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# awakening the senses

Last month a new garden was opened by the RHS in Wisley. Richard Hill went to investigate why this was such a special event...

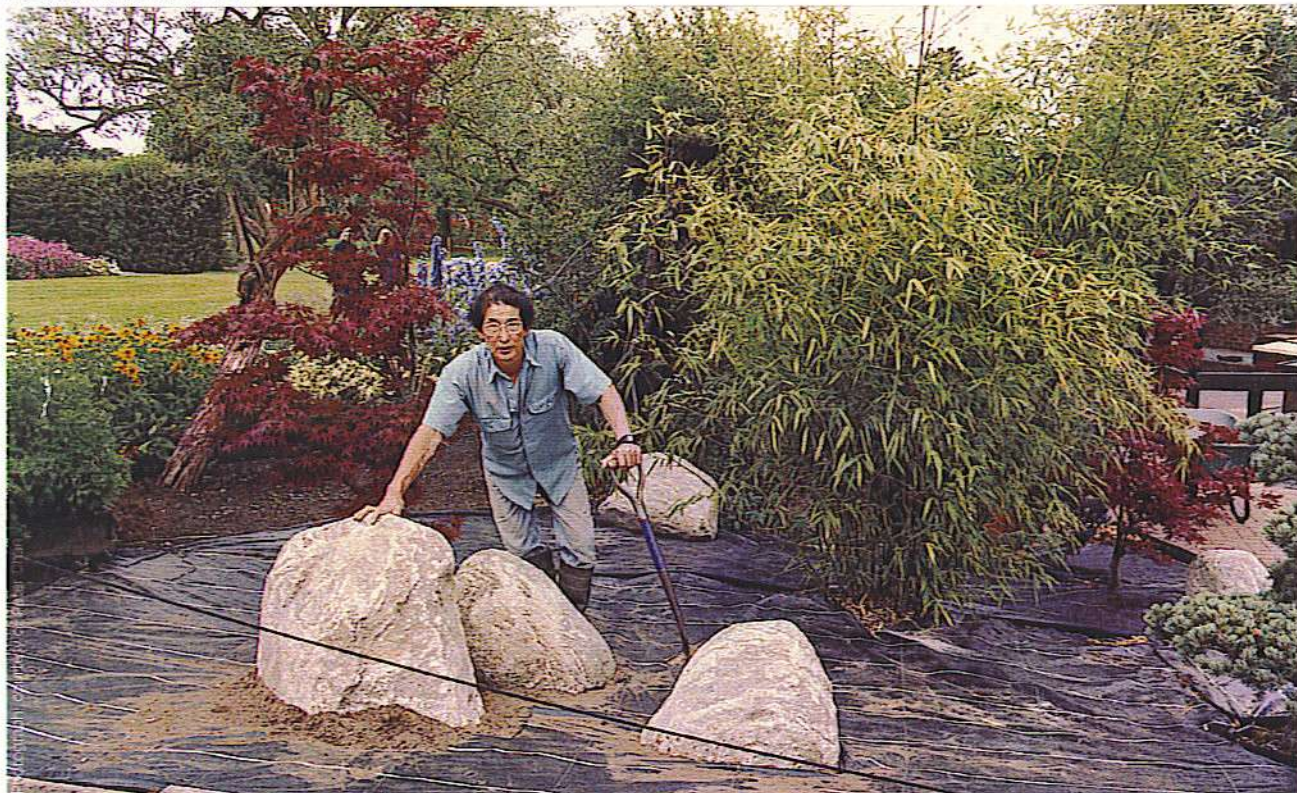
Recently opened at the RHS Gardens at Wisley is the Garden of the Senses. Formerly the Garden for the Disabled, the area has recently been refurbished to include an impressive display of bonsai trees, the first bonsai collection at Wisley. "This was made possible because of the huge generosity of Mr. Peter Chan," explained Sir Simon Hornby, President of the Royal Horticultural Society, "and we are very grateful to him indeed." In opening the garden, Sir Simon explained how it was created and how it would be maintained. "This garden has been modelled by the Wisley staff," he said, "They're learning from Peter Chan and they've learned to do the beautiful raking which is such an important part of the traditional layout of the garden. I think today we are unveiling a really important part of the Wisley gardens."

Peter Chan thanked the RHS. "As all gardeners know," he said, "if you want to keep the soil in good heart, you've got ►



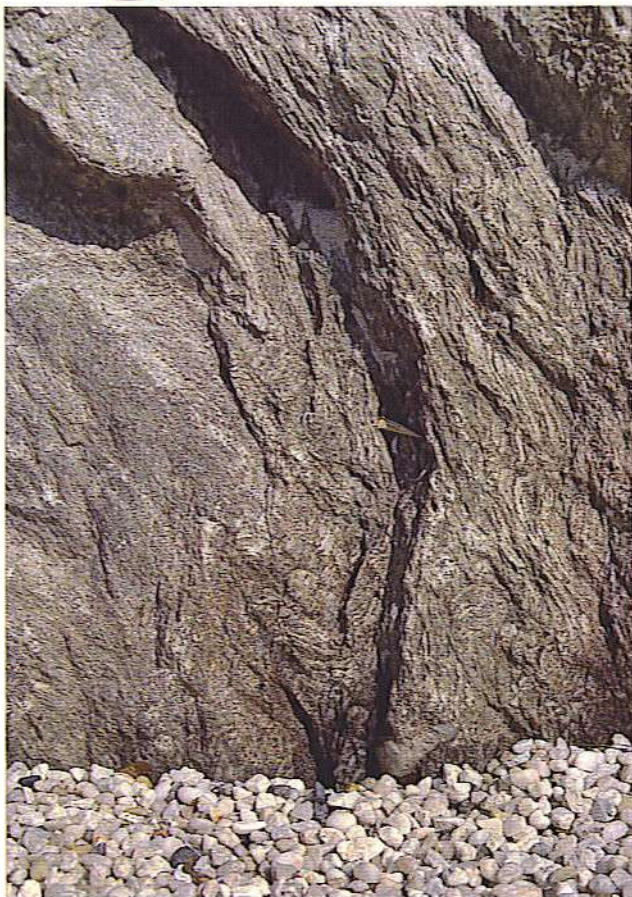
Sir Simon Hornby, President of the RHS and Peter Chan admire and discuss the Japanese White Pine (*Pinus parviflora*) at the opening of the garden

The garden under construction





Japanese White Pine (*Pinus parviflora*)



Rock and gravel combine to mimic a shoreline cliff face

*Festuca glauca* 'Elijah Blue' nestles in the slate surrounding the tachi-gata (stone pedestal lantern)



Wonderful bark of Japanese White Pine (*Pinus parviflora*)

to put back what you took out. I think this is our way of saying thank you, especially to the Royal Horticultural Society for providing the general public with immense pleasure in gardening."

Taking pride of place in the bonsai collection donated by Peter is a large Scots Pine 'Beuvronensis', which Peter has been training since 1980. In 1993 it was stolen from Peter's nursery, Herons Bonsai, but was traced around 18 months later. Peter told *The Art of Bonsai* he knew that this plant was destined for a special future. "As I got it back," he said, "I thought I really should donate it."

The garden is furnished with lanterns, water basin, bamboo fence and 'Doves', a tactile sculpture has been

General view of the bonsai display





Satsuki Azalea

retained from the former garden and sits quite comfortably with its new neighbours.

The pergola has been repainted black, an interesting contrast, in particular to the white of the gravel. A visual stimulation of the senses.

Climbers in the garden include *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, *Lonicera japonica* 'Halliana' and *Schizophragma hydrangeoides* 'Moonlight'.

A selection of grasses appear in clusters throughout the garden including *Festuca glauca* 'Elijah Blue', particularly effective when seen nestling in between the broken pieces of slate bedrock.

The garden is an impressive sight and experience. It is a place to explore senses. The sound of the fountain in the water feature, a deep plunging 'bath filling' sound and the higher pitched trickle of water flowing into the *tsukubai*. There are subtle aromas here and there, of Pine and other scents. The fragrance changes as you move around the garden.

The 'touch' sense can also be aroused. The *Carpinus betulus* is wonderfully tactile. Gently stroking the surfaces of trunk, branch and leaves with the tip of a finger reveals invisible colours and textures. Features not visible that would otherwise remain unnoticed.

Though the garden remains accessible for people with disabilities, the new presentation falls short of its full potential as a true Garden of the Senses. Many of the bonsai exhibits have wonderful tactile surfaces and give off subtle aromas, but alas many are displayed on pedestals in an inaccessible gravelled area. A few of the bonsai exhibits are reachable, but with difficulty from a wheelchair. Similarly, the garden could be a wonderful experience for people with visual impairment if it were not for the inaccessibility of some of the exhibits.

However, overall, this is an impressive garden. Hopefully in time, changes may be made to make this a true Garden of the Senses. In every sense of the words.

The water feature



Peter Chan stands with the Scots Pine 'Beuvronensis' he has been training for almost 20 years. Recently it was discovered after being stolen and missing for 18 months

The RHS Garden at Wisley is located 20 miles southwest of London near the junction between the A3 and the M25. The gardens are open from 10 am until sunset on weekdays (6 pm during British Summer Time) and from 9 am until sunset at weekends (6 pm during British Summer Time). Please note that on Sundays the gardens are open to RHS members only. Guide dogs are admitted and a limited number of wheelchairs are available by prior reservation. Carers or companions accompanying wheelchair users or visitors with visual impairment are admitted free.

For further details contact:

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<http://www.rhs.org.uk/Around/gardens/wis.asp>