

by Duncan J. D. Smith

It's hardly surprising that Vienna's long hot summers and rich, porous soils have resulted in a city full of parks and gardens. Most genres are represented, from English and French to Alpine and desert. The closest to paradise, however, are its Japanese and East Asian gardens.

#### A timeless space

The district of Döbling has long been twinned with the Setagaya district of Tokyo, and in 1992 the partnership was celebrated by the creation of SETAGAYAPARK, a traditional Japanese garden secreted alongside the busy junction of Hohe Warte and Barawitzkagasse. Conceived by renowned designer Ken Nakajima (he worked in Russia and Australia, too) the garden is other-worldly.

One needs a keen eye when visiting: from the outside Setagayapark is identified only by a bamboo door and a stone inscribed with the word *Furomon*, meaning "ageless gate". Certainly the garden that lies beyond is a timeless space and one into which Nakajima has squeezed an entire, albeit miniaturised Japanese landscape.

#### Ikebana and Suhama

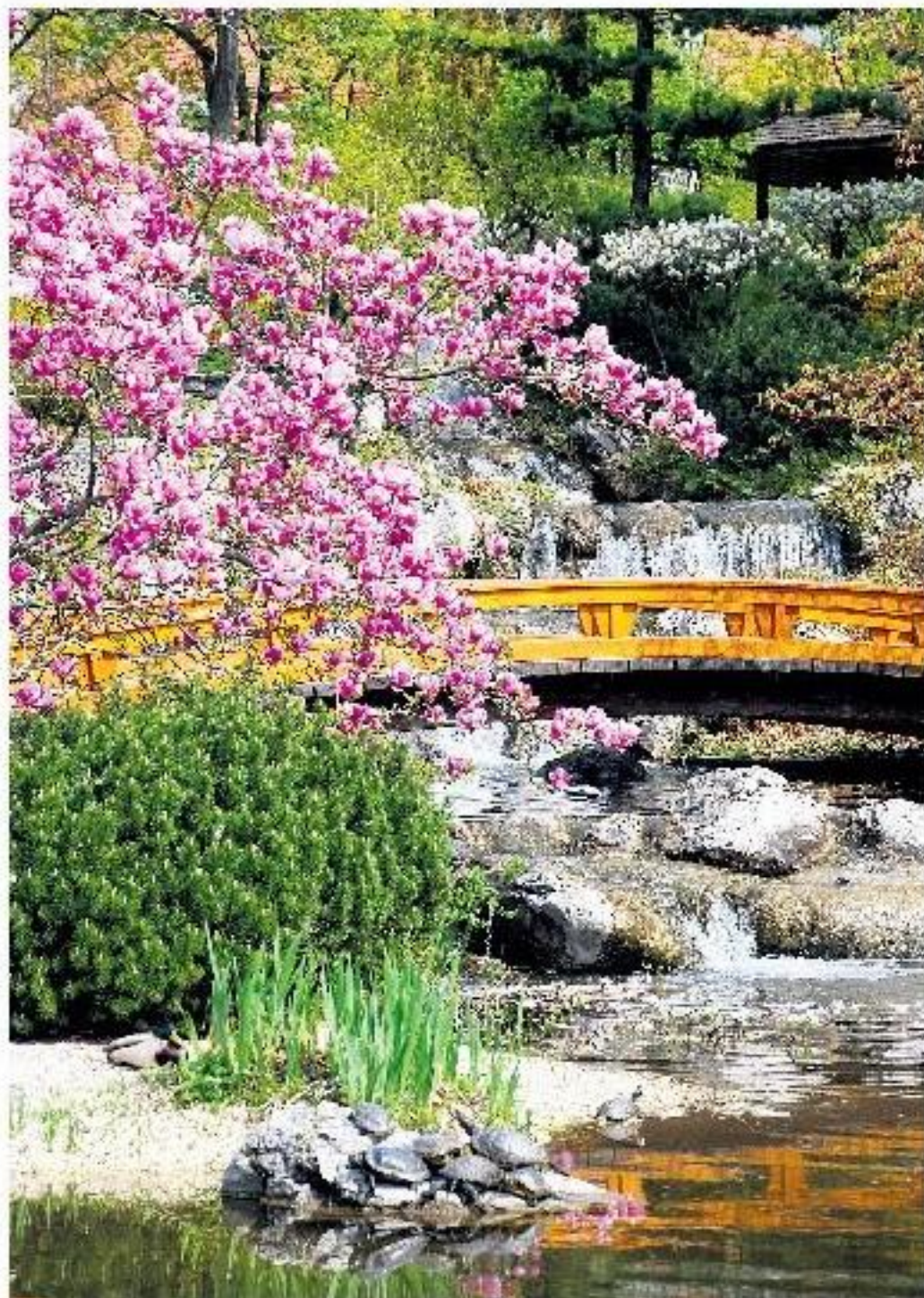
The heart of the garden is a carp-filled lake with a teahouse (*Chaniwa*) on its bank. Sometimes a peep through the window reveals women engaged in the delicate art of Japanese flower arranging (*Ikebana*). The view from here across the lily-strewn lake is enchanting, with a three-legged *Yukimi* lantern on one side and a white gravel beach (*Suhama*) on the other, where turtles like to sunbathe.

At the far end of the lake a gracefully-arching bridge worthy of Monet takes centre stage. Beyond it are waterfalls and a path winding uphill past maples, ornamental cherries, azaleas and magnolias. At the garden's highpoint near a stone pagoda water gurgles from a cube of

## STONES OF VIENNA

*Local green areas don't stop at lawns and trimmed hedges: Japanese gardens offer zen refuge if you know where to look*

# Close to Paradise: Seemingly Secret Gardens



*A floral explosion of Japanese colour in Döbling's Setagaya Park* Photo: Duncan J.D. Smith

stone. It is the ideal spot to pause and consider the Japanese deep love of nature and how it is enshrined in the Shinto faith.

#### Zen meditation

Vienna boasts several other Japanese gardens of which TAKASAKIPARK in Favoriten is most like Setagayapark. Created by Kinsaku Nakane and originally intended as a temporary work for the Vienna Garden Exhibition of 1974, it was made permanent by landscape architect Ikeda Tadashi at the behest of Vienna's Japanese community, as well as the inhabitants of the city of Takasaki. It is today a part of the Kurpark Oberlaa.

Very different is the waterless rock garden (*Karesansui*) laid out in 1913 alongside SCHÖNBRUNN'S famous Palmenhaus. By 1996, it had become so choked with ivy that it had been forgotten, until a Japanese woman re-discovered it! Now used as a focus for Zen meditation, the garden finds a modern counterpart in Courtyard 2 of the AKH, marking the 60th anniversary of the university's Japanese Faculty, with miniature mountain stones brought from Kyoto and Kobe.

#### Danube Island cherries

So popular has East Asian garden culture become that Vienna's horticultural college in Kagran now teaches it. Since 2001 both students and visitors have been able to enjoy the so-called ASIAGARTEN there, a teaching garden containing all the various plants and landscape features necessary for a successful Japanese garden.

Such expertise is reflected in the tiny TORA-SAN-PARK in neighbouring Floridsdorf, which is another celebration of good Austrian-Japanese relations. The name Tora-San is that of the central character in a long-running Japanese film series, one of which (*Torajiro Kokoro no Tabiji*) was filmed in a Strebersdorf *Heuriger!*

This tour finishes on the Donauinsel, where an annual cherry tree festival has been held since 2002 in the KIRSCHENHAIN, a grove of ornamental cherries given by Japan in 1996 to mark Austria's thousand year anniversary. ◇

*Setagayapark: 7:00 – dusk*  
19., Hohe Warte 8

*Schlosspark Schönbrunn: 6:00 – 21:00*  
13., Schönbrunner Schloßstraße 47

*Takasakipark: 6:00 – 22:00*  
10., Laaer Berg Strasse 211

*Asiagarten Kagran: by appointment*  
23., Pfarrgasse 61

*AKH, Tora-San-Park: all hours*  
21., Broßmannplatz

*Kirschenhain on Donauinsel: all hours*  
22., near the Jedleseer Bridge, Donauinsel

*Duncan J. D. Smith is the author of Only in Vienna (Christian Brandstätter Verlag)*  
[www.onlyinguides.com](http://www.onlyinguides.com)