The Garden as a Healing Place

The meditation garden of the past holds answers for developing therapeutic gardens in the future. By producing gardens as settings for the practice of behavioral medicine, we expand on the garden's function in healthcare facilities and nursing homes. Our better understanding of meditation garden traditions will add to the role of the public and private garden as a form of preventative medicine.

The Garden and the Senses

Practitioners of behavioral medicine—which includes relaxation therapy and chronic pain control—will often persuade their patients to focus on two or more of their senses with equal intensity as a means of treatment. As each of us has unique perceptual strengths and weaknesses (some of us are more aware of visual stimuli; others auditory, and so on), the garden, a place which can be designed to reach all of the senses, is an excellent setting for this kind of therapy.

My garden proposal contains elements that aim at more than one of our senses at a time, and with considerable intensity:

Artificial pond: stocked with bulldogs and tree frogs for even-ning sounds and planted with waterlilies offering year-round color and fragrance

Surrounding area: crickets and bobby bushes attractive to songbirds bring rural sounds into urban setting

Garden pavilion: temperature control from radiant heating and bombarded with negative air ions interior surfaces proportioned and tiled for maximum sound reverberation
audial harps in trees flanking the pavilion introduce sound of wind into room
daylight bouncing off ripples in reflection pool adds movement to prismatic lightbeams at night, floodlights in trees beam off water rather than off glazing, creating kinetic light lighting and turning pavilion into a lantern/kaleidoscope
black, glass-topped, wooden banquet table reflects and deflects sounds and prismatic light from windows

Fragrance of incense corresponds to taste of food eaten in room smoke gives three-dimensional emphasis to colored light beams wind chimes in trees tuned to correspond in quality to moving prismatic light

Fountain: radiant heating in pave-ment surrounding fountain creates warm marble mate at night fountain's splashing jets emphasize optical tension in tile pattern pulsing rhythms of the water jet are syn-chronized with the repetitive tile pattern, creating a mesmerizing effect
high water jet under-lit as major focal point in evening heated, steaming water diffuses light at night and warms immediate area perfumed water lends fragrance to fountain's surroundings

Garden approach and entry:

Lomandra poplars in flanking rows along the entry path flicker and rustle curing warm months
Cosmos multi/bijou seed pods sound like “whis-pering asters”
in winter, stands of dombecia are in full, fragrant bloom and show through the two rows alfalfa poplars and multi/bijou along the path
shadows and ground cover fanning entry path produce a year-round sequence of fragrance especially attractive to hummingbirds and butterflies whirling across with wind chimes and crack-ing, groaning culms of timbers bamboo add dramatic to garden entry during winter storms and Santa Ana winds