



Lisa Christy

CO-CEO,
PORTLAND JAPANESE GARDEN

Lisa Christy is a specialist in understanding audiences and how best to communicate with them. She is the Co-CEO of Portland Japanese Garden, serving alongside Aki Nakanishi to guide the organization into its next era of cultural leadership, community partnership, and global exchange. She joined the Garden in 2014 as Director of Marketing & Communications at a pivotal moment, just as the Garden embarked on its historic Cultural Crossing expansion designed by Kengo Kuma. Lisa later served as Chief External Affairs Officer and then Executive Director before being appointed Co-CEO in 2026.

Lisa's approach to leadership is rooted in her early life in the arts. Trained as a classical pianist on the path toward a concert career, she developed a deep appreciation for discipline, nuance, and how emotion is communicated without words. Ultimately, she realized that her true passion was understanding how people connect: what moves them, what inspires them, and what opens the door to belonging. That realization led her to communications, and it remains the foundation of her work today. She carries this forward in leadership, guided by the philosophy: *"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."*

Throughout her tenure, Lisa has helped define how Portland Japanese Garden serves its community. She led a sevenfold expansion of the External Affairs division, oversaw a comprehensive rebrand, and directed the communications strategy for the Cultural Village opening, earning national and international recognition. She built the Garden's guest experience strategy, expanded community access and engagement programs, and helped drive record-setting membership and attendance year after year.

Prior to joining Portland Japanese Garden, Lisa spent nearly a decade at advertising agency Wieden + Kennedy, helping to guide to some of the most influential and award-winning campaigns of the past 20 years, including Old Spice's "The Man Your Man Could Smell Like" and Procter & Gamble's "Thank You, Mom" Olympic campaign, as well as work for Sony, Starbucks, and Travel Oregon. Her travels to Japan on Sony campaigns, combined with tourism work for Travel Oregon, led her to her dream role at Portland Japanese Garden. Earlier in her career, she worked at agencies in Minneapolis and Kansas City.



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A committed mentor and advocate for education, Lisa spent three years as a full-time adjunct professor at the University of Tennessee, where she was named Lecturer of the Year. She continues to speak to universities, professional groups, and community organizations. She holds a bachelor's degree in communications from Middle Tennessee State University and a master's in advertising from Michigan State University.

Lisa lives in Portland with her husband and their teenage son who keeps his mom and dad busy with his many, many, *many* baseball games.



Akihito Nakanishi

CO-CEO OF PORTLAND JAPANESE GARDEN,
ARLENE SCHNITZER CURATOR OF CULTURE, ART,
AND EDUCATION

Aki Nakanishi is an international cultural leader and public diplomacy expert with nearly three decades of experience in government relations, public communication, cultural programming, and artistic exchange. He has built a distinguished career conceptualizing and delivering impactful initiatives for global audiences, and currently serves as Co-CEO of Portland Japanese Garden alongside Lisa Christy. In addition, he is Director of Japan Institute and the Arlene Schnitzer Curator of Culture, Art, and Education, guiding the organization's cultural vision, international/national partnerships, and multidisciplinary programming.

In his previous capacity at Portland Japanese Garden, Nakanishi led more than 1,000 programmatic initiatives that advanced the organization's stature as a leading force in cultural diplomacy. These initiatives encompassed art exhibitions, seasonal festivals, cultural demonstrations, workshops, seminars, lectures, concerts, international conferences, and culinary programs. Through a strategic vision that bridged local and international engagement, Nakanishi deepened the Garden's network of partners and supporters across Japan and the U.S., helping to elevate Portland's profile on both sides of the Pacific, a city that he and his family now proudly call home.

Prior to relocating from Tokyo in 2018, Nakanishi spent a decade as the Cultural Affairs Specialist at the United States Embassy in Tokyo. In this role, he oversaw a broad portfolio of cultural, creative, and educational engagements designed to deepen mutual understanding between the U.S. and Japan. As principal advisor to the Embassy's Cultural Attaché and a key cultural advisor to multiple U.S. Ambassadors, he played a central role in shaping the Mission's cultural diplomacy strategies. His portfolio included direct oversight of high-profile initiatives such as *"Ties Over Time"* under Ambassador John V. Roos and the *"International Poetry Exchange Project"* under Ambassador Caroline B. Kennedy, each of which strengthened long-term people-to-people connections through art and education.



Akihito Nakanishi

CO-CEO OF PORTLAND JAPANESE GARDEN,
ARLENE SCHNITZER CURATOR OF CULTURE, ART,
AND EDUCATION

Alongside the Embassy duties, Nakanishi pursued his own creative career as an independent artistic director. He spearheaded the creation of large-scale exhibitions and art fairs including Art Photo Tokyo 2016-17, and the Tokyo International Literary Festival from 2012-18. He has also contributed extensively to arts publications, written dossiers for cultural events, and founded his own non-profit organization, echovisions, dedicated to regional revitalization and youth empowerment.

For his achievements at the U.S. Embassy, Nakanishi received multiple State Department distinctions, including *the Meritorious Honor Award (2010)*, *the U.S. Embassy Japan Eagle Award (2011)*, and *the U.S. Mission Japan Honor Award (2016)*.

Nakanishi's career began in mass media as Program Director at one of Japan's major television networks, where he honed his skills in public communication, program development, and audience engagement. He later embarked upon the contemporary art world to gain a deeper understanding of human creativity and visual curation, working as an art dealer to connect budding artistic talents with the world.

He holds a master's degree in Cultural Policy from the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (Japan) and is currently a PhD Candidate at University of Cambridge (UK), where his research explores cultural intermediaries and artistic networks in medieval Japan.



Hugo Torii

GARDEN CURATOR
DIRECTOR OF JAPANESE GARDEN TRAINING CENTER

Hugo Torii is the Garden Curator at Portland Japanese Garden, making him the 10th to take on this critical role since the Garden opened in 1967. As Garden Curator, Torii helps to keep Portland Japanese Garden true to its original intent and design, while also allowing it to grow and evolve. Torii oversees a team of gardeners and is actively involved in the process of all Garden maintenance, keeping in mind the short term needs as well as longer term implications.

Prior to becoming the Garden Curator, Torii spent more than 2 years as the Director of Grounds Maintenance, overseeing the physical aspects of Portland Japanese Garden, its maintenance, and development. In this role, he started several projects that he continues in his current role as the Garden Curator, including building a training structure for the gardening team and starting an exchange program with gardeners from other notable gardens, to continue to position Portland Japanese Garden as a leader and key resource in preserving the art of Japanese gardening.

With a master's degree in Landscape Design from the Kyoto University of Art and Design, Torii brings a background of studies and experience in both Japanese gardens, Japanese aesthetics in horticulture, and floristry. Prior to his roles at Portland Japanese Garden, Torii spent over three years at Peter Berg Landscape Design in Rheinland Pfalz, Germany, and 12 years at the prominent UEYAKATO LANDSCAPE Co. Ltd., as a gardener and landscape architect in Kyoto, Japan. During this time, Torii managed projects including the Japanese garden and greeneries for the nearly 60-acre Keihanna Commemorative Park, the strolling pond garden at the Yosui-en Garden, and annual maintenance of pine trees at Nijo Castle, a World Heritage Site listed by UNESCO.



Misako Ito

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF JAPAN OFFICE
REPRESENTATIVE DIRECTOR OF JAPAN
ASSOCIATION OF PORTLAND JAPANESE GARDEN
AND JAPAN INSTITUTE

Misako Ito is the Executive Director of Portland Japanese Garden and Japan Institute's Japan Office in Tokyo. The first person to hold this newly established role, Ito's rich experience of launching grassroots, community-based exchange programs and establishing networks of intellectual exchanges and international relations have made her a widely respected leader in cultural diplomacy. As Executive Director, Ito is responsible for establishing a networking framework that will maintain, strengthen, and add connections between Portland Japanese Garden and Japan Institute with organizations and individuals in Japan. She also supports Japan Institute's three programmatic centers: the International Exchange Forum, International Japanese Garden Training Center, and Global Center for Culture & Art.

Born and raised in Tokyo, Ito studied abroad at the Australian National University in Canberra and graduating from Tsuda University in Tokyo with BA (American Studies), she worked at an American investment bank. She joined Toshi Shuppan, Publishers, where she started her professional career as an editor of 17 years. In 1988 she was involved in launching Gaiko Forum, a monthly journal on Japan's foreign policy and foreign affairs. Ito served as Editor-in-Chief for the journal beginning in 1999.

In 2004, Ito became the first managing director of the Japan Foundation Information Center (JFIC) at the Japan Foundation, Tokyo Headquarters. She has since held several positions at the Japan Foundation and the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including the posts of Director of JICC (Japan Information and Culture Center) at the Embassy of Japan in Washington, D.C., Director of the Japan Foundation Los Angeles, Director of JCC (Japan Creative Centre) at the Embassy of Japan in Singapore. She returned to Japan in 2016 to be assigned as Secretary General for the U.S.-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchanges (CULCON) at the Japan Foundation in Tokyo. In May of 2023, Ito assumed her director role with Portland Japanese Garden and Japan Institute. She works out of the organizations' office, located in the International House of Japan in Tokyo.



Sadafumi Uchiyama

CURATOR EMERITUS

Sadafumi (Sada) Uchiyama is Curator Emeritus of Portland Japanese Garden. Before his retirement, Uchiyama served as Chief Curator from 2021 to 2023. Uchiyama had served as Garden Curator of Portland Japanese Garden from 2008 to 2021, during which time he helped to create and integrate the Cultural Crossing Expansion Project. Uchiyama also served as a member on the Garden's Board of Trustees from 2003 to 2007. He was also Director of Japan Institute's International Japanese Garden Training Center.

A fourth-generation Japanese gardener from southern Japan, Uchiyama is devoted to fostering relations between Japanese gardens in Japan and those outside of Japan. He has been involved in the development of the North American Japanese Garden Association (NAJGA) and serves as a Charter Member of its board and programming board.

In 2022, Uchiyama was awarded the Foreign Minister's Commendation from Foreign Ministry of Japan, one of the highest honors bestowed by the Japanese government, given to those with outstanding achievements in international fields. In 2022 he was also honored by the Oregon Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects, which hailed him as "an internationally recognized master artisan of the practice of landscape architecture."

Uchiyama has taught landscape design courses and lectured on Japanese gardening at colleges and public gardens throughout the United States and Japan. His writings have been featured in *Garden Design*, *Fine Gardening*, *Inspired House*, *Luxe Magazine*, as well as professional journals in Japan.

He is a registered landscape architect with a BLA and MLA from the University of Illinois. His representative projects include renovations of the Osaka Garden; the site of the 1893 Great Columbian Exposition at Jackson Park in Chicago (from 2000 until present); and the *Shofu-en* of the Denver Botanic Gardens (2001 – 2012). Most recently, he completed the *Shoun-Kei* Japanese garden at Sarah Duke Gardens at Duke University (2015). At Portland Japanese Garden, Uchiyama worked closely with Kengo Kuma to create and integrate new garden spaces into the Cultural Crossing expansion. The two have continued to work together, collaborating on the new Rolex Headquarters in Dallas, Texas and other projects in the US.



Diane Durston

CURATOR EMERITA

Diane Durston is a writer, lecturer, cultural consultant, and educator, who lived for 18 years in Japan. From 2007 to 2018, Durston was the Arlene Schnitzer Curator of Culture, Art & Education at Portland Japanese Garden, where she has been instrumental in expanding the Garden's reputation as a center of cultural learning, laying the groundwork for the Garden's new International Institute for Garden Arts and Culture. Upon her retirement in 2018, Durston assumed the role of Curator Emerita.

She is the author of three books and numerous essays and articles on the culture and traditional way of life in Kyoto. Her book *Old Kyoto* is now in a second edition and 15th printing. The New York Times has referred to it as a "Japan travel classic." Her other books include *Kyoto: Seven Paths to the Heart of the City*, an introduction to historic preservation districts in Kyoto. She has also contributed essays to the *Encyclopedia of Japan*, *Japan*, *The Cycle of Life*, and *the Japan Crafts Sourcebook*. Her most recent book, *Wabi Sabi: The Art of Everyday Life* was published in 2006.

As a cultural consultant, she has developed on-site cultural programs in Japan introducing Japanese art, culture, religion, history, and gardens for such organizations as the University of Pennsylvania, the Whitney Museum, the Yale Galleries, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Since returning to the US in 1996, Durston has served as Special Programs Producer for the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, where she produced month-long performing arts festivals in conjunction with the openings of two special exhibitions "Edo: Art in Japan 1615–1868" in 1998 and of "Golden Age of Archeology in China" in 1999. From 2002–2006, Durston was Director of Special Projects and later Curator of Education at the Portland Art Museum.

In 2022 it was announced that the Government of Japan has awarded the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Rays to Durston. This award was established in 1875 by Emperor Meiji and is among the highest honors conferred to civilians. The Consular Office of Japan in Portland shared that Durston was chosen to be among the recipients of the Japanese government's 2022 Autumn Commendations "in recognition of her contributions to the introduction of Japanese culture in the United States, and to the promotion of mutual understanding between Japan and the United States."