



Symbolism of the Chinese Garden

Since ancient times the Chinese Garden has symbolised a world which reflects a variety of thoughts and choices. The Chinese Garden provides the right setting for people to explore their inner thoughts. The person who is able to be as one with nature gains both mental health and a long life.

The Chinese Garden is based on three principles. Firstly, the garden has to have a natural aspect rather than be artificially made; be more spontaneous rather than symmetrical; be elaborate, offering more surprises than simplicity. Secondly, the Garden has to reflect a world of its own, complete in thought, microcosmic. All the phases of nature are there for

the service of human thoughts. The Garden contains the basic elements of the world, the yin and the yang, shown through an intricately woven net or, better still, a web of rocks and water, combined in the limited space provided, with a consistent architecture and splendid aesthetics.

Thirdly, due to its limited area, the Chinese Garden has to occupy space accordingly. One cannot see everything at a glance, from every part of the garden, one becomes aware that there are other things yet to be seen. The continuous change of elements used also suggest an infinite variety of experiences.

The two main important elements in the Chinese Garden are rocks and water. Their combination forms both the architecture and the horticulture. Rocks and water symbolise all that forms part of the basis of nature, the yin and the yang, all that which gives life. Rocks are the body of the world, with its hills and valleys like the arteries are for blood. The water is the spirit of the world, which provides oxygen, breath, liquid clouds, blood running through the veins. The rocks symbolise all that which is active, the forces of work; the water, all that is contemplative, all that complements work, thought, freedom, silence, reflection; in one word - serenity.

From Birth to Maturity

The "Garden of Serenity" in Santa Lucija, therefore, is a symbol of life, from birth to death. The fountain at the very beginning of the garden is the figure of birth, with the water in the background symbolising the mother - the water as if giving birth, the happiness of a new life, the beginning of childhood.

Childhood is represented by the space found between the fountain and the actual garden door, the door to maturity. As in life, one finds two paths, one is straight with no problems, no difficulties, serene, under the guidance of parents, while the other is a serpentine path, full of adventure, danger, curving and away from the parents' sight. The parents are represented in the figures of the two lions. One is male, gathering in himself the strength of father. The other is a woman, feminine, with her happiness in her hands, a tender look, a promise of love and joy.

From childhood one passes to maturity. This threshold which everyone in life has to go through offers its welcome through a



large "portico" which offers shelter until one is inside. **A** Once inside, one starts his lookout for the wonders of life - 'WU' as found written on the inside of the door. Here the rocks seem to have matured and offer themselves as an emporium of wisdom and energy for life. The rocks are placed in a way as to resemble the image of a god, as if on an altar surrounded by plants and flowers. **B** The inscription behind the rocks says "the pleasure of heaven". It is here that the choices of life begin. On the right there is a small door which gives a special welcome thanks to its elevated patio which is meant to invite you to a day of labour after wishing you a good morning. **C** It is from here that you find yourself in the corridors of an active life - the sunrise of a new life.

Active life

The corridor is in a zig-zag form to remind us that active life is full of difficulties. Even the bridge has a zig-zag shape. **D** Many times in life we are forced to cross a bridge in order to overcome

difficulties. As if to remind us that we are not on our own, the corridor is covered with the symbol of comfort.

The Chinese Garden provides a choice of experiences. For this reason, on the other side we come across a round door in the form of a moon and inscribed on it are the words "The path to retreat" a spiritual retreat - away from the crowd. **E** This pathway is that which holds freedom of mind, not hidden thoughts found in dark corner but those thoughts which observe living nature, on the sweet music of all the sounds of nature, on the rainbow of the colours provided by nature, and reflections of active life. As we create the space for all these thoughts, we realise that no Chinese Garden is structured as one garden. Every garden is in reality many gardens, separated between one thought and another by walls, sheltered corridors and a chain of rooms, everything linked and in sequence in order to produce a series of different and opposite thoughts. Little by little the garden passes on a sense of continuity, one thing after the other, with no end.

Contemplative life

Contemplative life starts in the Bamboo Garden. **F** The Bamboo reeds create an enchanting sound in the breeze and their tender leaves cast their reflection and an infinite amount of shadows as they perform their dance to the same breeze. The lace-like design of each window varies from one to the other. This complements the idea of an infinite variety of thoughts found in the garden. From here one can glimpse the pond and distinguish the sound of the waterfall, as it strikes the rocks and continues on its way to feed the pond.

