



*World Cultural Heritage*

# Nara Palace Site East Palace Garden

平城宮  
東院庭園



## The East Palace Garden pond: Earlier and latter phases

The pond at the East Palace Garden can be divided into two phases, an earlier and a latter one, by substantial modification in the later Nara period. In the earlier phase, large round stones were laid on the bottom forming a belt running along the shore, but the latter phase saw a shallow pond entirely paved with a layer of small stones extending onto the banks. The shape of the pond also changed from the relatively simple backward "L" of the former phase to complex one with inlets, island, and peninsulas, and a stone arrangement forming an artificial hill on the north shore was also newly added in the latter phase. Along with this reconfiguring of the pond, the buildings were replaced several times.



## Buildings and Other Facilities in the Garden

In the East Palace Garden, there are restored buildings belonging to the later Nara period in the west side of the pond and the northeastern and southeastern parts of the site. These buildings are as follows (see the picture left): the central building in the middle left, the northwest building above it, and the two-stories corner tower in the right side of the middle part. Moreover, other features of the buildings belonging to different phases in the Nara period have been unearthed, which have not been reconstructed. For example, there were one building with pillars atop foundation stones in the north of the central building and another building with eaves on its north side in the north of the southwestern part of the pond. Both of them were facing to the pond. Features of winding stone-lined ditch for "Kyokusu" (stream) were unearthed at two locations. These are considered to have been associated with the pond in the earlier phase; however, the one located in the west of the central building was restored.

## Archaeological excavation

Remains of a large garden were discovered in 1967, in the southeastern corner of the Nara Palace precinct's eastern extension. As this locus corresponded with the "East Palace" seen in the *Shoku Nihongi*, the excavated garden was named the East Palace Garden. Until that time it had been possible to learn about Nara period gardens only through old documents such as *Manyōshū*, but as a result of the excavations conducted after this chance discovery, conditions of the garden and the area around it have for the most part become clear. It has been ascertained that the garden had a pebble beach pond, with an intricately shaped shoreline, at the center of its 80 m east-west by 100 m north-south lot, and that various buildings were placed around it.



▲ Artifacts recovered from the pond

Glazed tiles and a wooden small vessel with pottery used for baaquet



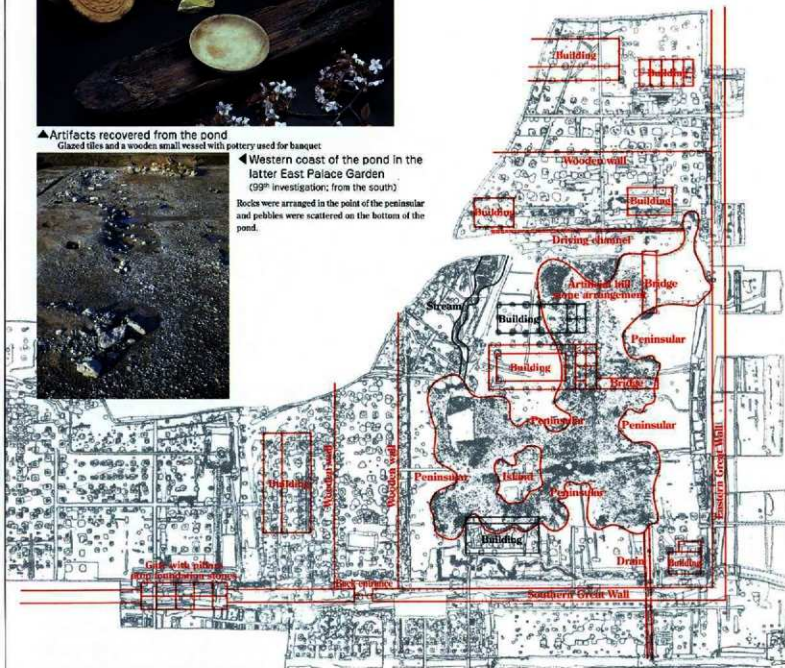
◀ Western coast of the pond in the latter East Palace Garden (99th investigation; from the south)

Rocks were arranged in the point of the peninsular and pebbles were scattered on the bottom of the pond.



▲ Vicinity of the artificial hill stone arrangement on the north shore, latter phase pond features (from the southwest)

\* An artificial hill (tsukiyama) is a man-made feature in the shape of a mountain placed within a garden to create a hill and water landscape, and in former times it was also called *kazari*. The construction of such *kazari* with piled stones is known to have been practiced in China by the time of the Later Han Dynasty. In Japan, this is the oldest example.

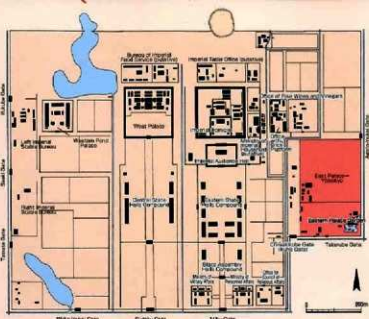


Features of the latter phase (in red) Features prior to the latter phase (in black)

Archaeological features of the latter Eastern Palace Garden



The Nara Palace has an extension on its eastern side, unknown for other ancient Japanese palace precincts. The southern half of this extension was apparently called "Tein" or "Tōgu" (both literally mean "East Palace") throughout the Nara period. Empress Shotoku established a building with lazuline roof tiles called "Jeweled Hall of the East Palace", and held banquets and ceremonies there. From recent research one theory holds that the Yobaikyū ("Mountain Plum Palace") of Emperor Kōnin, the Nan'en or Nanjūen ("South Garden") of Emperor Shōmu (father of Empress Shotoku), and the Todai ("Eastern Domicile") were centered here. Regardless, those facilities likely had close links to the excavated East Palace Garden. The East Palace Garden was designated as a National Site of Extraordinary Scenic Beauty in 2009, as an outstanding example of ancient garden site archaeologically excavated and restored.



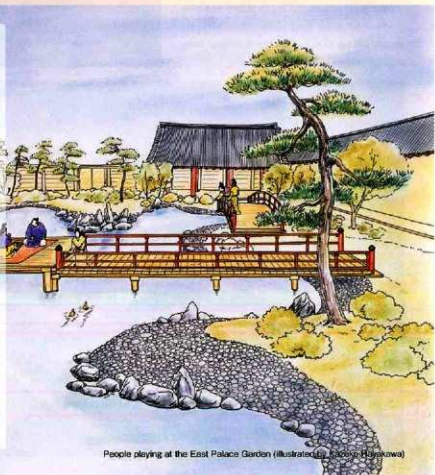
### Characteristics of the latter East Palace Garden

The composition of the East Palace Garden centers on a pond, 60 m east-west by 60 m north-south, appearing as a backward "L" when viewed from the south. The central building standing on the west bank has an open platform extending over the water, from which a bridge connects to the east bank. At the pond's northern edge is a stone arrangement forming an artificial hill, and in the southwestern part is an island, each serving as a scenic focus of the garden, and ornamental stones were placed at the tips of the inward jutting peninsulas. The pebble beach, made of small stones laid over a gentle slope extending from the bottom of the pond onto its banks, traces out a winding shoreline, bringing to mind the air of an elegant garden of the Nara period. This important site may be called the precursor of Japanese gardens that from the Heian period on made natural scenery the main element.



Reconstructed East Palace Garden from the south

Emperor/ Year	Event
Genmei 710 (Wado 3)	Capital moved to Nara
Shomu 726 (Jinki 3)	Banquet was held at Na'in in March
Shomu 740 (Tenpyo 12)	Capital moved to Kani.
Shomu 745 (Tenpyo 17)	Capital moved to Nara
Shomu 747 (Tenpyo 19)	Emperor viewed shooting and horse race at Nara in May
Koken 752 (Tenpyo Shoho 4)	Completion ceremony of the Giant Buddha in the Todaiji temple in April According to a document, empress returned to the East Palace on the same day
Koken 754 (Tenpyo Shoho 6)	Empress held conference at the East Palace in January
Koken 757 (Tenpyo Hoji 1)	Nara Palace remodelled Yoricon put into effect
Jynnin 761 (Tenpyo Hoji 3)	Nara Palace remodelled
Shotoku 764 (Tenpyo Hoshi 6)	Empress Shotoke (same person as Koken) enthroned
Shotoku 767 (Jingu Keishi 1)	Empress held conference at the East Palace in January Emperor conducted ritual of Inari no Kami purification at the East Palace in February
	Construction of the colorful building of Gyokuden was completed in April Official in-charge of East Palace construction was appointed in December
Shotoku 769 (Jingu Keishi 2)	Emperor held banquet at the East Palace in January
Shotoku 770 (Jinki 3)	Banquet was held at the East Palace
Kennin 772 (Hoki 5)	Occasion was observed and a ritual was held at Yahaiiya in December Construction of Yahaiiya was completed. Emperor moved to Yahaiiya
Kennin 773 (Hoki 6)	
Kennin 774 (Hoki 5)	Banquet was held at Yahaiiya in January
Kennin 778 (Hoki 6)	Banquet was held at Yahaiiya in January
Kennin 777 (Hoki 5)	Lotus with two flowers on one stem was found at the south pond of Yahaiiya in June
Kennin 784 (Jiroku 3)	Capital moved to Nagasaki



People playing at the East Palace Garden (illustrated by Kazuko Hayakawa)

## Basic policy for reconstruction and presentation

Development of the Nara Palace site as a whole is based upon the "Basic Scheme for the Preservation and Development of the Nara Palace Site as a Special Historic Site," drawn up by the Agency for Cultural Affairs in 1978, and further development is proceeded from 2008, based upon the master plan of the "National Historic Park of Asuka and Nara Palace Site, the Nara Palace Site Area (tentative name)". The East Palace Garden is one of four locations within the Nara Palace Site designated for total reconstruction, and the goal is to recreate the area maintained within the palace grounds for feasts and amusement. The basic policy for this reconstruction is as follows.

- (1) The garden and buildings of the latter half of the Nara period are to be reconstructed for public presentation.
- (2) Excavated features are to be covered with a layer of earth for preservation, on top of which the pond, buildings, bridges, outer walls etc. are to be reconstructed at original scale, although the stone arrangement and some of the ornamental stones are to be exposed for display as they are.
- (3) Floral varieties are to be selected on the basis of archaeological findings, such as recovered plant remains, plus historic documents, and scenery fitting for an ancient garden is to be reconstructed.

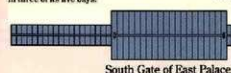
### ▼ Central building and bridge (from the east)

The central building was the East Palace Garden's "main hall" located at the center of the pond's west bank, and is thought to have been the focus of occasions when banquets and ceremonies were held. It was furnished with an open platform extending over the water, from which a flat bridge connected to the east bank. The bridge was long in the east-west direction, standing on embedded pillars that made four bays down its length and one bay in width. The pillars have been reconstructed as octagonal in shape (25 cm diameter), modeled after the recovered remains of veranda struts of the central building. Deck boards were shaped after referring to the drawing of *Shigusa Egi Emaki*. Also, the onion-bulb jewel ornaments on the end pillars of the flat and arched bridges are based on the examples of the same item, recovered in 1966 from the southeast corner of Nara Palace.



### ▼ Takenkabe Gote (East Palace South Gate; from the southwest)

This is an east-west structure, with pillars atop foundation stones making five bays down the length and two bays in width. As the main gate to the East Palace, it is thought that the Jeweled Hall of the East Palace stood on the northern extension of its central axis. The structure, materials, and dimensions are patterned after the main East Gate of Horyu-ji temple, and it has been reconstructed as a single-story gable-roofed structure with doorways in three of its five bays.

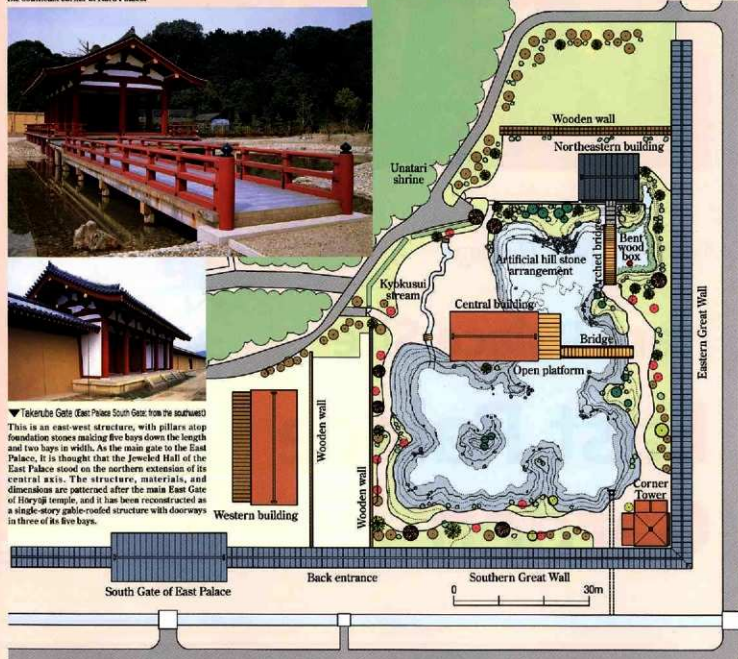


▲ Reconstruction of artificial hill and pebble beach on the north shore of the pond (from the southwest)



### ◀ Arched bridge (from the south)

This is a bridge running north-south, standing on embedded pillars that made five bays down its length and one bay in width. The length is nearly the same as the garden's flat bridge, but is divided at smaller intervals into five bays rather than four. Further, as the three central bays are wider than those on both ends, it is thought they were spaced to match the bridge's curvature, so reconstruction was made as an arched bridge.



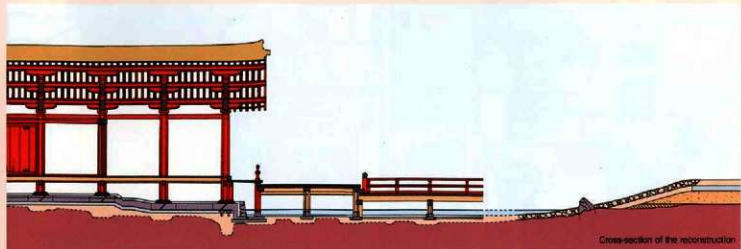
Reconstruction plan of the East Palace Garden



## Reconstruction of the garden landform

In preparing the garden landform, in principle a protective layer of earth is used to prevent damage to the remaining subterranean features, and to indicate a subtle landform. When erecting a reconstructed building, about 40 cm of earthen fill forms the new base. For the pond, it is protected with a covering of sand and non-woven fabric, small stones (5-10 cm diameter) similar to the feature itself were laid down at a thickness of about 10 cm to recreate a pebble beach of the Nara period. Most of the exposed ornamental

stones are original of the Nara period. In the artificial hill stone arrangement at the north shore, the central columnar stone is gneiss, and others are andesite and chart. The surfaces of the ornamental stones were strengthened with resin, and items that had broken were restored by gluing them back together. At locations where it is thought that ornamental stones were missing, stones were newly set that had been marked on their backs with the year of replacement.



## Water for the pond

In the East Palace Garden of the latter phase, a stone-lined waterway flowing from west to east at the garden's northern end, and a small pond with stone shore edging to receive the flow were the main facilities for water supply, in addition to which a water source had been secured by placing a bent wood box around a spring in the northeast part of the pond. Also, when draining the water in order to dry out the pond, a culvert which ran under the southern outer earthen wall was used. In preparing the site, along with reconstructions of the stone-lined waterway and small pond to supply water to the pond, inlet pipes were set at nine places at the bottom of the pond, centered on the western portion, in order to eliminate stagnation. The volume of water in the pond is about 350 m<sup>3</sup>, with well water being used for supply, and water purity maintained by circulating it up to three times daily to through a water management and cleansing facility set up northeast of the Unatori shrine. It is likely that the feature of "Kyokusui (stream)" belongs to the earlier phase; however, it has been restored since it was an outstanding component of the garden. It was reconstructed by andesites that were recovered from the Palace site, with some supplements of new stones. These stones were arranged along the feature plan. A reservoir was placed above, and the stream was presumably restored connecting to the pond in a fashion that water runs down from the upper part of the shore.

## Reconstruction of the flora

The flora is an essential element in shaping the garden's scenery. From analysis of the plant remains (branches, leaves, seeds, pollen, and etc.) recovered through excavation of sediments in the pond, the vegetation planted at the latter East Palace Garden was inferred to have been mainly composed of red pine, cypress, plum, peach, chinaberry, and Japanese blue oak, and also possibly willow, cherry, camellia, and azalea have been planted. These plants are seen in literary anthologies such as the *Manyōshū* and *Kafusō*, and the selections were made referring to these records. Locations for planting were reconstructed after considering depressions revealed by excavation where trees may have been planted or uprooted. Red pines were selected to be planted on the north peninsular of the eastern shore where a large amount of pine cones were recovered. In addition, the sizes and shapes of the trees were determined after consulting pictorial materials such as the Heian period picture scroll *Nenja Gyoji Emaki*, and with consideration given to the overall appearance of the scenery.



## Approach to reconstructing the buildings

Ground plan of a building is ascertained from the remains, and if there are gutters for catching the rain, the extent of the eaves is also known. From this the beam framework of the eaves themselves can be inferred. In addition, recovered materials such as architectural members and remnants of pillars left in the postholes are the first source of information for the reconstruction. Further, some existing examples of ancient architecture of the Nara and Asuka periods, documentary materials, and illustrations are also taken into view. In the East Palace Garden, there are not only the buildings reconstructed based upon archaeological features, but also a building with modern function for public exhibition.

## Reconstructed buildings based upon archaeological features

### ・ Central Building

This is an east-west oriented structure with a core of five bays down the length and two bays in width, encircled on four sides with a veranda. Most of the pillars stood on foundation stones, with those of the four corners only being embedded in deep postholes. As the ground had been specially strengthened for the western three bays alone, that portion is thought to have been closed off as a room, with the eastern two bays being an open hall connecting onto the pond (see picture upper right). Also, as the layout is highly similar to the earlier form of the Denpodo at Horyoji temple, the dimensions of the members and the structural form in principle took that building as model for the reconstruction. Further, as the pillar remnant in the southeast corner was made with wide bevels produced by cutting away the four edges of a square post, after referring to the Phoenix Hall of Byodoin and other surviving ancient buildings that utilized beveled members, beveling was applied to nearly all parts of the structure.



Inside the central building (from the west)



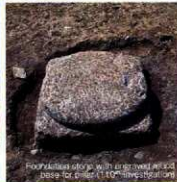
Unearthed wooden pillar (southeast corner)

### ・ Northeastern Building

This is an east-west oriented structure with three bays down the length and two bays in width, with pillars atop foundation stones. A foundation stone with engraved round base for the pillar was unearthed. From this evidence, we inferred that the diameter of the pillar measured 41.4 cm. The reconstruction was referred to the Dining Hall of the Horyoji temple in the structure and size. This building is supposed to have been a facility like a bower located in the north of the pond. Therefore, we restored this building as an open structure with walls only on the east and south sides and no wall on the north and south sides.



Northeastern building (from the south-west)



Foundation stone with engraved round base for pillar (1/100th scale)

### ・ Corner Tower

This is a two-story structure located in the southwest of the pond. Excavation revealed that there was an east-west building three bays long by two bays wide, with a north-south building two bays long by one bay wide, attached to the north side and set along the east side of the east-west building. Remains of pillars octagonal in section (ca. 34 cm in diameter) were unearthed, with foundation boards made by stones and woods placed underneath the pillars. In addition, the pillars had brackets at the position of ca. 30 cm from its bottom, and the brackets were placed on the pillars intersecting at the right angle. Since the foundation was specially strengthened, we consider that this was two-story building. Therefore, the building was restored as the structure three bays long by two bays wide with the northern attached building two bays long by one bay wide, with gable roofs covered by cypress bark for the first tier, with a square structure three bays on the side with a pyramidal roof covered by cypress bark, after referring to the corner towers of the Phoenix Hall of the Byodoin temple.



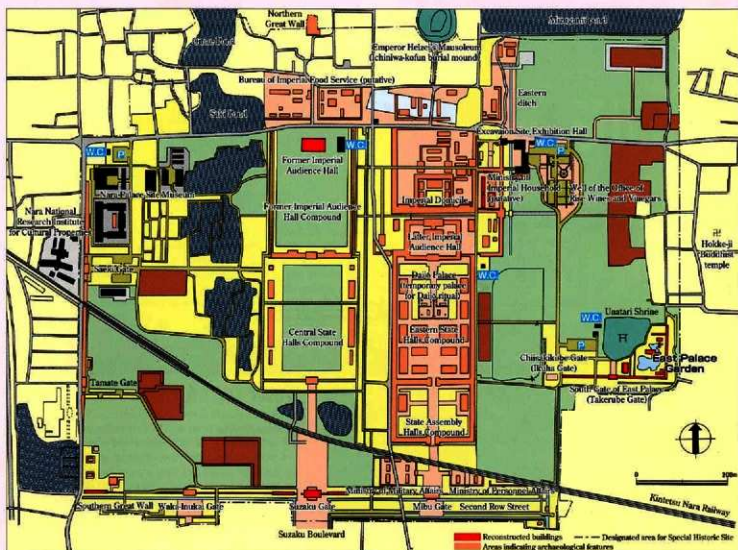
Corner Tower (from the north-west)

## Reconstruction and utilization of the Western Building

This is a north-south gabled building seven bays long by two bays wide, with a roofed veranda on the western side, with a function for public guidance. Appearing as a waiting room set up at the side of the road connecting the Jeweled Hall to the East Palace South Gate, originally it was not a garden-related facility. But in the reconstruction program it was readied as an entrance leading into the garden from the parking lot on the west, and as a management facility. While the outer structure was reconstructed as an ancient building, new materials such as steel beams and glass were abundantly used for the interior, a device which enables the reconstructed portions and the space used for modern functions to be distinguished at a glance.



Western building (from the west)



## Nara Palace Site

### The course of research toward reconstruction

Year	Item
1967	44th investigation (excavation at the southern part; discovering pond feature)
1976	99th investigation (excavation at the central part)
1978	110th investigation (excavation at the northern part)
1980	120th investigation (excavation at the western part)
1993	Commencement of reconstruction 243rd and 245-1st investigations (excavations of the South Gate of East Palace)
1994	245-2nd investigation (excavation of the Eastern Great Wall)
1995	Reconstruction of the western part of the Southern Great Wall and the northern part of the Eastern Great Wall was completed Reconstruction of the South Gate and the northeastern building was complete
1996	Reconstruction of the northern wooden wall was completed 271st and 276th investigations (excavations at the pond)
1997	Reconstruction of the central building, bridge and arched bridge was completed 280th investigation (excavation at the southeastern part) 284th investigation (excavation at the southwestern part)
1998	Reconstruction of the western building, two north-south wooden walls and Southern Great Wall (extension) was completed Reconstruction of the garden around the pond was finished Opening to the public
1999	302nd investigation (excavation of the Kyokusui stream)
2000	323rd investigation (excavation at the junction of the stream and pond)
	Reconstruction of the corner tower, stream, and the southeast corner of the Great Wall were completed.
	Reconstruction project of the East Palace Garden was completed.
2009	Designated as a National Site of Extraordinary Scenic Beauty.



30 minutes walk from Yamato Saidaiji station of Kintetsu Railway

Or, take a bus to Saidaiji from JR Nara station and Kintetsu Nara station, or to JR Nara station from Yamato Saidaiji station, and get off at Heijō-kyōseki bus stop, and walk for 10 minutes. Closed on Monday (except for National Holidays on Monday, in which case the museum is open on the holiday and closed the following Tuesday instead) and year-end holidays.  
Open daily 9:00-16:30 (last admission 16:00)  
Free admission

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