The Japanese Garden and the indoor flower show room of Smith College, while very different in layout, composition and botanical origin, are most severely contrasted through the differences in each garden’s intent. The Japanese Garden, completed in May 1985 by then Smith College president Jill Ker Conway, was intended as an always-accessible place of reflection and contemplation, complete with rock statues that symbolize seven significant stages in the life of Siddhartha Buddha that relate to important Buddhist teachings. The indoor flower show room is meant to house several flower shows throughout the year and regardless of the season, the room always contains flowers that are fragrant and in bloom.

During the time period in which I visited, the room held the Fall Chrysanthemum show, which lasts for only two weeks in November. The room was filled floor to ceiling with colorful varieties of chrysanthemums and yet, it was clear the room was not meant as a place for extended visitation. The flowers were most certainly the center of focus in the room, meant to be looked at and not touched. This limited interaction is in sharp contrast with the Japanese Garden, the entire purpose of which is reflection and thought through interaction with the peaceful environment of the garden. Each garden was created with an intention in mind and these intentions, whether they be peaceful contemplation or showcasing especially beautiful specimens, have become reality through effective use of specific specimens, arrangements and layouts.

The Japanese Garden was created with a specific purpose in mind, as an open, contemplative space. For the desired intention to be achieved, all the elements of the garden had to be manipulated very carefully and harmoniously. The elements of the garden include the colors of the foliage, the plants in the garden and the other non-organic parts of the garden such as statues and buildings. The specific arrangement of these elements communicates the purpose
of the garden to the visitor. The foliage of the Japanese Garden includes Japanese Maple trees, Bitter Orange trees, Winter Hazel trees and Japanese Mountain Cherry trees along with some native foliage that is interspersed among the larger plants. Together these plants compose a beautiful yet understated garden that is clearly encouraging visitors to enjoy and interact with it. Other elements that communicate the purpose of the garden to visitors are the seven rock statues relating to important events in the life of Buddha. These statues tell the story of Buddha’s personal path to enlightenment, which then serves to encourage visitors to seek their own paths and look deep within themselves for inspiration in their everyday lives. The tea hut and the benches that are present in the garden serve to beckon onlookers to sit and meditate and to interact with their surroundings. The purpose of the garden is not solely visual, it is meant to be an environment that fosters creativity and self-reflection as evidenced by the arrangement of the garden around the Tea hut. Visitors are meant to truly engage with the garden.

This is in contrast with the flower show room where the Chrysanthemum Show was being held. The flower show room was overflowing with bursts of color and extravagance, visitors are meant to admire and appreciate it. The Japanese Garden on the other hand does not contain many flowers such as these because flowers exaggerate the physical beauty of a place, serving as distractions, as opposed to encouraging a calm and open atmosphere of internal reflection and even perhaps religious contemplation. The flower show room was bright with an atmosphere of showmanship and competition, as a result of the voting that was taking place to determine the best chrysanthemum arrangement. Additionally the flower show room had no place for sitting and thinking, the arrangement of the room encouraged movement and flow throughout the whole greenhouse. The chaotic juxtaposition of flowers in the room does not produce the same peaceful atmosphere as the Japanese Garden. Another use of the flower show room is to have live
specimens of plants and especially flowers that are available for scientific study by the botanical department at the college and by students interested in botanical studies. There is no substitution for live plants as Pavord asserts, “Drawings and paintings were good, but the real plants, if carefully made to preserve their essential characteristics, were even better.”

The Japanese Garden also communicates an important message about nature. It is mean to be interacted with and enjoyed on a daily basis. When I visited the garden I noted several signs of visitation to the garden, presumably from students. I saw some graffiti on the back side of the tea hut with the message “Que sera sera” meaning what will be, will be. I also noted some carvings on a tree at the back of the garden that said people’s names, probably generations of visitors to the garden. While these signs are not particularly respectful, they demonstrate real interactions with the garden, as the creator intended. People are obviously not afraid to express themselves in the garden, and that, while not conventional, is a path to self-discovery in itself.

The Japanese garden additionally communicates a message about Smith College and their feelings surrounding nature. From their decision to create the garden, the administrators of Smith College are saying that calm reflection is important to the academic and emotional lives of their students. Life can be extremely stressful at an elite liberal arts college such as Smith and the effort to reduce this stress is very commendable on the part of the administrators. This garden was one of the most recent additions to the botanical gardens at Smith College, which also communicates to the visitor that administrators have the knowledge and the intelligence to recognize a need when it surfaces and to handle changing times as capably as possible.

Art and science are traditionally considered greatly separate fields, however they come to a conjunction in botanical gardens. The artistry required by landscape design meets the scientific

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1 Pavord, Anna. "In Italy 1500-1550, and The First Botanic Garden." In The Naming of Names: The Search for Order in the World of
knowledge necessarily to successfully plant botanical specimens in foreign soil. A wealth of scientific specimens is created with artistry unparalleled in any drawing or representation. In the Japanese Garden at Smith College, the botanical specimens are beautifully placed surrounding the Tea House with the rock sculptures artistically placed in the way most conclusive to perfectly calm and peaceful reflection. The scientific knowledge required to create the Japanese Garden must have been great as a result of the wide variety of specimens used. Trees from Korea, Japan and China are all present in the gardens and thriving in the atmosphere created for them.

The Japanese Garden in comparison to the flower show room is untamed, wild, self-sufficient and constantly changing while the indoor flower show room is meticulously groomed, dependent on caretakers and climate controlled. Though, despite all of these differences, the main and most important distinction is the intent of each garden. One is meant for reflection, contemplation and most importantly interaction with nature and the other is meant for admiration, competition and appreciation from a distance. These disparities in intent are communicated through the different layouts, specimens and compositions of each garden created by each garden designer.
Critique from Mikey

Intro:
Good: There is a lot of good information there. I liked your history of the garden, I actually learned a lot from it. I really like that you figured out the intentions of the room when it was built and didn’t just give information about what you saw.
Needs Improvement: I think you need something else to start off the paragraph. It doesn’t hook the audience the way that it might want to. Your thesis is a little vague.

“Each garden was created with an intention in mind and these intentions have become reality through effective use of specific specimens, arrangements and layouts.”

This could be more specific instead of saying these intentions. You also say an intention in mind but for some reason, to me, that just seems really vague as well. This paragraph might also be split up into two paragraphs, or should just be shortened. Its just a little lengthy and could cause the reader to get bored of it.

Conclusion:
Good: I like this. You restate what I think is your thesis in the conclusion, as you should. Your wording is nice and it flows well.
Needs Improvement: The opening sentence of this paragraph is really long. It should also be ; however… not , however. That’s just something small though. Again, there could be a little bit more specificity in some of the descriptions, but overall, I like it.

Things to watch out for:
I like your opening and conclusion paragraphs as a whole. I just hope that you have enough information to support your thesis. It seems like a pretty limited topic, so I just hope that you have enough supportive evidence to prove it. Also, be sure at the end of every body paragraph to tie your points back to your thesis. This is vital to the success of the paper. I like what you’ve done so far though and I hope that it is able to fulfill the thesis because its quite interesting.

Critique from Dan

Introduction:
I really like how detailed your introduction is, and the explanation you give about the purpose of each of the rooms, but I think you could make it a little more concise. Currently it comes across as a bit lengthy, but I think this could be fixed. For example the I think you could cut the section where you write:

During the time period in which I visited, the room held the Fall Chrysanthemum show, which lasts for only two weeks in November. The room was filled floor to ceiling with colorful varieties of chrysanthemums and bees were buzzing excitedly around the flowers, and yet, it was clear the room was not meant as a place for extended visitation.

I think this section is not necessary, and could be moved to the body of your essay. I think you would accomplish the same goal without these lines, and it would come of as much more
compact and direct.

Conclusion:

Your conclusion is very good, and I especially like the last two sentences as they make it clear what exactly separates these two sections of the gardens. However I think your first sentence drags on a little bit but that can be fixed. I think you should divide the first sentence in the two sentences. Finish the first at controlled and begin the second at despite and then fix the grammar in each of the sentences as need be. Overall though I think it’s a strong conclusion.

Watch out:

It seems that you tend to write in lengthy sentences and while it allows you to display a lot of detail I think it can take away from your argument a little bit. Try sticking to shorter sentences that really hit your points, so that the reader knows exactly what points you are making and never has to stop to try to put together all the different aspects of one sentence. Just make sure you can tell the significance of every sentence, and that no one appears too long and confusing.

Goals to reach for: Make sure you really focus on the points you lay out in your introduction because they are strong and would make for a great essay, but I know how distracting all the different aspects of the gardens were and I know the temptation to drift off from the points you should be making and write about other aspects of the garden. I think you chose two great spots to write about, and as long as you stick to the path you lay out in your introduction I think you should be fine.

My response

Hi guys,

Thank you for your feedback it definitely helped in thinking about my paper. Mikey I completely agree with your feedback, I will try to make my introductory sentence a little more engaging to the reader and also try to clear up my thesis a little more so that it doesn't muddle the direction I want to take with my paper. I also will try to shorten the first paragraph quite a bit, I have an unfortunate tendency to drag on in my introductory paragraphs. I will also take your advice with regards to the rest of the paper and try to tie everything back to the thesis because often times I forget to do that. Dan, thank you for the specific advice about which area to cut from the intro, I agree that it would be more useful in the body of the paper. Also the specific suggestions about the conclusion are very helpful as well. I know I definitely have a tendency to write in run on sentences so I shall keep an eye on that. Also I will try my best to stick to the topic that I have chosen and to tie everything back to my conclusion.

Thanks again for the feedback!