

The Garden of National Treasures and Chashitsu

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The garden of the Nezu Museum, located between Aoyama-dori Ave. and Roppongi-dori Ave., is one of Tokyo's most beautiful gardens. According to our survey of Museums (2010), the Nezu Museum ranked as the 15th most popular tourist site in Tokyo, so it may not be as well-known as the Mori Art Museum or the Ghibli Museum. However, the Nezu Museum has a distinctive garden and a splendid collection.

The Museum was originally built as the private residence of Nezu Kaichiro Sr. (1860-1940), an industrialist and president of Tobu Railways and also a member of the National Diet. Born in Yamanashi, Nezu acquired an old Samurai residence of Kawachitannann-han Takagike in Aoyama in 1906, with a poorly maintained tea plantation, sometimes infested with raccoons.

Nezu was one of the famous *kindai-sukisha*, tea masters of modern Japan, who adopted the tea name of *Seizan*, Blue/Clear Mountain. The culture of *chanoyu*, the tea ceremony, is unique to Japan. The Japanese tradition of *chanoyu*, as Okakura Kakuzo's *the Book of Tea* describes, went through a major crisis in the beginning of the Meiji Era. The Samurai class, the main supporter of *chanoyu*, had collapsed and people shifted their attention from their traditional way of living to the newly introduced Western civilization.

Emerging businessmen played a key role in *chanoyu* as substitutes for the samurai class and became *kindai-sukisha*, or tea devotees, after the Meiji restoration. Masuda Takashi *Don'o*, President of Mitsui & Co., Ltd., was a key figure. *Kindai-sukisha* like Masuda *Don'o* and Nezu were not satisfied with traditional *chanoyu*, and looked at *chanoyu* from the point of view of Japanese art. They passionately collected famous *chanoyu* utensils (*meibutsu*) and created a luxurious and splendid *chanoyu* style.

Masuda *Don'o* and Nezu collected a wide range of artwork and *chanoyu* utensils and promoted many tea parties. Because of the *haibutsu kishaku*, the destruction of Buddhist temples, images and texts during the Meiji Restoration, and the downfall of the *Daimyo*, major feudal lords of the Samurais, many excellent works of art were on the market and were sometimes sold at extremely cheap prices to Europe and the United States. *Don'o* and Nezu were so anxious about these artworks being taken abroad that they sought to collect as many of them as possible.

When *Don'o* obtained a famous work of calligraphy of Kōbō-Daishi Kūkai, founder

of the Shingon School of Japanese Buddhism, he held a tea party to which he invited many guests to see the work at his residence. The tea party was held on the memorial day of Kūkai, and was designed to showcase precious artwork, including various Buddhist arts. The way of the tea party was totally new for chanoyu, but won a reputation. The party still continues today as Daishi-kai, one of the most famous tea ceremonies in Japan. Daishi-kai was hosted by Kaichiro Nezu and several major sukishas, after Don'ō, and is now held in spring at the Nezu Museum.

Nezu Kaichiro created a garden and *chashitsu*, tea houses, which are ideal for chanoyu when he built his residence in Aoyama. *Shichu-no-sankyo* is an important key word in chanoyu, and means to install a space resembling the mountains in nature in order to enjoy a cup of tea even in the city. Tea masters have invented many techniques and endeavored for hundreds of years to accomplish *shichu-no-sankyo*. Nezu created a great garden with five tea houses skillfully taking advantage of the natural height differences of the site. Unfortunately, the garden suffered during a severe air raid by the US air-force, and the main building and tea houses were burned down. Only four tea houses and the main building have been reconstructed since.

When you visit the garden of the Nezu Museum, you will find that it is distinct from any other daimyo garden. As you enter the garden you may be surprised by the cozy green space, charming with *tobi-ishi*, step stones, and *ishi-tōrō*, stone lanterns, which lead you to the *chashitsu* step by step. This garden is a precious space not only for tea devotees, but also for the busy people of the world, as it offers a place where they can relax and forget the annoying events of everyday life.

It is a really nice garden and you will be satisfied whenever you visit there. The season around April to May is recommended as the national treasure of *Kakitsubata-zu* (Iris screen), a masterpiece of Ogata Korin, is on display, to match the timing of Iris garden blooming. Although the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has a different version of Korin's Irises, it is only in the Nezu Museum that you can appreciate the great design of Korin and real Irises at the same time.



Location of the Nezu Museum



Tsukubai placed at the Museum entrance. *Tsukubai* is a wash basin used in a tea garden; people purify their hands and mouth before they proceed to the chashitsu. A huge *chozubachi*, water bowl, is filled with water. Smaller stones before the *chozubachi* are for a hand lantern and for a hot water pot. Installing a *tsukubai* is a chanoyu tradition.



Shiordo, a door of bamboo; separates the field from the *roji*, space of chashitsu. This is a garden technique that has been used to distinguish tea house space.



A chashitsu with an ishi-tōrō



A houseboat on a pond



Real kakitsubata (Irises) of the pond



Ogata Korin *Kakitsubata-zu* (Iris Screen)