

# The art of **BONSAI**



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The Japanese garden  
at Capel Manor

SEPTEMBER 98 NO. 19



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# capel manor

Richard Hill went to Capel Manor and found a Japanese haven full of tranquillity in the city of London

Hosting the National Garden Centre, Capel Manor Horticultural and Environmental Centre contains a wide range of themed gardens, many of which trace the history of gardens and gardening, or demonstrate gardening excellence.

One such garden is the Japanese garden. Although only five years old, its guiding traditions, led by Japanese culture, date back hundreds of years. Despite the constant rumble of the overloaded M25 motorway just a few hundred yards away, the garden is a peaceful and tranquil setting.

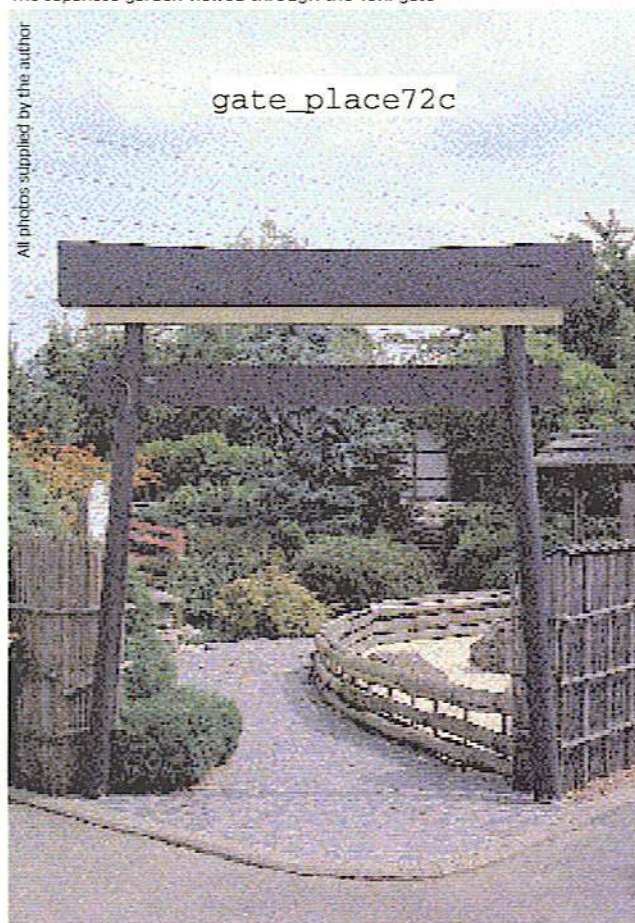
It is a garden to be alone in. Unlike our own gardens, a Japanese garden is not planted with the idea of displaying

and presenting flowers and plants. The principles which govern such gardens come from the philosophy of Zen. The authentic Japanese Garden exemplifies an ancient philosophy, though the philosophical meaning can be very wide.

The Capel Manor Japanese garden is just that. It is a representation of the universe and its elements. Begin by standing outside the garden, viewing it perfectly framed in the *torii* gate. What you see beyond is a space that is both pure and revered.

This is a *kaiyu*, a stroll garden, that combines three basic Japanese styles — the rock and water garden, the Zen

The Japanese garden viewed through the Torii gate



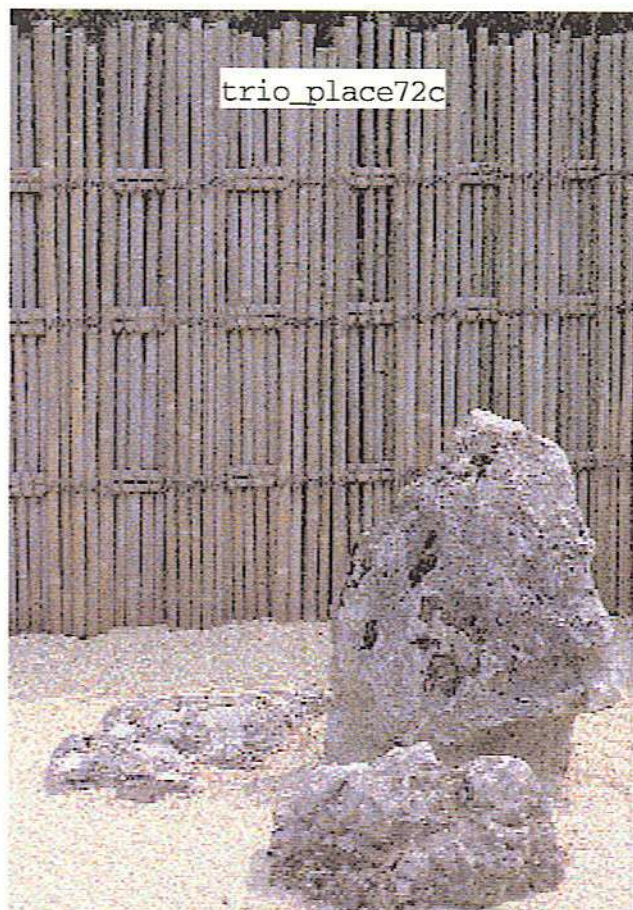
Chozubachi



gate\_place72c

basin\_place72c





The triangular arrangement of three Buddha stones in the Karesansui dry garden



*Polystichum setiferum* clipped in traditional Japanese style of waves. Note the *Buxus sempervirens* in the background

garden, and the tea garden.

Just inside the gate stands a *chozubachi* (stone hand-washing basin). This is where guests to the garden would traditionally wash their hands and face, cleansing both heart and soul.

Above the *chozubachi* is a diagrammatic layout plan of the *kaiyu*, showing the path, or *roji*, that the visitor should take. This is not merely a functional route. It is a philosophical path separating the visitor from the outside world. It enables the visitor to appreciate the physical and spiritual aspects of the garden to the full. The stones are placed with careful irregularity and lead indirectly, rather than directly, to hidden or obscure places.

The first garden within a garden the visitor approaches is the *karesansui* or Zen dry garden. In its earliest manifestation *karesansui* simply referred to the placement of stones where there was neither pond nor *nosuji*.

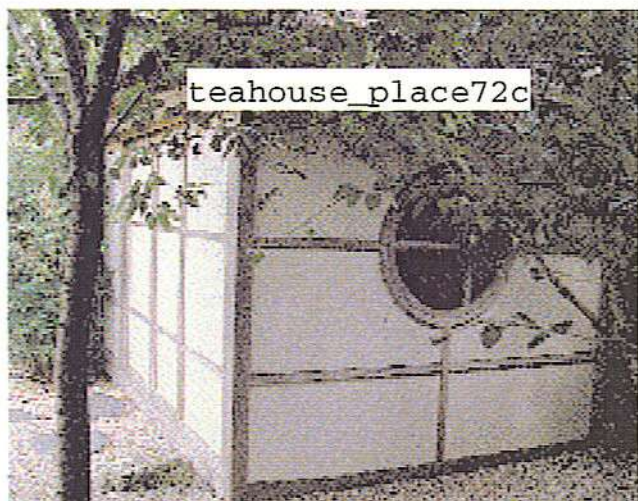
Garden Unit Officer, Roger Sygrave, explains the significance: "The rocks symbolise shipping, mainly shipping boats and so forth," he says, "The raking of the gravel is very much symbolic of the weather, so we rake deeply for rough weather. We rake in several different patterns and usually do it every other day."

In the far corner of the *karesansui* stand three stones in a triangle arrangement, the three Buddha stones. Stones in a Japanese garden are usually grouped in odd numbers. According to the Capel Manor literature: 'each stone must be uncut and weathered — it is this patina of age (*sabi*) which gives the rock its power. Within the stone resides a ►

The sumitomo symbol well (izumi), carved from Welsh slate







teahouse\_place72c

The tea house (Cha-seki)



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Close up of bark of Prunus serrula in the tea garden waiting area

spirit, which can be angered and may even turn the rock into a devil stone (*isbigami*) if it is misplaced.'

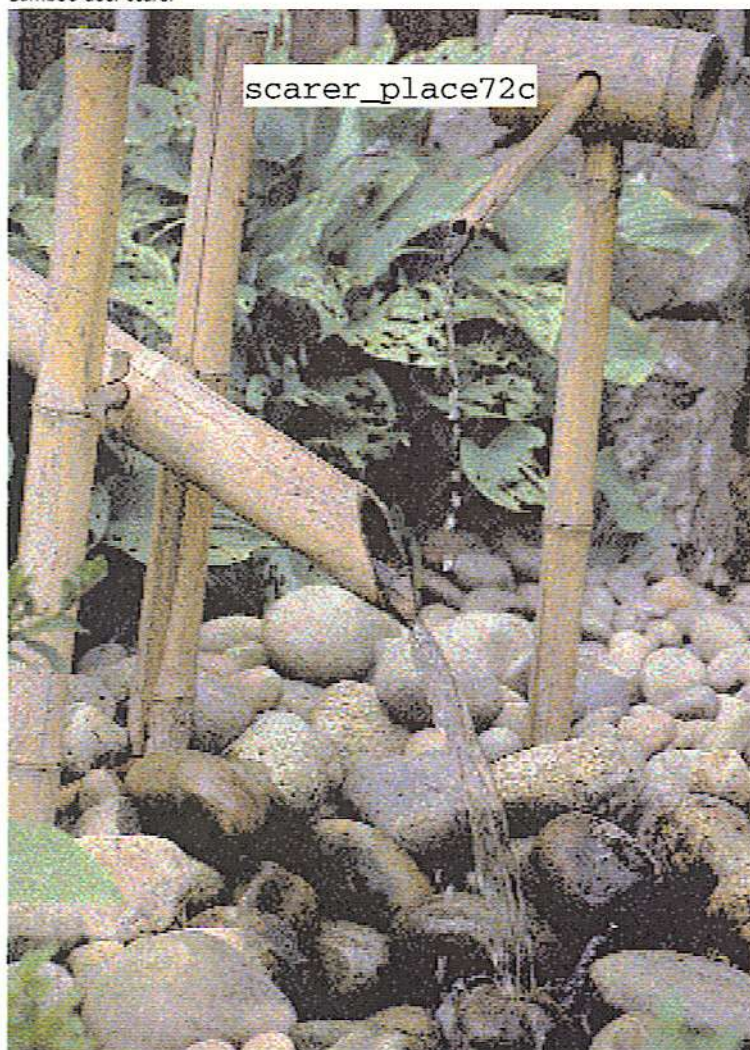
Beyond the Zen garden, passing the *teppo-gakki* bamboo gun barrel fence, lies the outer region of the tea garden. Here, as elsewhere in the garden, the plantings are clipped

in a particular way. 'The *Pinus strobus* should have a waving effect and we are gradually getting that shape,' explained Roger, 'We once thought these should all be pruned in round shapes, but we were wrong. We are still very much on a learning curve.'

There are a number of complex elements to the tea garden, but these merge seamlessly to provide a natural progression towards, through and away from the inner tea garden. There is a thatched roofed waiting bench, the *koshikake*. Seated here, the visitor can take time to pause, to contemplate and perhaps meditate for a while. Again, the arrangement, pruning and clipping of all the surrounding plants are a carefully contrived art form designed to inspire such feelings of inner-harmony and relaxation.

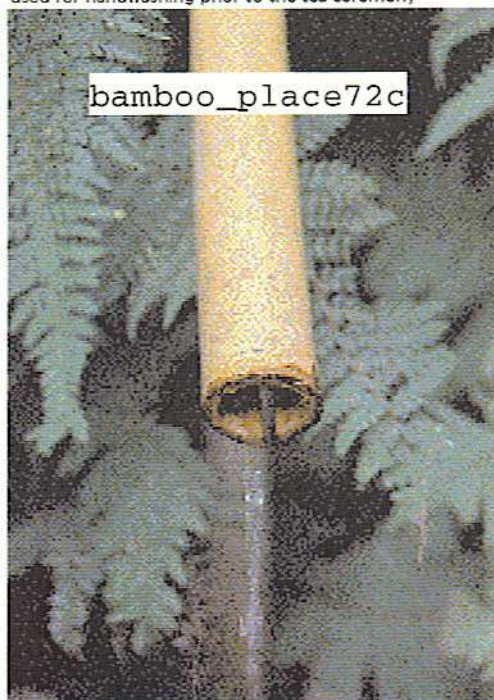
At the summit of the garden is the inner tea ►

Bamboo deer scarer



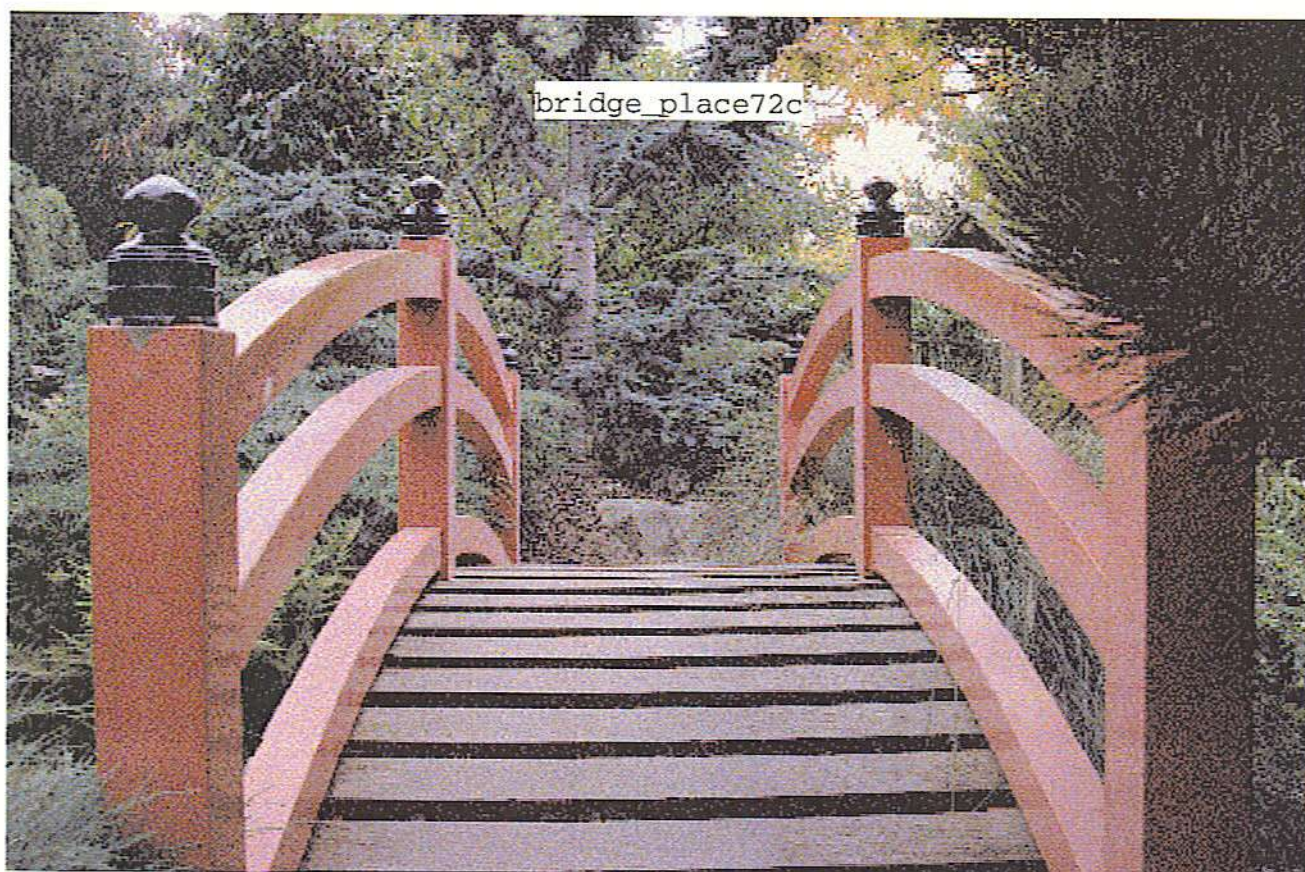
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Water flowing into the Tsukubai (water basin). The water is used for handwashing prior to the tea ceremony



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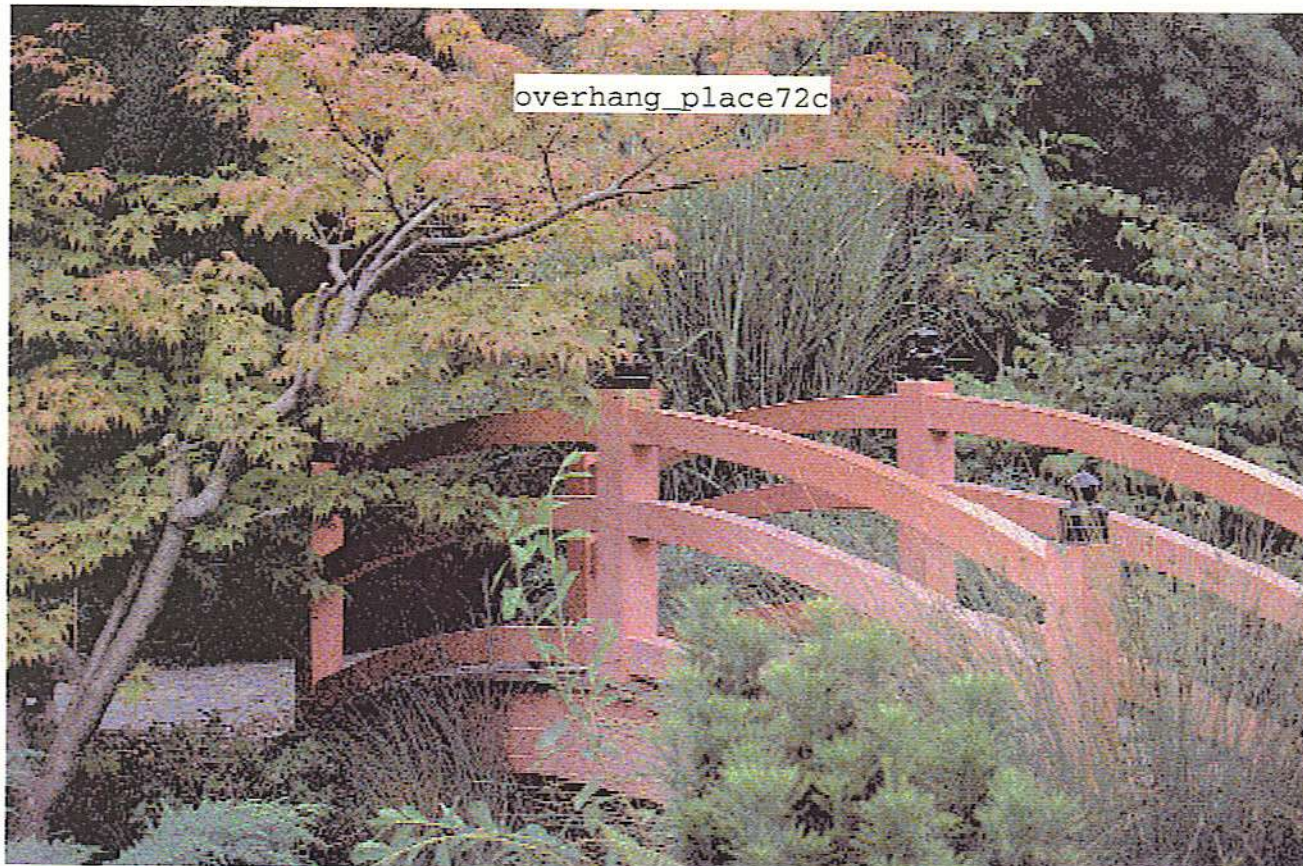




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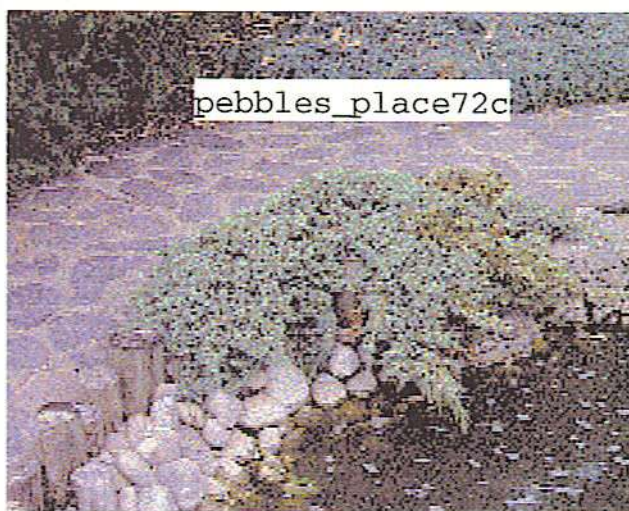
The bridge — a classical steep bridge painted in black and red

General view of the Japanese garden



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pebbles\_place72c

Juniperus squamata 'Blue Carpet'



gravel\_place72c

Raked gravel in the zen garden

garden. Simple and clean. One outstanding feature here is the *izumi* (well). Carved out of dark Welsh slate, it is sculpted as the symbol of the Sumitomo Corporation, sponsors of the garden. Although it looks modern in design, this symbol dates back to the 16th century, where it was believed to have been used as the emblem to the Sumitomo family shop. Whatever its origins, it does make for a rather striking feature in this tea garden.

In front of the tea house lies the *katana-kake*, the sword stone. Traditionally this formed a step on which a Samurai warrior would stand to hang his sword, the only place and occasion he would be parted with it.

Traditionally, the Japanese tea house is an island of serenity. The ceremony itself is based on the simple act of boiling water, making tea, offering it to others, and drinking. But it should be 'served with a respectful heart and received with gratitude.' In this culture, the bowl of tea should satisfy both physical and spiritual thirst. The four principles of harmony, respect, purity and tranquility, are integral parts of the tea ceremony.

Another striking feature of the inner tea garden is the pedestal lantern or *tachi-gata*. This was imported from Japan and is hand-crafted from hard granite. There are a number of stone lanterns around the garden, and when illuminated at nighttime they add yet a further dimension to this place.

The tea garden is left passing the *yotsume-gaki* or four-eyed fence. Woven into the fence is a *Wisteria sinensis*. The method of pruning some plants is similar to our own, as in this case, spur pruning. Further on however, pruning methods differ to our own. The *Sirea* 'Arguta' for example, in the English style would be pruned in a renewal system, cutting out some shoots, but leaving others to flower the following season. The Japanese style however dictates clipping the bush to maintain a round shape.

Predictably the garden has a bamboo water deer scarer. Rhythmically filling, tipping, emptying and flipping back



fern\_place72c

Picea breweriana

to create that familiar 'clock' sound of hollow bamboo.

The major feature of the garden is the stream cascading down from the inner tea garden. Junipers and ferns overhang the little waterfalls. The Junipers have been left to spray outward, but over time they will be trimmed and trained to give a cascade effect to mirror that of the water.

In the water there are neither aquatic plants nor fish. Although a feature of some replica Japanese gardens this is not thought to be traditionally accurate. Their absence does create an ecological imbalance however. "We had to look at this very carefully," said Roger, "so we actually put an additive in the water from time to time, which turns the water, first blue, then a greenish shade."

Japanese gardens emphasize plants, stones and water — the essence of nature. They are places of serene, quiet beauty and are used for

meditation and contemplation. Justice can never be done in writing to a beautiful garden such as this one.

Capel Manor is situated north of London near Junction 25 of the M25 London Orbital motorway. Capel Manor Horticultural and Environmental Centre, Bullsmoor Lane, Enfield, Middlesex. EN1 4RQ Tel: 0181 366 4442

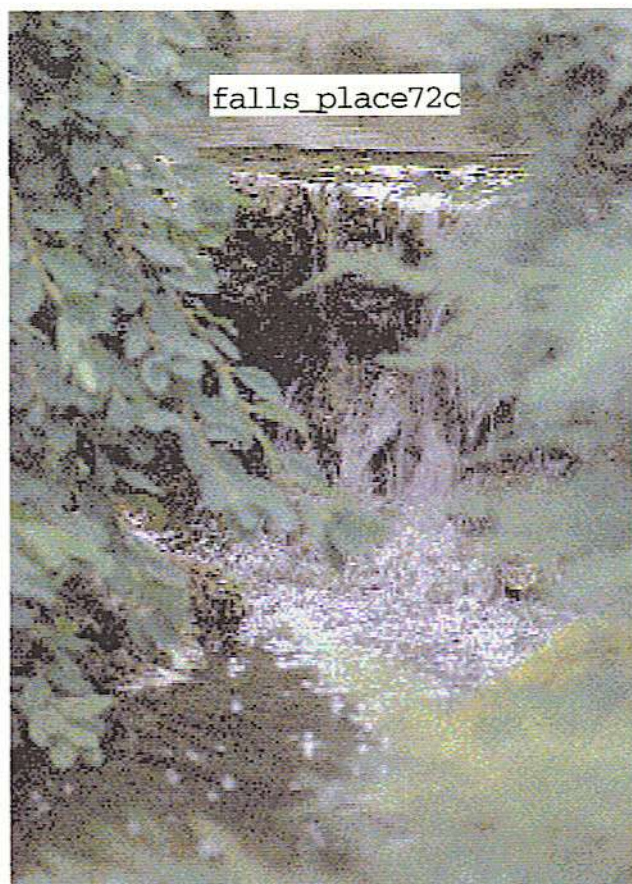
Capel Manor hosts a bonsai show twice a year. The next scheduled show is on 26 & 27 September 1998. This would be the ideal opportunity to combine a passion with bonsai with the unique experience of a visit to a prominent Japanese Garden.





path\_place72c

View of the tea house showing the planted lantern (likekomi-gate) on the left and the sword stone (katana-kake) at the front



falls\_place72c

Junipers and ferns overhang the cascading stream

Tortoise island — a prominent and revered feature in any traditional Japanese garden



bubbles\_place72c