



A writer, Keane's books include *Japanese Garden Design* (an introduction to the culture and aesthetics of Japanese gardens), *Sakuteiki* (a translation of the Japan's oldest gardening treatise), *The Art of Setting Stones* (eight essays on the meaning of gardens), and the newly published, *Japanese Tea Gardens*. More about Keane's work can be found at www.mpkeane.com.

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Art in the Garden



The Bontei Tray Gardens of Marc Peter Keane



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Photography by Jonathan Ley



The *Bontei* Tray Gardens of Marc Peter Keane

In Japanese *bontei* means tray garden. There are many traditions in East Asia of presenting stones and plants on trays or in ceramic pots. All of these traditions express the beauty and rhythms of nature in highly abstracted form, capturing the sense of reflection one feels in wild nature in the space of a tray. My *bontei* begin within that tradition but broaden the scope to include new materials and philosophies the way modern gardens do.

The design of *bontei* derives from that of Japanese gardens. The overall balance, for instance, often incorporates "empty" space and points of punctuation found in *karesansui*, gardens of stone and raked sand. This emptiness is called "*ma*" in Japanese and can refer to the undeveloped space in a garden, the unpainted portion of an ink landscape painting or a silent period in music.

The aesthetics of *bontei*, their colors, patterns and textures, is that of common materials used in a refined way. Stones, rusted



metal, wood-fired ceramics. In Japan, this would be called the *wabi* aesthetic, which is most closely associated with the tea ceremony. As a counterpoint to the rusticity of the *wabi* elements, I introduce elements that are precise and highly controlled. This interplay between diametric opposites is also a common theme in the aesthetics of the tea ceremony in which the element of control is called "*shin*" and that of wildness is called "*do*."

Marc Peter Keane lived in Kyoto, Japan, for 18 years, designing gardens for private individuals, companies and temples, and continues that work now from his studio in Ithaca, New York. His designs range from classical Japanese gardens to avant garden interpretations. He is affiliated with the Research Center for Japanese Garden Art at the Kyoto University of Art and Design, the East Asian Program at Cornell University, and the Institute for Medieval Japanese Studies at Columbia University.

