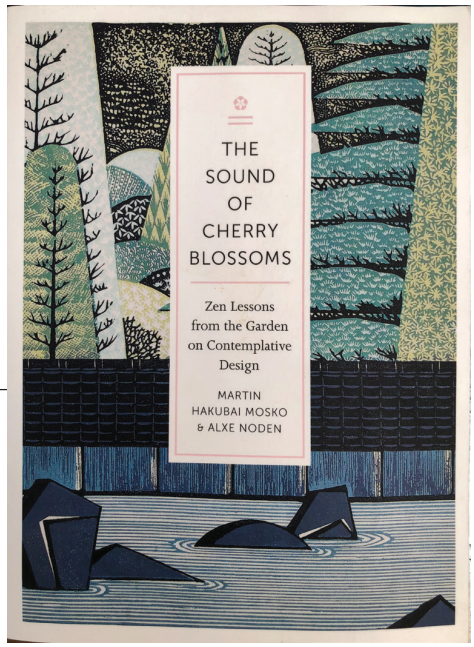
BOOK REVIEW:
THE SOUND OF CHERRY BLOSSOMS–ZEN LESSONS FROM THE GARDEN ON CONTEMPLATIVE DESIGN

BOULDER: SHAMBHALA PUBLICATIONS; BY MARTIN HAKUBAI MOSKO AND ALXE NODEN

REVIEWED BY **KEN LAMB**



As the title suggests this book is imbued with insights arising out of Zen Buddhism, yet it is also a handbook on the practical steps to create landscape gardens in the modern world.

In the landscape design and construction industry much is taught about technical requirements but very little about attitude, vision, and approach. This book eloquently addresses this missing subject. It describes a path of training, self-observation, insight, and inspiration. The steps outlined under the heading 'The Process' are a rigorous practical guide to sensitive garden design.

Mosko and Noden tackle the undefinable and sacred in simple and exact ways that can lead the reader to reflection and a new way of seeing; and that opens the doors to creative gardening. When addressing 'Joining Heaven and Earth,' they present it not just as an idea, but rather a guidance born of their direct experience and realizations.

The chapters under the heading 'Spaciousness and Not Knowing' give wings and voice to the meditative approach. To me, they share their insight and Zen training when they say, "experiencing a sacred garden is an awakening to the extraordinary nature of ordinary experience." This book is founded in practicality and profound understanding of the construction process balanced with meditation, creative wonder, and discipline.

This sensitive Zen approach to garden design is summarized in one of the final paragraphs: Pathways are a moving viewpoint made up of discreet small steps. Here the techniques of conceal and reveal and borrowed scenery play a paramount role. Each step or every few steps should reveal a discrete yet complete composition. Each picture should have a compelling center of interest (or focus) and a balance of Heaven, Earth and Man, as well as a proper scale and proportion (page 139).

Indeed, each step of the path is a moment of unfolding revelation. How appropriate as this book is about pathways and reflections of a journey based on vast personal experience in the spiritual and physical realms. Personally, I would like to have seen some images of the gardens they have created; after all it is the garden that is transformative. Yet this book hones the vision; warms the heart and clarifies the mind in its far reaching and diverse topics in the practical, human, and spiritual worlds it embraces.

Every student, designer, scholar, gardener, and monk should read it and savor it, for indeed *The Sound of Cherry Blossoms* is food for the soul.