



# THE DESIGNER

JOURNAL FOR THE ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL LANDSCAPE DESIGNERS

## HONORING THE SPIRIT OF PLACE

**JAPAN'S CHERRY TREES**  
 BY DONNA M. SWANSEN, APLD

**DESIGN CHALLENGES**  
 BY MARJORIE A. APPLEBY, APLD

I had just finished installing an Alleé Garden with 15 cherry trees at a retirement community when I got a call from a friend. She said 'Want to come to Japan with me and see the cherry trees?' Hopeful phrases sprang to my lips. 'The yen has gone from 80 to a dollar to 130—I could deduct some of the cost against my recent commission.' 'Your son-in-law is there and he speaks Japanese?' 'Yes!'

Now some might say we have cherry trees—why go to Japan? It's hard to appreciate the scale of Japan's appreciation of the cherry tree until we understand that they plant so many more of them. Hirosaki Jo Castle, in Hirosaki, Northern Honshu, has 5,000 cherry trees. Five thousand!

They plant them up on hills



When my husband and I moved to our condominium in Mentor, Ohio in 1993, we were delighted that several features make the area both unique and interesting. The site is quite significant historically: 3-foot cement posts mark a former horse-and-buggy trail that was used to get to Mentor Avenue before roads were made. President James A. Garfield's former home is located approximately three miles west on Mentor Avenue. Another great feature of this trail is the 80-foot pine trees that were planted when the trail was installed. This small patch of woods is directly behind our unit.

After heavy rains, however, it became apparent that the swale between our deck and the woods

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## JAPANESE LOVE "FLOWER VIEWING"

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and berms so you can stroll under them. They place them in settings true to Feng Shui principles of wind-water-earth-fire. The Feng Shui of the cherry tree was especially evident in a garden at Okura, our hotel in Tokyo. A glass wall was all that separated the garden from the entire restaurant. We saw weeping cherries in bloom, built into the hill, framing waterfalls and fountains. After dark, charcoal blazed in two metal censers set on legs. We instinctually realized the spiritual aspect of the scene. It is a labor of love to incorporate wind-water-earth-fire-stone-metal into a garden.

I also learned of a special event that still takes place in Japan called 'Hanami' or 'flower viewing.'

Starting in early April and continuing north through the blooming season, people travel through Japan to catch the trees in bloom. To better experience 'Hanami', a blue tarp is placed under the cherry trees and revelers enjoy a substantial picnic lunch of sushi and sake while the petals cover them and make soft designs on the blue tarps. You cannot understand Japan until you understand the reverence of the people for flowers.

## COMBINE NATURE AND COMFORTABLE LIVING

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would fill with enough run-off to attract a family of mallard ducks! Mowing crews struggled to trim the grass in the area, creating deep ruts.

I decided to observe the hydrology of the area over a period of several seasons to ensure that any suggested changes would be well-informed. It was crucial that the integrity of the wooded natural area be maintained, as well as honoring the four-foot wide pathway that permits both mowers and wildlife access through the site. A trip to Frank Lloyd Wright's architectural treasure in Pennsylvania, Fallingwater, provided ideas that would create an attractive marriage between residential living areas and the natural world.

A dry creek-bed was created to allow water to flow naturally through the area while maintaining access for wildlife. One of the challenges we faced was the culvert that was installed by the builder at the end of the swale; water must flow to a retention basin some 150 yards away and could not be excluded.

We started by removing soil from under the culvert base and the grass in the marked-off creek-bed area. Wheelbarrows transported the various sizes of washed gravel and boulders to the back yard, as the space between each unit would not allow for trucks. We placed the smallest gravel at the bottom just as you would do for the foundation of a pond; however, a liner was not needed as the soil test taken



early in the design process indicated a clay base. Boulders and gravel were meticulously placed and rearranged for the better part of a day, but the results were worth it.

A small bridge was added a year later. And every spring the creek-bed is a joy to clean up, as pine needles and cones are easily removed and surface weeds effortlessly plucked because they don't take root in the gravel. The wooded area directly adjacent to it continues to entertain and delight us as we watch the endless procession of birds and animals. Eight years later, this design solution is still functioning quite well. The creek-bed has provided additional benefits: deer have chosen to ignore the area as a potential roadway to our vegetable garden, although a bold groundhog has happily used it to his benefit.