

Cultivating

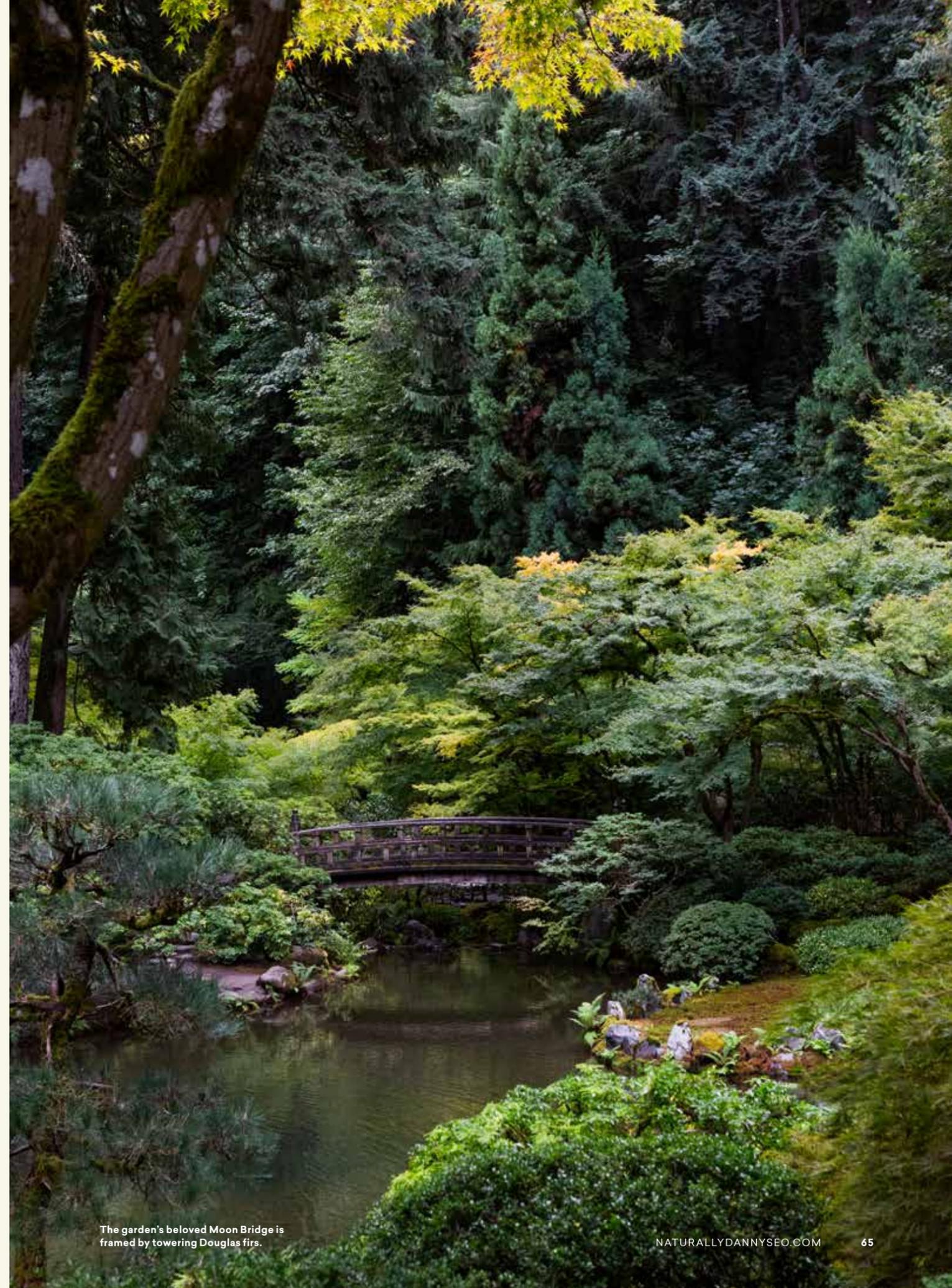


Peace

Nestled in the hills of Portland, Oregon is the most authentic Japanese garden outside of Japan. Naturally took a tour of the tranquil oasis.

Story by Christine
Richmond

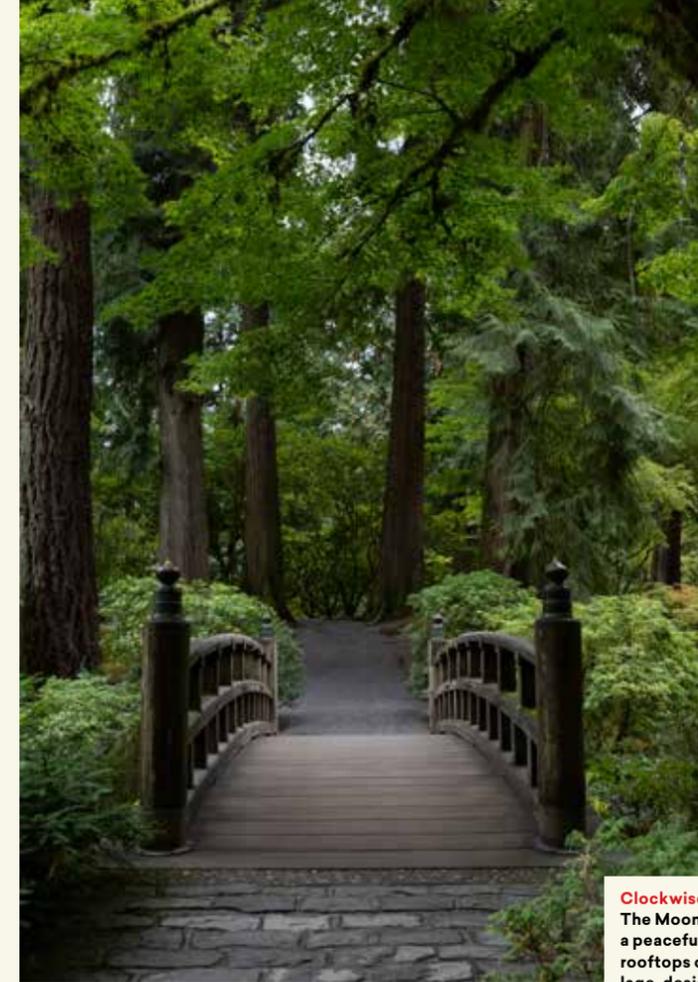
Photographs by
Amy Bartlam



The garden's beloved Moon Bridge is framed by towering Douglas firs.



The 200-year-old entry gate is guarded by two lion figures



Clockwise, from top left: The Moon Bridge overlooks a peaceful pond; the green rooftops of the Cultural Village, designed by architect Kengo Kuma, blend seamlessly with their surroundings; an aerial view of the contemplative Sand and Stone Garden.

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you grew up in Portland, Oregon, it's likely that your first introduction to the Portland Japanese Garden was through a field trip. That was native Portlander Greg Dalbey's experience in the 1980s. The 44-year-old creative director remembers what it felt like to walk through the entrance—a 200-year-old wood and clay tile gate imported from Japan—as an elementary school student. "It was really inspiring," he recalls. "It felt like I had suddenly left Portland."

The idea for the Portland Japanese Garden first took shape in 1958, when Portland was named the sister city of Sapporo, Japan. Professor Takuma Tono of Tokyo Agricultural University was brought in to transform the site of a former zoo in Washington Park into a serene oasis where people could connect with nature while immersing themselves in Japanese culture. When the garden opened to the public in 1967, the hope was that it would

inspire healing and reconciliation in a post-WWII world.

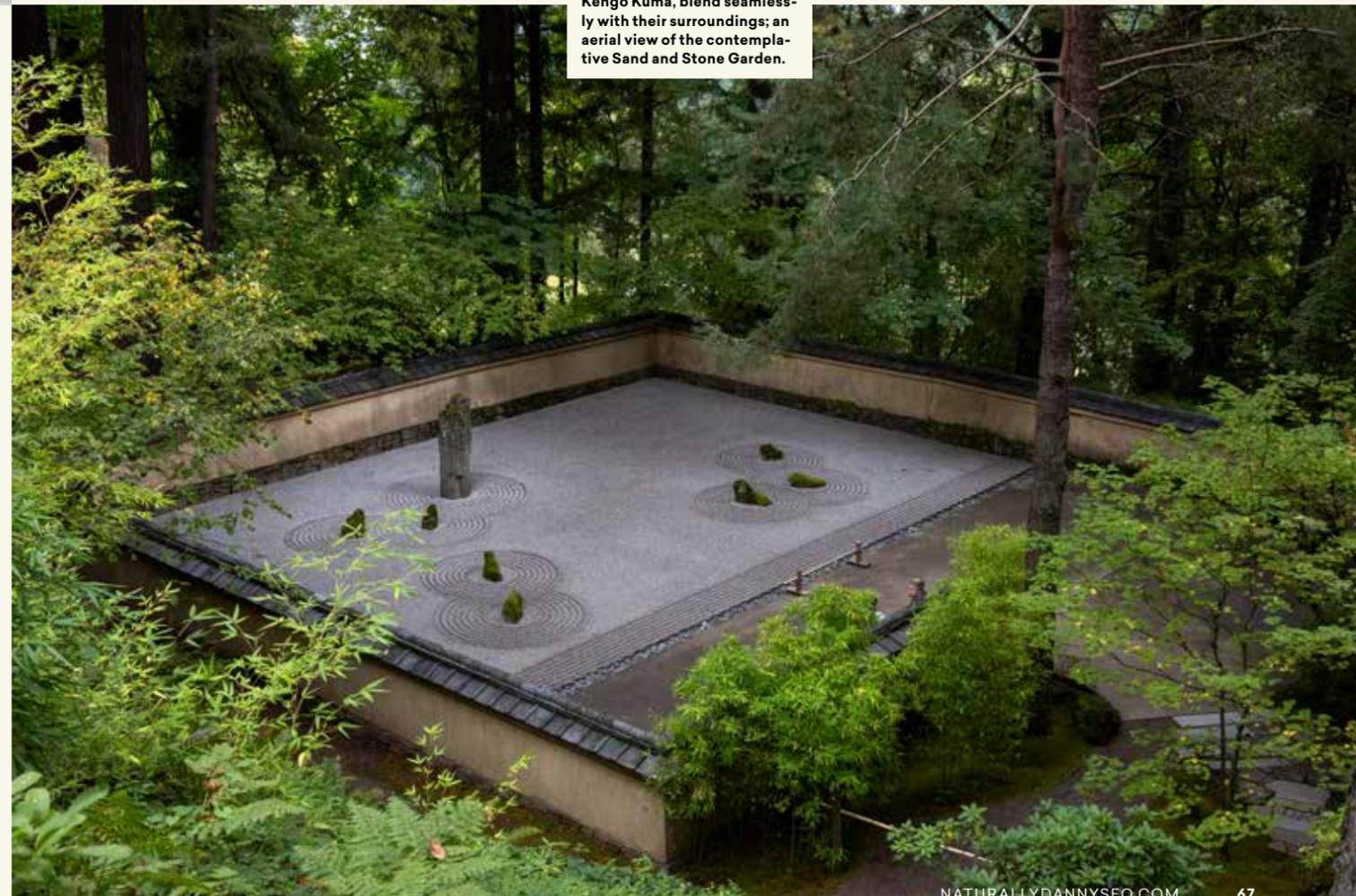
Today, nearly half a million people visit each year. Portland residents like Dalbey consider it a haven—a place to collect their thoughts and ground themselves. Dalbey goes there whenever he has out-of-town guests or is looking for landscaping ideas for his yard. The garden even served as a peaceful escape when his grandfather passed away. "After the funeral, I found myself there almost instinctively," Dalbey says. "It's amazing to have this meditative, introspective place in the city where you can let your spirit relax."

But in the garden's early days, not everyone was on board with the idea. Angry residents gathered at the site to protest, holding racist signs and threatening the staff. They assaulted and stabbed the first garden director, Kinya Hira (he survived the attack). The Peace Lantern, a traditional granite lantern gifted to the garden from the city of Yokohama, Japan, was toppled and damaged, one of several acts of vandalism the garden has endured in its 60-year history.

Despite these painful setbacks, the Portland Japanese Garden has flourished. It's now widely considered to be the most authentic Japanese garden outside of Japan. It boasts eight distinct gar-

● Keeping the Peace

The Portland Japanese Garden takes tranquility seriously. To maintain its peaceful environment, it doesn't allow weddings or other public events, engagement photo sessions or other types of portrait photography, outside food or drinks (other than water), or pets (other than service animals).





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Essential Elements of a Japanese Garden

Stone.

Professor Takuma Tono considered stones to be the bones of a garden. "Like many niwashi (garden masters), he believed that certain stones had traits and qualities that made them more than 'just a rock,' and he was thorough about sourcing and arranging them," says Will Lerner, Portland Japanese Garden's communications specialist. Stones can symbolize stability or longevity. They can also be used to represent characters in a story or geographical features like mountains. For example, some people believe the stones in the Sand and Stone Garden depict the Buddha sacrificing himself to feed hungry tiger cubs.

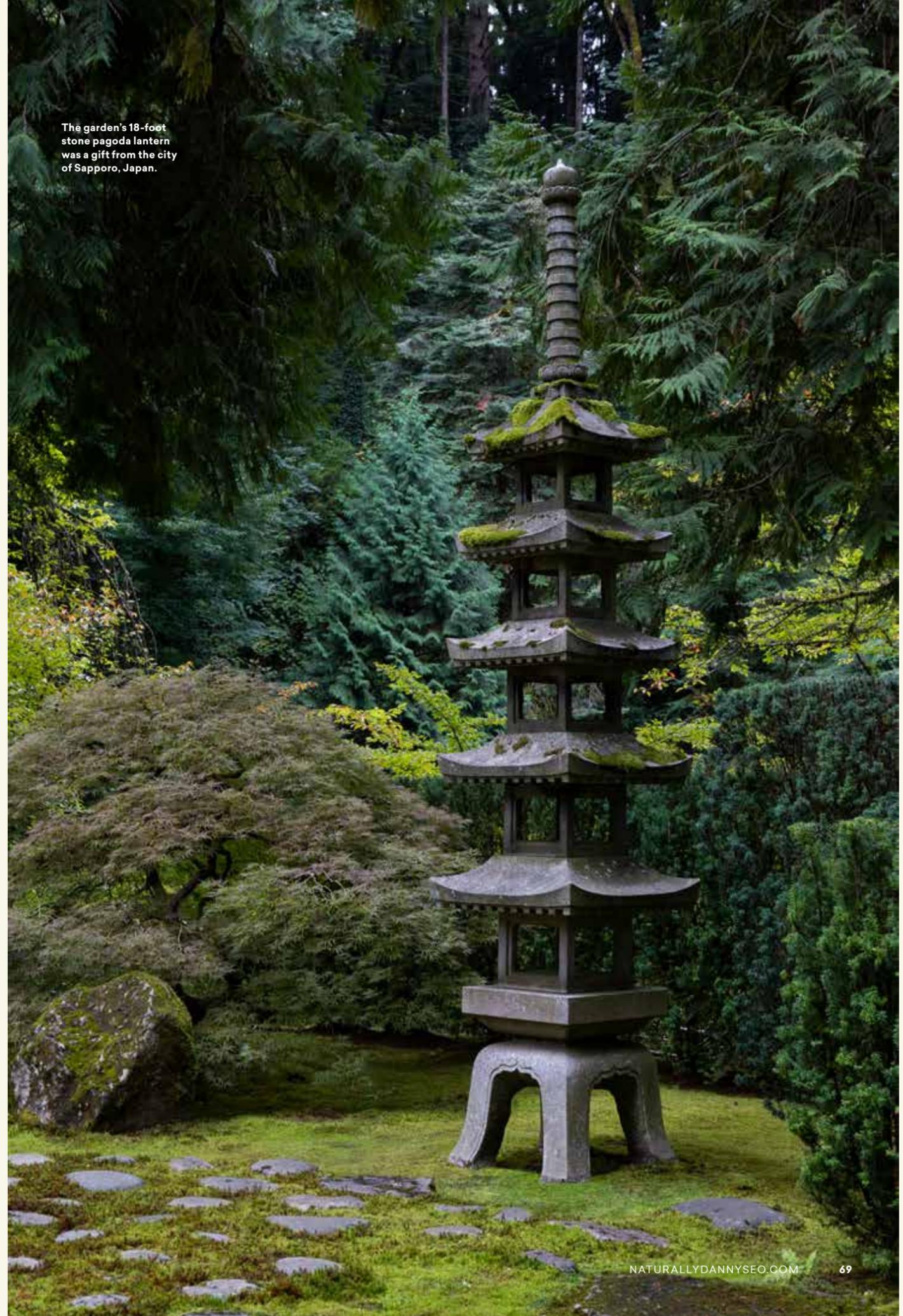
Water.

In his book *A Secret of Japanese Gardens*, Tono wrote that water "is of intrinsic value

to the Japanese" and is "an almost indispensable feature of Japanese gardens." A pond might inspire reflection, while a waterfall can symbolize the flow of life. Water is also used to introduce sounds to a garden. In dry landscape gardens, water is represented figuratively (a raked pattern may look like ripples in a pond, for example).

Plants.

In contrast to, say, a cottage garden packed with colorful, showy perennials, "a Japanese garden is predominantly green," says Lerner. He estimates that about 75% of the plants at the Portland Japanese Garden are green throughout the year, offset by the occasional pop of color. The steady presence of green evokes feelings of stability and has a profoundly calming effect.



The garden's 18-foot stone pagoda lantern was a gift from the city of Sapporo, Japan.

The Flat Garden is meant to be observed from a single viewpoint, like a landscape painting.



Even drainage covers are artfully disguised using natural materials.

Waste Not

The Portland Japanese Garden has found clever ways to incorporate the Japanese philosophy of *mottainai*, which emphasizes that if something is valuable, it shouldn't go to waste. When the nearby Keller Auditorium underwent a major renovation in the 1960s, for example, the garden salvaged its granite stairs and used the stone to build walkways.

dens, all connected by winding pathways. There's the Strolling Pond Garden with its beloved (and Instagram-friendly) wooden Moon Bridge. Further south, the Sand and Stone Garden draws visitors looking for quiet introspection. A *karesansui* or "dry landscape" garden, it's made with carefully selected stones surrounded by sand that's raked daily into concentric circles and other patterns that encourage contemplation. The Sand and Stone Garden embodies the Japanese design principle of *yohaku-no-bi*, which means "the beauty of blank space." Will Lerner, Portland Japanese Garden's communications specialist, explains that "the void is a space for you to insert your own thoughts and feelings. Our chief curator Sadafumi Uchiyama described it as a depository of emotions."

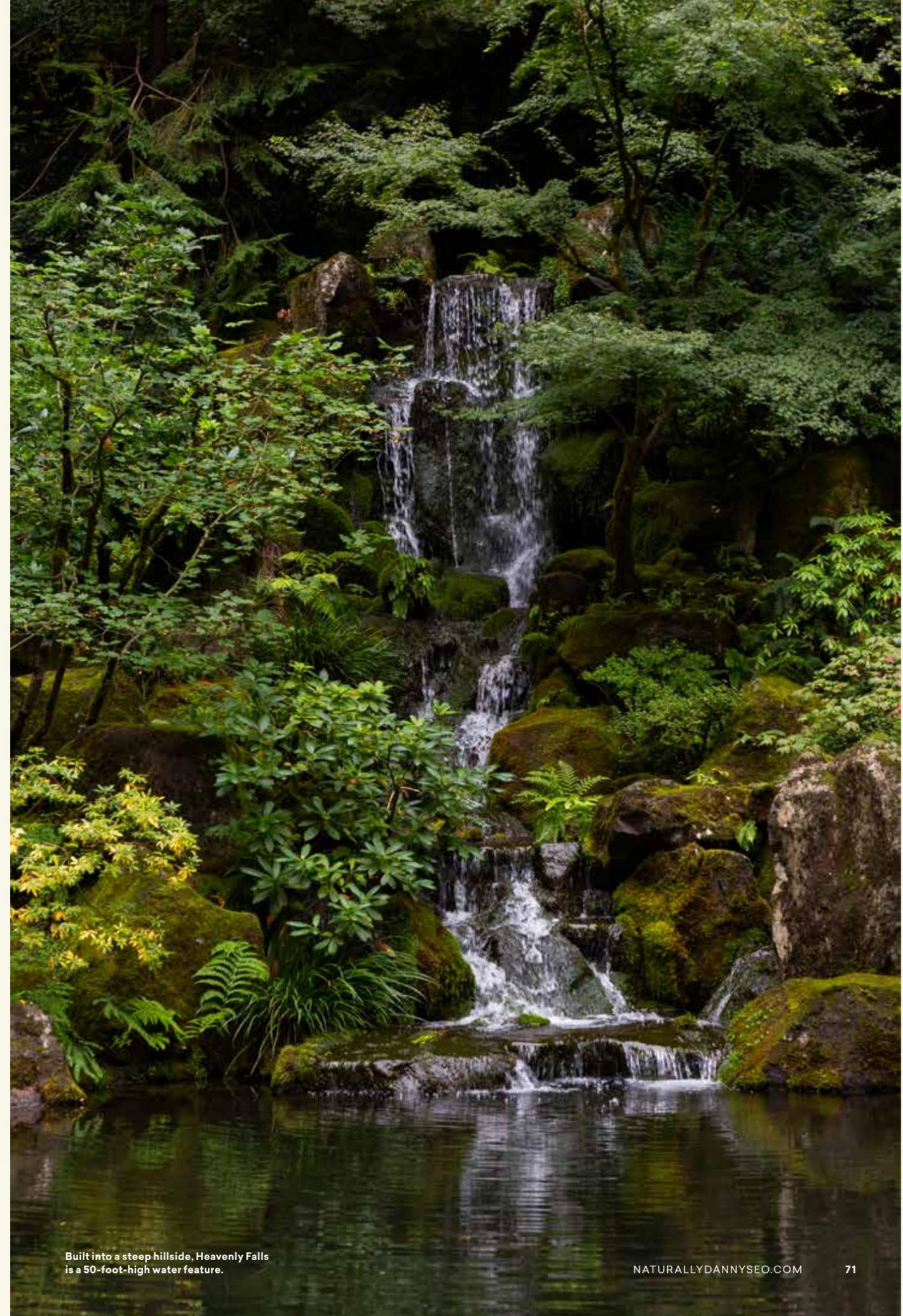
Another Japanese design principle used throughout is *hide-and-reveal* (*miegakure*). "Japanese gardens typically don't have straight paths. They meander and curve," Lerner explains. You might come upon stepping stones that have been deliberately placed so that you look down. "And then, when you look back up, you see a completely different view," Lerner says. *Hide-and-reveal* encourages people to be in the present moment and creates a feeling of the garden unfolding as you move through it. "There's a real intentionality to the design," Lerner says. "The views people encounter and even the sounds they hear have all been carefully considered." Legend has it that Tono, when building a water feature, would stand with his back to it and direct people to reposition stones

until the sound was just right.

After strolling through the gardens, visitors can watch a tea ceremony demonstration, listen to a *shinobue* flute performance, or take an *ikebana* (flower arranging) workshop at the Cultural Village, a LEED-certified space with art galleries, classrooms, a library, and a café serving Japanese teas and snacks, all designed by famed Japanese architect Kengo Kuma. In addition to its extensive array of cultural programming, the Portland Japanese Garden also offers horticultural training for all levels, including classes and guided tours for school children and multi-day seminars for design professionals.

Up next for the Portland Japanese Garden is the construction of a nearby Kuma-designed campus and theater that will be a gathering place for "gardeners, artists, designers, performers, practitioners, craftspeople, and scholars from Japan and around the world to learn and teach their crafts." Six decades ago, the hope was that the garden might help educate people about Japanese customs and traditions. With this ambitious project, that vision will become a reality, cementing the Portland Japanese Garden's status as a major Japanese cultural institution.

Whether it's an art installation that brings you there or you just want to relax under a Japanese maple tree, the Portland Japanese Garden encourages visitors to return often. "Every time you come, the garden will be different—and will present you with a new perspective," Lerner says.



Built into a steep hillside, Heavenly Falls is a 50-foot-high water feature.