



Kyoto

Hōjō (方丈)

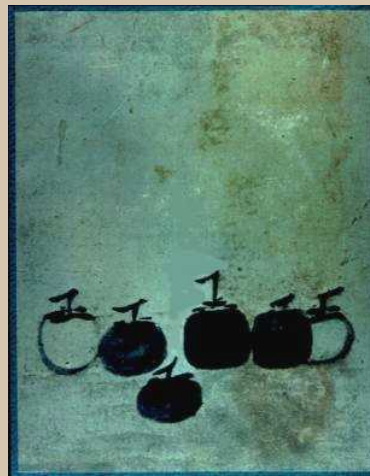
After passing the Karamon, you get to the Hōjō, the living quarters of the head priest of a Zen temple. The Hōjō architecture is using elements from the Shinden architecture (used for aristocratic mansions of the Heian period) and the Shoin architecture, which originated in Zen temples, but became a popular architectural style for samurai class residences. The basis is a rectangular room serving as quarters for reading, sleeping and studying. Later, the big room was subdivided into 6 smaller rooms with different functions.

Highlights Daitoku-ji

The Six Persimmons

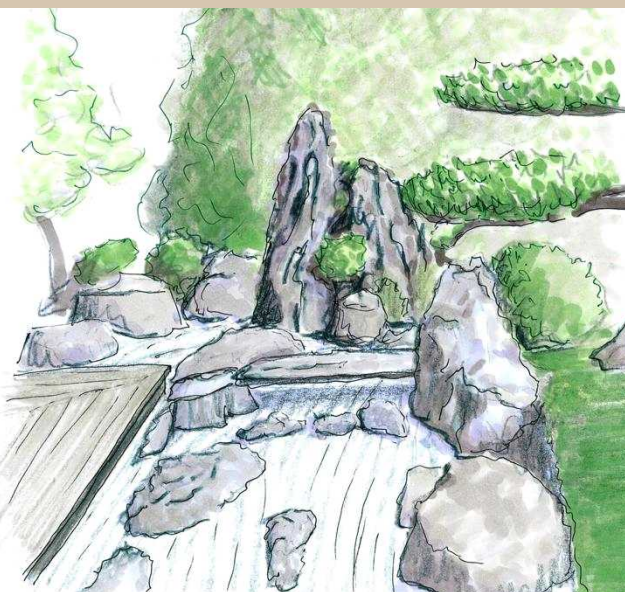
This painting is regarded by some as the greatest masterpiece of Zen painting – the “Six Persimmons” by monk Mu-Qi – unfortunately not on display for visitors. This painting has often been praised for the remarkable skill of the brush strokes.

Look closer at the six persimmons. Two persimmons appear completely black, another set of two have a soft gray value with visible brush strokes. The two outer persimmons were drawn with almost no ink on the brush, and seem to float next to their dark counterparts. The six persimmons symbolize the stages of enlightenment – from the dark void and emptiness (deep sleep in complete darkness) over to the real world of gray shades (awakening to the twilight of the morning), and from there to white and pure world of unity (complete consciousness in bright daylight).



Daisen-in - The Gardens and their meaning

The small gravel gardens of the Daisen-in are said to reflect the metaphorical journey of life according to Buddhist teachings. Let's follow the stream that flows through the gardens and listen to the story it has to tell.



The starting point is the north-east end of the Hōjō-Shoin, the study room in the abbot's quarters. During the Muromachi period, gardens were by convention built in the north-east corner of the Hōjō.

Here, we can see a stone arrangement with two tall vertical stones and a small vertical stone in front of it symbolizing the Hōrai-san, often referred to as the 'Mountain isle of Eternal Youth', 'Island of the Immortals' or 'Treasure Mountain'. The name comes from a Chinese island that has become to play an important part in the Taoist mythology. It is an element often used in Japanese garden symbolism and usually displayed as inaccessible

– neither path nor bridge lead to it, so no mortals can enter this paradise of peace and happiness. Note that the bridge made of a flat stone slab in front of it does not connect to it, but leads to the Nakajima (中島, middle island) in front of it.

Shinden-zukuri

寝殿造

architecture style during the Heian period (794-1185), mostly used for aristocratic mansions

Shoin

書院

study room, also the name for an entire architecture style, Shoin-Zukuri

Chinese Art in Japan

Dōgen and Eisai as well as other Zen teachers studied the Rinzaï tradition in China and brought the teachings, as well as Chinese Zen art back to Japan. That way, the "Six persimmons" was introduced to Japan and made a profound impact on the Japanese Zen tradition.

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