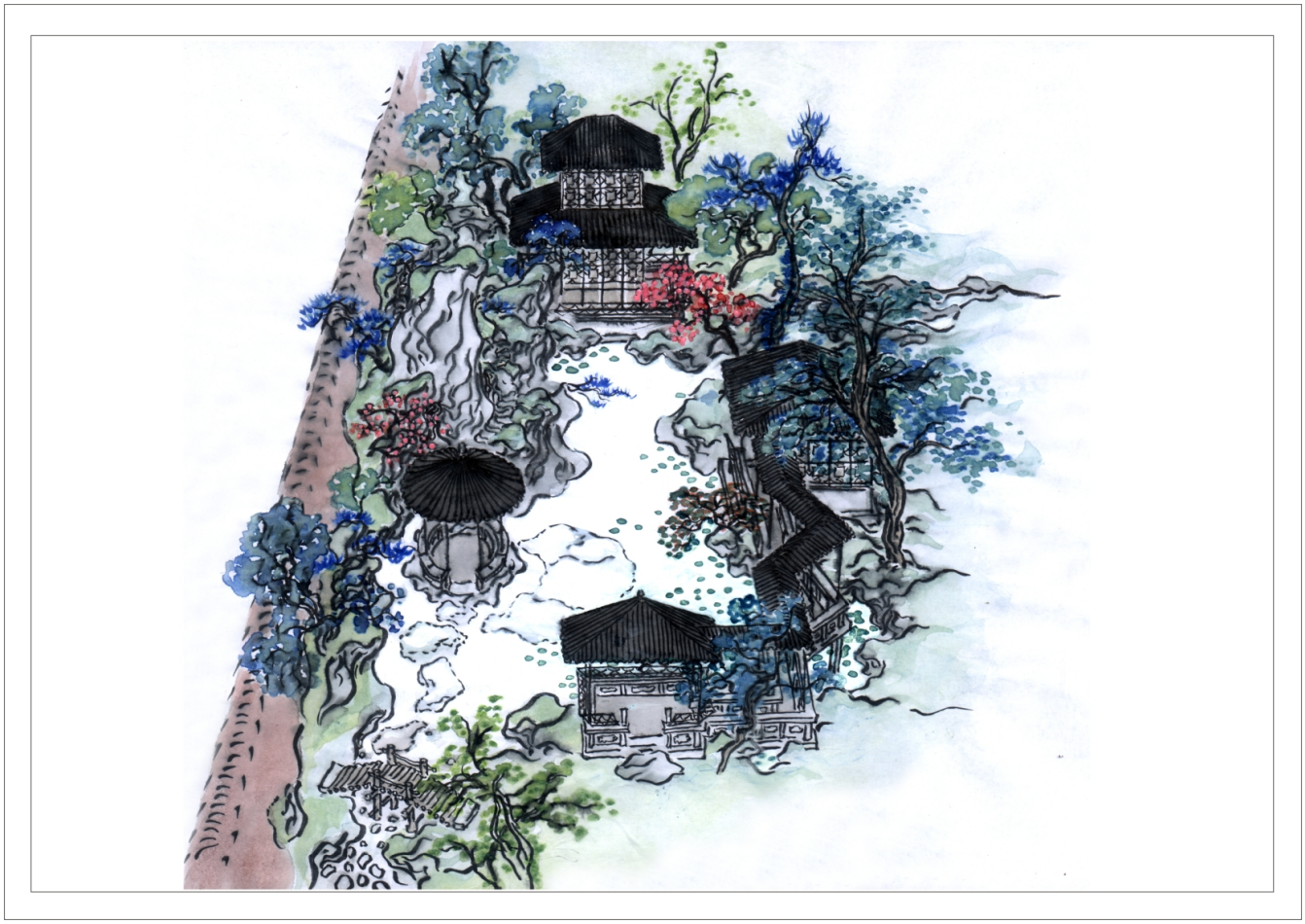


An artist from Suzhou dreams of bringing a garden from Suzhou, “the Venice of the East”, to the Venice of Marco Polo. That master is Ye Fang, creator of one of the most famous gardens in Suzhou, a small town in southern China that counts Venice as a sister city. The Chinese garden is not merely an object of pure aesthetic enjoyment, an exotic emblem, a wonder from a distant land.
It is a space rich in arcane mysteries and meaningful symbols, that reveal themselves to the watchful observer walking full of curiosity through its winding paths.

Ye Fang chooses every component with great care: the stones, the flowers, the plants, the wooden pavilions that one encounters crossing the bridges and walking along the garden paths. It is a miniature landscape and as such it must contain its essential parts, laid out in harmony according to the Chinese art of fengshui: the hill, a natural barrier against harmful influences,

water, a fundamental element that is a symbol of life and of spontaneous mouvement, the stones, essence of the mountain, that sacred place and axis mundi. Finally, plants and flowers: the plum tree (mei), a favourite among trees, is the symbol of purity and youth, the peach tree (tao) is the emblem of matrimonial union and immortality, the willow tree (liu) is the symbol of spring and femininity, the orchid (lan) suggests refinement and learnedness, the lotus flower (lianhua) is the Buddhist symbol of peace, continuity and above all purity, because it rises from the mud with its scented white flowers.

Ye Fang studies the shapes of his garden, but without fixing them in a geometric plan because what emerges is not the product of his artistic genius, rather the product of the nature that lives within him. He imagines the thoughts that each stone, each flower, each bridge might provoke and he places these in a harmonious manner so as to create a wonderful landscape that reflects the inner equilibrium and encourages meditation, introspection and the awakening of the senses. Water reflections, shadows, colours and shapes combine to suggest other aspects of reality. Everything is present and alive, like in a wonderful microcosm in which fantasy meets reality. Ye Fang draws inspiration from Chinese traditional thought to complete the space and time of his garden: the art and history of ancient China live in a modern garden.

This why, along the paths, we find stelae bearing the verses of poets from Imperial China. In order to carry out the construction of his garden, Ye Fang frequently travels to lake Tai and the surrounding mountains: there he finds stones with the strangest shapes, ideally suited for his design and the healthiest and most beautiful plants. Now his dream moves to the West, to the city of Venice itself: a jewel of Chinese civilization will be set in the ancient city on the island of San Servolo, offering visitors a peaceful and serene place to meditate.