



NEZU MUSEUM GARDEN • TOKYO, JAPAN

## A SLOW DISCOVERY OF BEAUTY

Tokyo's Nezu Museum boasts an outstanding collection of classical Japanese arts. Beyond the museum, set alongside a building designed by Kengo Kuma on the site of Nezu's former home, flows a garden offering a journey of discovery.

The Nezu Museum garden takes the form of a Japanese stroll garden. The idea is to take the observer on a journey—walking along a carefully constructed path with a succession of thoughtfully choreographed points of interest, creating a place for contemplation.

The Japanese stroll garden is perhaps the easiest type of Japanese garden to read from a Western perspective. Culturally, the garden conjures very different associations in Japan. Here, nature is placed at the center of everything—an approach that has been much more slowly adopted in Western gardening traditions. Scenes are spread throughout the stroll garden, hidden from each other yet anticipated; they often call to mind well-known areas of natural beauty. These tableaux do not seek to mimic the areas that inspired them, but do evoke a sense of awe and wonderment at the beauty of nature.

Railway magnate Nezu Kaichirō purchased the land in 1906. He was particularly drawn to its topography; the movement of peaks and valleys gave the potential for added interest in the creation of the garden. Thus the garden was originally conceived in the *shin-zan-yūkoku* style, which conjured the atmosphere of deep mountains and mysterious valleys. The finished design includes teahouses, rustic buildings, pools, stone sculptures, and a small shrine.

Nezu was in fact a passionate practitioner of The Way of Tea (the ceremonial preparation of tea); four tea-houses are found at points along the garden path. Inside, the host can offer his guests the intimacy of the tea ceremony, where a world of focused appreciation is shared and observed. The beauty of the surrounding gardens adds a heightened sense of transcendence.

After Nezu's death, the house and collection were opened to the public in 1941. Sadly, the site was largely destroyed during the bombing of Tokyo—but luckily, the museum collection had already been removed. Since then, little by little, the museum and its garden have been restored.

This garden now provides a special oasis in the heart of bustling Tokyo, offering visitors to the museum a chance to escape. The garden still manages to create those timeless moments of intimacy that only nature can provide.