflicted upon the Japanese students during World War II.

The current students decided to rebuild the Japanese garden on the same location it had once stood. As the project continued to grow more and more members of the community began to lend their support. The students even managed to contact some of the Japanese Americans who had attended RHS and took place in the construction of the original garden. The reconstruction of the Japanese garden was completed on May 6th, 1996 and a dedication ceremony was held in which those Japanese American students who were interned before they could graduate were granted honorary high school diplomas. The garden was named "Heiwa En" or Garden of Peace in commemoration of the injustices suffered by the Japanese Americans students of Roosevelt High School during World War II. It also serves as a tribute to the current students of RHS who share the experience of living in a time and place where racial conflicts abound.



#### A Garden Restored

This is a garden of peace and understanding, a place of serenity where one can sit, relax, and rest one's mind in peace. It commemorates the re-establishment of the beautiful Japanese garden built by Japanese RHS students in the mid 1930's. That garden was destroyed in the late 1940's by World War II hysteria against the Japanese. RHS students (1995-1996), in a more reflective environment and time, rebuilt the garden with funds provided by RHS alumni and Friend of Roosevelt High School. This garden is a tribute to the students of Roosevelt High School who sought to right a wrong by rebuilding the Japanese garden in remembrance with respect and brotherly love.

Bruce Kaji  
Class of 1944





## GARDEN OF PEACE

A dedication ceremony was held on June 2005 to commemorate the naming of the restored Japanese Garden built in 1996 by Roosevelt HS Alumni and friends. The garden was named "Heiwa -En", garden of peace, to reflect our hope for future generations. The original garden was built by the RHS Japanese Club in 1935, led by Shigeo Takayama, club president.

Through Mr. Shigeo Takayama's generosity, the garden underwent a major upgrade in 2005, designed by Haruo Yamashiro, an award winning landscape contractor. Mr. Takayama's contribution not only...

The garden was upgraded in 2005 through the efforts of Shigeo Takayama who provided the financial support to hire Haruo Yamashiro, an award winning landscape artist. The reasoning behind this massive transformation is left largely to personal speculation. When the renovation was completed, another dedication ceremony was held and the significance of the garden was altered slightly. Now the garden is a tribute to overcoming all racial tensions and "...to reflect our hope for future generations" as is stated on one of the plaques within the garden. Over time, the meaning and purpose assigned to this garden have changed. This is evident even within the last ten years. In 1996 the garden is stated to be a reminder of the hardships faced by Japanese American students during the Japanese internment. By 2005, the garden has come to represent the clash of racial tensions and the suffering of minority groups in general and looks to the possibility of one day resolving these potent issues that are still rampant within the city of Los Angeles. The meaning of the garden is modified to suit changes taking place in society as well as complex the interracial relations of the neighborhood in which the garden is located. The fact that a Japanese garden was chosen to represent the struggle for racial equality seems to be part of a historical trend. "While Japanese cities use gardens to present a vision of historical tranquility to counteract their image of modern vitality, for North American cities the sister city garden is a way of announcing their internationalism and receptivity to cultural diversity" (Brown, 25). America uses Japanese gardens as a means of ratifying its diversity through the promotion of an aspect of Japanese culture that it feels it can understand and appropriate for its own use. Japanese gardens are a safe and reasonable way in which to demonstrate cultural acceptance without delving into anything too unfamiliar or dangerous. The Japanese garden at RHS has many layers of meaning that have been built on top of each other. Examining of how the meaning of the garden has changed along with the community that surrounds it reveals how its significance is truly dependent the preconceived notions each generation has assigned to it.



## Bibliography

Kendall Brown, "Territories of Play: A Short History of Japanese Style Gardens in North America," Japanese-Style Gardens of the Pacific West Coast (1999).

Photo-documentation of the Garden of Peace is located in Roosevelt HS located at 4565 Mathews St. Los Angeles, CA 90033. Office Phone: 323-266-7241.