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Interview transcript: Patricia Deridder of Yume Japanese Gardens

The Library's **Biblio Lotus team is delighted to present this interview series**, hoping to elevate Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities' voices and celebrate their culture. The interviewees are in different fields and from various backgrounds, but their dedication to AAPI histories and cultures helps form our diverse and dynamic community in Pima County.

Patricia Deridder is the founder and executive director of **Yume Japanese Gardens**, a Tucson non-profit that aims to share the tranquility of a Japanese garden with our community. We're grateful to her for sitting down with us and sharing some insights into how the gardens came to be and some of the unique qualities of a Japanese garden.

This interview was conducted in May 2021 by Megan H., Children's Library Associate at Kirk-Bear Canyon Library.

Megan: How did Yume Japanese Gardens begin?

Patricia: I moved to Tucson about twenty years ago now, and just at that time my parents had passed away in Europe. And I sold the estate, I sold my place, everything. So I had a little bit of money and I was wondering, 'what can I do with it?' And because I had lived in Japan for fifteen years I thought, what better way to try to express the Japanese culture, and the Japanese aesthetics, and the Japanese feeling towards nature-what better than a Japanese garden. And at first I thought a museum, but I didn't really- that was not my priority- so that is how the Japanese garden happened.

Megan: Well, very good. So it started kind of as a museum, but then it developed more as a garden?

Patricia: No. no, no, no, no. I started as a garden right away.

Megan: Oh, ok.

Patricia: But when I first came to the United States-I am from Belgium. So, I went from Belgium to Japan, and then from Japan to the U.S. So when I first came I thought, "Oh it would be so nice to make a museum", but for that you need a lot of money. And also it limits us as to what you can do as far as sharing. With a garden you can share the culture, you can share the festivals, you can share the special days they have. So there's a lot of things you can do. With a museum, you're a little more limited. At the end, I made a small museum within the gardens. And many people think the gardens are a museum in their own right; because when I first came to the United States, one of my friends in Japan was rebuilding their house. And in the countryside-the house- they basically take them to the field and burn them down because everything is wood and paper, you have a little bit of glass of course but for the most part, that's

what they do. So I asked them, can I take a few pieces from their house. And I integrated- I didn't know I was going to be making a Japanese garden at that time, it was so long ago- but when I did finally do the gardens, I had some tiles that I put on the top of the gates, and the sliding doors that we have, the little houses that we have. So I did integrate a lot of it, as much as I could twenty years later into the garden.

Megan: Very cool. So what makes a Japanese garden unique compared to a different kind of garden?

Patricia: Like a botanical garden, you mean?

Megan: Or compared to a European style garden, or…

Patricia: An English style garden?

Megan: Yeah

Patricia: Well the difference is that you are trying to bring landscapes and nature into a smaller space. So you don't really copy but you take the essence of it. So most of the trees, unless they are shading trees, are human sized. Everything is built in a humanistic way, if I can say. And they are different also because each plant is important; and that's why I felt you could have it in the desert in Tucson, because we use a lot of gravel. We use a lot of stones, and those are very important. They are almost as important as the greenery. We also don't use many flowers. You might get a few more flowers, blooming trees or blooming shrubs in the spring; but most of the year we play more with just textures of the leaves or the type of plants we put in there. And you have to be able to see every plant, so you don't have to plant too much. Actually grass is something that was introduced only during the 19th century in Japan. Before that they had moss or they were just showing the dirt or gravel. So that's what makes, you know aesthetically, a Japanese garden different from the others. Now the other thing too is that there are parks in Japan which has a lot of grass or they have later gardens that have a lot of grass, very famous. But the gardens we try to represent here are not palace gardens. They are what people would have had about two, three hundred years ago, in Kyoto, and they are courtyard gardens. And they created those courtyards because the landscape made it so that Kyoto was built in a valley and it was very hot in the summer. And so in order to respond to that, they would build a house and have several courtyards within or they could have just one, but like a big atrium if you want.

Megan: Like an open house planning.

Patricia: Right. And because they had sliding doors. In the summer sliding doors can be made of reeds instead of solid. It can have a breeze going all the time. And so what I wanted to show here in Tucson was those courtyard gardens more so than just regular noble gardens or big park gardens or other types of things that you can see in Japan. So they are very different. Phoenix, they have a beautiful garden that is four acres. It's a very large one. And you go around a large pond and they have different features too, and that's a very nice Japanese garden. They have a master pruner that is there 24/7. You have less of that in Tucson. It's not as manicured as Phoenix, but it's just a different type of garden.

Megan: Yeah. So, speaking of the plants, is there any specific care for these Japanese plants in the Southern Arizona climate 'cause I imagine it's a lot less humid, a lot more dry, than you would have in Kyoto.

Patricia: Yes, you're totally right there. We have a hard time having maples, for example; but there are still ways if you plant them under or surround them by other trees. Nandina, Heavenly Bamboo, for example, grows very well here. It thrives. Boxwood or Myrtle bushes, they do as well over there as they do here. Bamboo in general does very well here. Actually at the entrance of our gardens here we have Timber Bamboo that's as tall as a three story high building.

Megan: Wow.

Patricia: Yeah, you should come and see it.

Megan: Yes, I will.

Patricia: So yes, a lot of the plants- we have irises, you can grow irises by the water here. There's many, many plants that we were able to use as they use in Japan.

Megan: Very good. So that would be good for home gardeners to know as well if they want to add a bit of the Japanese gardens to their own yard.

Patricia: Definitely. We have a lot of visitors who come and they say, "We'd like to do a Japanese garden. What do you recommend?"

Megan: Ah, yeah.

Patricia: I tell them where to get the stones, where to get whatever they need.

Megan: Perfect. And so when I looked on your website, you teach the ikebana classes at the gardens. So can you tell me a little about what ikebana is?

Patricia: Well ikebana is Japanese flower arrangements. It started 550 years ago in Japan, in Kyoto as a matter of fact. Its oldest school was named 'ikenobo'. So a lot of people confuse ikebana, ikenobo. Ikebana evolved and there's now about 2,000 schools.

Megan: Oh, wow.

Patricia: They all started from ikenobo. And, you know, everybody has its taste and everybody has its own ways of doing and it evolves into very interesting, different types of arrangements. Each school has their own style, their own forms they follow. It's usually made with branches as well as flowers and reeds. You always have a mix, which makes it very different from any kind of Western-style arrangement where you have mostly flowers. In ikebana you can just cut two branches, three reeds, and one or two flowers and you have an arrangement.

Megan: Oh, good.

Patricia: But it takes a long time. I've been doing it for over fifty years. Anybody who is really serious about it, it's a lifetime study. And again, ikebana…its foundation is in…it came from the temples. And therefore there's a spiritual side to it too. When you do ikebana, but in a serious form, and become a teacher and things like that, then we call it 'kado'- the way of the flowers. Like you have 'shodo'- for the way of the brush. You have…there's a lot of 'do's in there, a lot of 'ways' in Japan. But ikebana is one of them too. So it depends if you do ikebana for the sake of making a pretty arrangement; or if you go deeper into it over the years you do 'the way of the flowers'. So it's very different because you cannot really do that when you do Western-style arrangements because Western-style arrangements are very quickly done. The material is very similar. I mean it's florist material, you don't have to think much about it.

Megan: Mmhm..

Patricia: But when you use the branch from a tree, or when you use a flower that you just got outside, or even flowers that you buy, you have to look at each individual one. You have to look at the leaves. You have to look at the position of where the flower looks the best. And same thing with the branches. You cut a little piece of one tree. But then which side will show the best to you when you make your arrangements? So it takes a long time. This morning, I was teaching actually, and I had cut two branches from an ornamental plum. You know I had a few students. It took them about an hour to put one together event though we had three branches to put into the vase. But you have to bend them according to certain forms, they have to have certain sizes. So it's a little more complicated and it always takes time and you never know. You never do twice the same thing, which is wonderful.

Megan: There's always some thoughtfulness to it, yeah.

Patricia: Right.

Megan: And you had talked about the Phoenix garden. There's a couple of Japanese gardens in the Southwest. Do you ever collaborate or have any partnerships with those gardens?

Patricia: Oh yes. Well, there's not many in the Southwest. Phoenix is probably the only one that you have in Arizona. And then after that most of them are in California.

Megan: Yeah, there's one in San Diego- probably the closest one after Phoenix.

Patricia: Yes, the biggest. And then there's quite a few in Los Angeles. With LA, it's a little far away already but with Phoenix, yes, we do collaborate a lot. Actually, maybe you don't know, but we had something that we call the Thousand Crane Healing for Tucson at the beginning of COVID, and we gathered about three thousand cranes and made a big exhibit out of it. We made mobiles out of them. We put them through the trees, had a big exhibit. So that we did in Tucson, and then we brought them about two month ago to Phoenix and set them up over there for their own festival. It was another festival. Sometimes they give us very large banners that they do with calligraphy. So they bring them for us on loan and we set them up in the gardens for our events. So we try to have…sometimes we have groups. We just had a Butō dance group that is from Tucson. So we are trying to bring them to Phoenix too. We try to exchange our artists that are very specific to the Japanese culture. For the Children's Festival we had two days ago, we had an artist that performs a lot at the gardens over there [Phoenix] too. He was doing Taiko drumming.

Megan: Oh, wow.

Patricia: We do have our Taiko drumming here, also. That is wonderful. But you know, sometimes you want something different, and so we do exchanges like that too.

Megan: Yeah, to add to the variety of programs.

Patricia: Right. And sometimes you know, like for example, they have lots of lanterns. We borrow the lanterns for festivals because it's very expensive to buy. And yes, so we do have a lot of collaboration between us.

Megan: Materials as well. And with the artists, like the Taiko drummer and the others, so how did you build those connections with the Japanese artist community in Tucson and Pima County area?

Patricia: Well, just because we want to show as much of the culture of Japan. So, finally, you know like the gardens too, you have the Taiko drummer, you have a group of shakuhachi players, the flute players…um and over the years, I've gotten to meet them. People who do kyudo, the archery, people who do judo, and there's all those different Japanese cultural….I mean I don't know. They're not really businesses, but they are certainly artistic features of the culture that I always wanted to bring as much of that as I can to the gardens. That's how I got to meet them.

Megan: So that was maybe through friends of friends kind of thing? But how did you form that kind of connection?

Patricia: Looking online or … Also, a few years ago, Pima used to have a very nice…it was kind of a Japanese concours…and they had a big festival at the same time. And they would invite all those different groups and perform. And it was while the children, even young adults, would give their speeches, speaking Japanese. After that, there would be all that festival going on and that's how I got to know quite a few people too.

Megan: That helps a lot.

Patricia: It's a very small world.

Megan: Yes, yeah, definitely.

Patricia: We find each other. And some people just come into the gardens and they say, "Oh, by the way, I do this or I do that". I found a lady who does puppets and she had a show that was very specific. It was a Japanese folk tale. She came and performed at the gardens. She was not Japanese. She's like me, I mean, except she never went to Japan, I don't think. But still, her…she did it in such a scholarly way that I felt it could be brought into the garden. I am an archeologist at heart, so everything has to be as true to the culture. I don't want to put up a show where you'll have a caricature of Japan. It has to be true. It has to respect the culture. And so, when I found an artist that maybe is not Japanese, I look at the show and if I think it's of that level, that grade, then they can come in. Otherwise, they don't.

Megan: It has to take it seriously.

Patricia: Right, right. Because if you start watering down what you provide, then people cannot learn. They cannot learn what the real thing is. And I think it's true for any culture. You want to be represented for what you are really.

Megan: Yeah you have to be able to…take the right kind of notes and be sure you're doing the right thing. And do you have any upcoming events or programs that you would like to share with the community? You just had the Children's Day, but is there anything else coming up before you close for the summer?

Patricia: Well tomorrow night and Saturday night we will have two evenings where we'll have somebody will play shakuhachi, the flute, as well as harp. It's a very talented person. His name is Paul Amiel. And he has gone to Japan. He has studied in Japan. His level is really high as far as I'm concerned for the flute playing. It's amazing. And so he will kind of play in the background

and people will be able to visit the gardens that we decorate actually. This time it will be with umbrellas. And of course lanterns, and candles, and things like that. People can just take an evening stroll.

Megan: Very pretty.

Patricia: That will be the conclusion for our season, which was a very short season because of COVID. But we hope to be able to reopen…We have to wait until the end of the summer because in summer people don't come.

Megan: Yes, it's too hot.

Patricia: Not only that, we do have to cover some plants, because even though they…most of them survive, they need a lot of TLC.

Megan: They need some protection.

Patricia: Once you cover them, and you have to close up the buildings and things like that, it's very difficult to open even in the evenings. It's not possible. So, we close until October and hopefully, maybe we'll try to get some grants or something like that, reopen with lots of events and things like that starting next year. Now the other feature of a Japanese garden that I didn't mention, which is also one of the main reasons why I chose to do a garden, is because most Japanese gardens, even if they are not Zen gardens, provide a very healing surrounding. When I first created those gardens, I went to an association of Japanese gardens- the National Japanese Association. And they had a program within the three days…that was about the healing in Japanese gardens that had been studied in a very medical, how do you say it, approach.

Megan: Scientific?

Patricia: Scientific, yeah. Scientific, medical research. And it was a program that had started in the Morikami Gardens in Florida. And, speaking of another exchange that we had. So they had started that and they had several thousands of people that went through that program and they had done major studies about it. And they had just completed that when I went to that program. And I thought, "Well, this is the best program ever for people to quiet down. To sit. To reflect on life. And also to heal". The purpose of it was to help people who have for example lost a person. Or they have a problem they don't know what to do with themselves. They need to find a new way to look at things. And it's a six-week program, minimum six weeks. And you walk through the gardens and you journal about a specific subject that we provide in a book. So when I saw that and I hear about it, I thought, "This is amazing". I mean it's not total therapy. We cannot change everybody. But we have a success rate of over 80 percent.

Megan: Oh, very good.

Patricia: Which is unusual for that kind of therapeutic walks. So I said, "I want that for this garden. This is going to be the reason for the garden to be." Of course, I want to share the culture. I want to share the events, and things like that. But at the core, I really want people in Tucson to be able to be able to have a space where they can learn to be happy again.

Megan: Mmhm..To work on their mental health.

Patricia: Exactly. So that was really the main reason to create the gardens and the Morikami was very good. They loaned us the book, they told us we could apply it to our garden. And when I designed it, I designed it with that book, because we need stations where people sit and look at specific things. So I designed it so that there would be all the elements. Of course the Morikami, I don't know how many acres because it's a really big garden. But in our garden, which is only three quarters on an acre, we fit everything except that it's smaller. It's not miniature. It's still human sized. But instead of having a twenty or thirty foot bridge, our bridge might be fifteen. Or ten. Or six. So we just made it more, even more human. In that size, in that sense. So I always think that the gardens in Tucson are absolutely perfect for that program, and that's really the biggest achievement I think we have done at Yume.

Megan: Doing that program?

Patricia: Yes, yes.

Megan: Yeah, that sounds like a really valuable program.

Patricia: Yes, it's difficult to let the word out that it's there. That has been certified, you know; but it's something that you do on your own. I mean, we provide a guide once or twice to help navigating how to use the book; but really, it's work that you do on yourself, for yourself. So that's the beauty of it. You don't have to go back every week to a counselor.

Megan: Ah, yeah. Self-guided therapy.

Patricia: Exactly.

Megan: And since this is an interview for the library, can you share some of your favorite books with us?

Patricia: Hmm. You mean related to Japan?

Megan: It could be related to Japan or it could just be a favorite novel that you read.

Patricia: Recently?

Megan: It could be an old favorite too. Either way.

Patricia: Well, let's keep it in the Japanese realm. I'd say "Shogun" [author: James, Clavell].

Megan: Shogun?

Patricia: Yes, because it was very true to the life of the times. And it was a fun story to read, very long but very educational at the same time too.

Megan: Nice. And what are you currently reading?

Patricia: Currently, it's more like "What to do with your plants".

Megan: Ah. Gardening books.

Patricia: Yeah how to trim in the more Japanese way. You know, I did this garden, but I didn't have the training for it. And I'm not a gardener to begin with. So I did it, and then I met a Japanese third-generation landscape architect from Kyoto. And I said I want to do those as true to the principles as it can be. And I just said, "Okay. What am I doing wrong? How can I

improve?” And so we worked on it. He never said I was wrong. Japanese don’t do that to you. But if I didn’t do it right, he would have really told me and he would have never come back. Now he comes back every year to check if things are ok. And he brings sometimes brings a couple of people that help pruning the big trees.

Megan: Oh wow.

Patricia: Yes, because you still need to have a little bit of a Japanese sense there. So it’s something you can’t find except for the gardens in Phoenix where they have an excellent pruner. You can’t find that in Arizona. Maybe if you go to California, yes. But then they don’t like to work here because of how the plants are reacting. And it’s just because the seasons are not the same.

Megan: The desert environment. Yeah, very different.

Patricia: Different. So you have accommodate it to some extent.

Megan: Yes, yeah. Well, thank you. Those were all of the interview questions.