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POSTED ON JULY 10, 2019 ([HTTPS://WWW.COLORADOBOULEVARD.NET/A-TALE-OF-PASADENA-A-JAPANESE-TEA-HOUSE-AND-THE-WAY-OF-TEA/](https://www.coloradoboulevard.net/a-tale-of-pasadena-a-japanese-tea-house-and-the-way-of-tea/)) BY [KENT MATSUOKA](https://www.coloradoboulevard.net/author/kenma/) ([HTTPS://WWW.COLORADOBOULEVARD.NET/AUTHOR/KENMA/](https://www.coloradoboulevard.net/author/kenma/))

Updated: A Tale of Pasadena, a Japanese Tea House, and the Way of Tea

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(<https://i1.wp.com/www.coloradoboulevard.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-garden-that-formerly-housed-the-Tea-House-at-the-Pasadena-Buddhist-Temple-Photo-Kent-Matsuoka.jpg?ssl=1>).

The garden that formerly housed the Tea House at the Pasadena Buddhist Temple (Photo – Kent Matsuoka)

Alan Nakagawa (<https://alannakagawa.com/>) is an interdisciplinary artist primarily working with sound; he occasionally incorporates video, sculpture, drawing, paint, performance, text, food and, most recently, perfumes.

By Kent Matsuoka

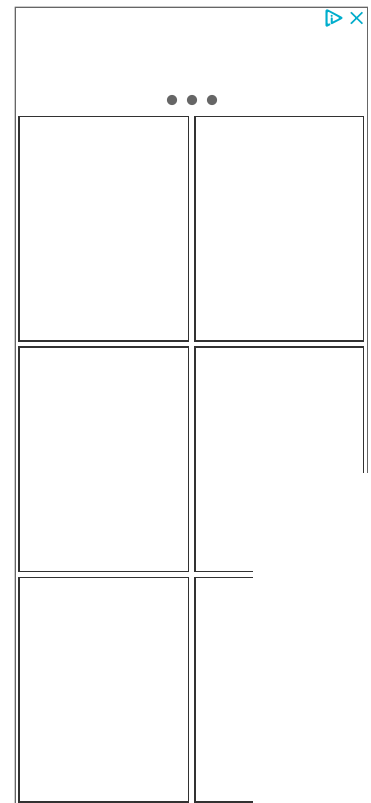
Nakagawa currently is working on a project to explore the significance of the tea house (https://pressreader.com/@nickname12457566/csb_zt4QQqRncUKraFOXr3xBtZI_g-BM6bN56It1q-FuSpR1iaOZK7fPP7_e71g3LrTz), that once stood in the garden behind the Pasadena Buddhist Temple (<https://www.pasadenabuddhisttemple.org/>), and how it continues to influence the community.

It was here that I sat down for lunch with local artist Alan Nakagawa and members of the church’s Sons of Gardeners volunteer group, formed by some of the sons of the church’s founders who had created and maintained the beautifully manicured Japanese garden behind the temple. These now retired boomers also unofficially have taken up the mantle of preserving the temple’s history.

The Tea House

Built in 1964, the tea house was donated by the Urasenke Tea School (<http://www.urasenke.or.jp/texte/index.html>) in Japan, one of three schools descended from the 16th century tea master Sen no Rikyu (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sen_no_Riky%C5%AB). Tantsai Soshitsu was the 14th generation descendant of Sen no Rikyu and the headmaster of Urasenke responsible for preserving the Japanese cultural tradition of tea during the post-war occupation and rebuilding of Japan. He recognized the importance of education in an era when Western thought and culture pervaded Japan and the world. After serving tea to some American soldiers interested in learning the culture of the country they occupied, he turned his attention internationally. Tantsai sent his son, Hounsai, on missions to the U.S. and Europe to bring the way of tea to the world.

Hounsai succeeded his father as the 15th headmaster of Urasenke when his father passed in 1964. He visited Pasadena to dedicate the completion of the tea house bequeathed by his father in 1965, conferring upon it the name Seifu-an (The Arbor of Pure Breeze).



Events by Date

<< ([/a-tale-of-pasadena-a-japanese-tea-and-the-way-of-tea/?long_events=1&ajaxCalendar=1&mo=1&...](https://www.coloradoboulevard.net/events/throop-garden-sundays-2-2021-02-21/))
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31 (<https://www.coloradoboulevard.net/events/2021-02-31/>)

7 (<https://www.coloradoboulevard.net/events/learning-garden-sundays-2-2021-02-07/>)

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(<https://i2.wp.com/www.coloradoboulevard.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Photo-Kent-Matsuoka.jpg?ssl=1>)

(Photo – Kent Matsuoka)

How did Pasadena become the recipient of such an honor from Urasenke?

Old Town Pasadena was once home to a thriving [Japantown](https://www.californiajapantowns.org/pasadena.html) (<https://www.californiajapantowns.org/pasadena.html>), along Fair Oaks Boulevard between Colorado and California. Many of those businesses and the community were negatively affected by President Roosevelt's [Executive Order 9066](https://densho.org/looking-like-the-enemy/) (<https://densho.org/looking-like-the-enemy/>), issued on February 19, 1942 in response to the attack on Pearl Harbor two months earlier.

Some 70,000 American citizens with as little as 1/16 Japanese ancestry were summarily rounded up with only what they could carry and sent to barren desert relocation centers deep in the country's interior for the duration of World War II. They often left with little time to make arrangements for the storage of personal belongings or the disposition of merchandise, some of which was sold at pennies on the dollar or abandoned.

Upon returning, Japanese American families often found their former homes and businesses looted and occupied by new families, further exacerbated by the influx of new residents who had migrated to Los Angeles for the plentiful opportunities in the defense industry. They also faced a severe housing shortage and [discriminatory laws](https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/alien_land_laws.htm) (https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/alien_land_laws.htm) that prevented their resettlement. Surviving Christian churches and Buddhist Temples in the community served as temporary hostels for Japanese Americans as families helped each other.

Although records in Japan show that a Buddhist Temple in Pasadena was recognized as early as 1931, Japanese Churches in the area were forced to move several times prior to the War. Many simply closed their doors as their congregations were forced to evacuate, and they never reopened. The fate of the original Pasadena Temple has been forgotten, but a number of families managed to re-establish the [Pasadena Buddhist Temple](https://www.pasadenabuddhisttemple.org) (<https://www.pasadenabuddhisttemple.org>) in 1948 where it stands today on property off Lincoln in Northwest Pasadena.

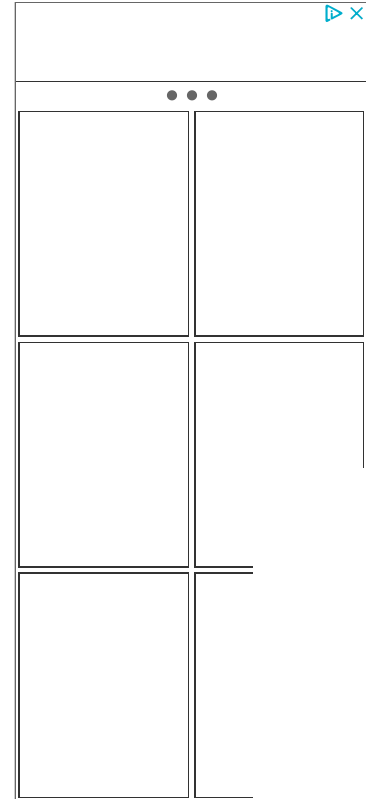
It was here that Tantsansai decided to establish a Los Angeles outpost for his school. Perhaps the decision was determined by the presence of [Sosei Matsumoto](https://www.arts.gov/honors/heritage/fellows/sosei-shizuye-matsumoto) (<https://www.arts.gov/honors/heritage/fellows/sosei-shizuye-matsumoto>). Matsumoto was born in Honolulu, attended high school in Los Angeles and escaped to Japan during the War. While in Japan, she learned the art of tea from Tantsansai himself. She wanted to open a school for tea upon her return to Los Angeles, but found a scarred community unsure about embracing its culture after spending the duration of the War in the camps. The signing of the U.S.-Japan peace treaty in 1951 signaled a normalization of relations, and Matsumoto was invited to serve tea to over 3,000 American and Japanese officials, including President Truman and Prime Minister Yoshida. She would go on to teach tea both at the Temple and her own school for some 30 years, eventually being recognized for her contributions to preserving Japanese culture by Emperor Akihito and by receipt of a NEA National Education Fellowship from President Clinton.

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Daily Calendar

Sunday, February 7, 2021

Throop Learning Garden
(<https://www.coloradoboulevard.net/events/throop-learning-garden-sundays-2-2021-02-07/>)
- 8:30 am - 11:00 am

Tuesday, February 9, 2021

Pasadena Farmers' Market – Tuesday
(<https://www.coloradoboulevard.net/events/pasadena-farmers-market-tuesday-2021-02-09/>) - 8:30 am - 12:30 pm

Caltech Tai Chi Club – Tuesdays
(<https://www.coloradoboulevard.net/events/caltech-tai-chi-club-tuesdays-2021-02-09/>)

<https://i1.wp.com/www.coloradoboulevard.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Interdisciplinary-artist-Alan-Nakagawa-Photo-Kent-Matsuoka.jpg?ssl=1>

Interdisciplinary artist Alan Nakagawa (Photo – Kent Matsuoka)

A Japanese garden

The modest Japanese garden on the grounds of the Pasadena Buddhist Temple most likely also influenced the decision. The majority of pre-war Japanese immigrants came to America as migrant farm workers, many eventually saving to establish independent gardening businesses or nurseries. As many as 17 Japanese-owned florists and nurseries operated in Pasadena just prior to the outbreak of the War.

Originally created by volunteers from the congregation, the garden still stands behind the Temple, and the spirit of the tea house lingers. Responsibility for its upkeep has been assumed by the organization appropriately called the 'Sons of Gardeners.'

This is a group of men not interested in politics or the intricate details of history. Like others of their generation at churches of all denominations across the country, they have a sense of civic pride and responsibility to maintain the grounds and the unique cultural aspects of the Temple as did previous generations of the Temple's congregation. I felt an immediate sense of kinship with these men as my own late father did this at his church, as did my grandfather before him.

Future of tea house in doubt

<https://www.rafu.com/2019/03/obituary-osei-matsumoto-103-tea-ceremony-instructor/>) would eventually also hand over responsibility for the tea house to longtime student, [Yaeko Sakahara](https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/latimes/obituary.aspx?n=yaeko-may-sakahara&pid=190114578&fhid=10576) (<https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/latimes/obituary.aspx?n=yaeko-may-sakahara&pid=190114578&fhid=10576>). By 2010, Sakahara also was succumbing to the rigors of age, plagued with health issues affecting her ability to conduct classes. The future of the tea house was in doubt. The tea house also was beginning to show its age; termites in the then 50 year old wood and paper structure produced damage beyond the means of volunteers to repair.

<https://i2.wp.com/www.coloradoboulevard.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-key-to-the-Tea-House-is-still-at-the-Temple-Photo-Kent-Matsuoka.jpg?ssl=1>

The key to the Tea House is still at the Temple (Photo – Kent Matsuoka)

Huntington Library

Enter the Huntington Library and Gardens in San Marino. The Huntington had been looking for an authentic tea house to add to its existing [Japanese Garden](https://www.huntington.org/japanese-garden) (<https://www.huntington.org/japanese-garden>), which had been among the first of 16 gardens on 120 acres created by Henry Huntington on his estate. The Huntington entered into an agreement with the Temple to acquire the tea house, carefully dismantle it piece by piece and send it to Japan. Yoshiaki Nakamura, the son of the original builder, would restore and rebuild the structure at the Huntington as part of a larger \$6.8 million dollar renovation (<https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/huntington-japanese-gardens-restoration>) of the Japanese Garden in 2011.

The Way of Tea

Although both Alan and I are ethnically Japanese, we were born in America, raised in an era where kids would rather play baseball and eat hot dogs than drink iced green tea and eat sushi as the cool kids do now. [The Way of Tea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_tea_ceremony) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_tea_ceremony), or "Chado," was as foreign and complex to us as are the calculations necessary for the aeronautical engineers over at JPL to land on the moon.

Chado was first brought back from China to Japan by the Buddhist monk Kukai in the ninth century, and it became a staple of the court aristocracy. Steeped in ritual and symbolism, one cannot help but imagine the tea house on the grounds of the Temple. Passing the sign indicating the former location of the tea house, one can imagine the path one would have taken to enter. Overgrown rocks in the garden indicate a path placed in a gentle curve

.net/events/caltech-tai-chi-club-tuesdays-2021-02-09/) - 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm

Wednesday, February 10, 2021

Altadena Farmers' Market (Virtual)

(<https://www.coloradoboulevard.net/events/altadena-farmers-market-2021-02-10/>) - 4:00 pm - 8:00 pm

Thursday, February 11, 2021

South Pasadena Farmers' Market (Virtual)

(<https://www.coloradoboulevard.net/events/28955-2021-02-11/>) - 4:00 pm - 8:00 pm

Friday, February 12, 2021

Monrovia Friday Night Street Fair (Virtual)

(<https://www.coloradoboulevard.net/events/friday-night-festival-monrovia-2021-02-12/>) - 5:00 pm - 9:00 pm

Pasadena Area Knitters and Makers

(<https://www.coloradoboulevard.net/events/arboretum-library-knitters-makers-2021-02-12/>) - 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm

Caltech Tai Chi Club - Fridays (Virtual)

(<https://www.coloradoboulevard.net/events/caltech-tai-chi-club-fridays-2021-02-12/>) - 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm

Saturday, February 13, 2021

Pasadena Farmers' Market – Saturday

(<https://www.coloradoboulevard.net/events/pasadena-farmers-market-saturday-2021-02-13/>) - 8:30 am - 12:30 pm

Family Nature Walk at Eaton Canyon

(<https://www.coloradoboulevard.net/events/family-nature-walk-eaton-canyon-2021-02-13/>) - 9:00 am - 11:00 am

with changes in elevation to force the guest to physically slow down and appreciate the surroundings. One would have stopped at a bubbling water basin, or tsukubai, to wash hands and ritually purify before entering, finally going through a small door about three feet in height. Called the nijiri-guchi (<https://koryu.com/library/dlowry6.html>), the door forces the guest to bend down and crawl in on one's knees, reminding the guest that during the ceremony all are equal, regardless of wealth, prestige, or social status.

(<https://i0.wp.com/www.coloradoboulevard.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Tea-ceremony-at-the-Chidorigafuchi-National-Cemetery-in-Japan-Photo-Kent-Matsuoka.jpg?ssl=1>).

Tea ceremony at the Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery in Japan (Photo – Kent Matsuoka)

Rediscovering Chado

At an outdoor tea ceremony I attended last Spring at the Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery (<http://www.env.go.jp/garden/chidorigafuchi/english/index.html>) in Tokyo, the participants still recognized the unseen boundaries suggested by the ritual even absent the physical barrier of a tea house. They stopped to bow deeply to the tea master before crossing an unspoken threshold to receive the tea, then they bowed again before walking with the tea to the memorial as an offering to the unidentified remains of Japan's war dead interred there.

The reasons for Americans today to discover Chado are as varied as the beautiful ceramic tea cups used for ceremony. For me, it is to learn about the culture of my ancestors and better understand my history. Some come for the artistic interpretations of the food and the symbolism of the utensils, and others come for the meditative aspect of the ritual.

Alan and I have found ourselves returning to our Japanese roots after spending the majority of our careers avoiding those roots. We recognize that we are two of the many sons that are woven into this story. From the Sons of the Gardeners who came back to care for the garden their forefathers cared for so long, to the son of the original tea house builder who came to restore the tea house, to the long line of sons and disciples of the Urasenke School, we have closed a circle in our lives leading back 500 years to Sen no Rikyu.

Multi-media presentation

Perhaps this will be Alan's focus as he weaves an inter-disciplinary portrait of history, ethnic-identity and community in his yearlong project exploring the lingering significance of the tea house.

Alan will host a multi-media presentation at the Temple on ArtNight (October 11, 2019), featuring images from various events of and at the Tea House and a short film on okebana, the Japanese art of flower arranging, by Christo Mercado.

> Watch for updates as Alan podcasts interviews with temple members and their post-war Japanese-American identity available here (<https://soundcloud.com/user-878578935/>).

For those interested in visiting the tea house in its new home, the Huntington (<https://www.huntington.org/events/japanese-teahouse-tour-1?sd=1565634600&ed=1565649000>) offers tours of the tea house on every second Monday of the month and seasonal tea ceremony demonstrations conducted by Huntington's Cultural Curator Robert Hori, who trained under current Urasenke head master Zabosai Soshitsu.

(<https://i1.wp.com/www.coloradoboulevard.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/L-R-Alan-Nakagawa-and-Kent-Matsuoka.jpg?ssl=1>).

(L-R) Alan Nakagawa and Kent Matsuoka

Kent Matsuoka is a Japanese-American living in Los Angeles whose family was forced from their home and interned at the Granada War Relocation Center during World War II. He works as a producer and location manager in Hollywood and writes in the hope that the injustices faced by his family are never experienced by American citizens again.

Kent Matsuoka

(<https://www.coloradoboulevard.net/author/kenma/>)

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Wonderful article! I am obsessed with Japanese culture.

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