

Wabi Sabi

Centuries ago, during the height of the Japanese autumn, in one of Kyoto's majestic gardens, a tea master asked his disciple to prepare for tea ceremony.

The young man trimmed the hedges, raked the gravel, painstakingly removed the dried leaves from the stones, cleared the moss path of twigs.

The garden looked "perfect", not a blade of grass out of place.

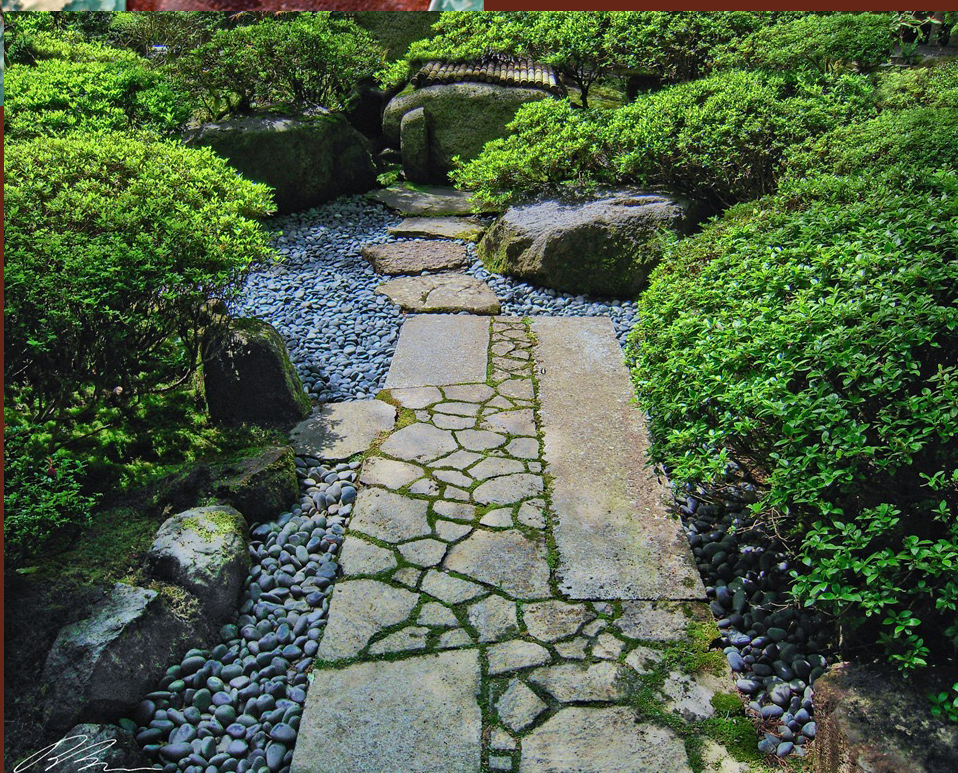
The master inspected the garden quietly...

Then, he reached at a branch of a maple tree and shook it, watching the rust colored leaves fall with random grace on the tended earth...

there it was now, the magic of imperfection.

There it was...
the order of nature, never far from the hands of those who tended to it.

There it was...
wabi sabi, thought master Rikyu – the father of Japanese Tea Ceremony.





In 1997 I took a cultural awareness class at the University of Washington, titled "Chado: Way of Tea". For 10 weeks I took part in a class devoted to studying and participating in the Japanese Tea Ceremony. The class required discipline and rigor as well as an open mind to appreciate the austere beauty of the ritual. Part of the class focused on "wabi sabi", a concept that lies at the heart of Japanese culture. This concept is a difficult one to explain, but broken down into its component parts, one can begin to get a glimpse of the aesthetic behind it.

Left: Students prepare for their introduction to the Japanese Tea Ceremony

First, *wabi* 侘

Originally, wabi's main feeling was of loneliness. Japanese language has a knack for coming up with words describing specific feelings, and this is one of them. What characterizes wabi from standard loneliness is that this feeling comes from living among nature, far away from society.

Next, *Sabi* 寂

...on the other hand, is a bit simpler. It has been described as "chill," "lean," or "withered."

It shares a pronunciation that is similar to the word for "rust", and this connection with degradation is not coincidental.

Right: Seattle Japanese Garden Tea Ceremony House



WABI		SABI
Freedom from Attachment	Simplicity	Austere Sublimity
	Tranquillity	
Subtle Profundity	Naturalness	Asymmetry

It has been 20 years since I knelt in the Japanese tea house and participated in a Japanese Tea Ceremony.

My experience with the Japanese Tea Ceremony has made me stop more than once to just give pause, to contemplate the simplicity of wabi sabi.

Often I have thought of visiting Ryōan-ji, Kyoto a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the location of what is considered to be the “perfect” example of a dry garden...a garden which was created to embrace the aesthetic of wabi sabi... in its form, materials and symbolism.



As part of my journey,
I plan to participate in a
traditional Japanese Tea Ceremony
once more, steeped in the culture and
surroundings which Chado was born.





To document my Xplore experience, I will keep a sketchbook handy to record my visual experiences and impressions. In addition, I will record my experiences in digital form and post them to a blog page where others can follow my trip.

After my return I will provide a presentation of my Xplore journey composed of digital media, reproductions from my sketchbook, a summary of my journey and engage in a question and answer forum.

My aim in this endeavor is three-fold:

I seek to experience the aesthetic that
many consider as the heart of Japanese culture,

I wish to visit a cultural site that is deemed
important by many,

And I aspire to connect my previous
experiences as a university student
with one that is authentically Japanese.

