

The 2009 Banks Memorial Lecture: The amazing Dunedin Chinese garden

Douglas (Mick) Field¹

Foreword

This is a personal perspective of the development of the Chinese Garden in Dunedin. It is not so much a story about gardens in the horticultural sense as an observation of events that led to the conception and building of this garden – the developments, influences, and factors that shaped and determined its ultimate creation. Although the underlying reason for the development of the garden was clearly understood and articulated from the beginning, the path that it took had many turns.

In my view, Dunedin has been presented with a treasure that arose from the hearts and souls of the Chinese community to create a garden that is also known as 'Lan Yuan'.

Beginnings

The establishment of a sister city relationship between Dunedin and Shanghai brought Dunedin City Council's Chief Executive (at that time Murray Douglas, Fig. 1A) and Dr Jim Ng (a Dunedin GP and historian, Fig. 1B) together to further the relationship of the two cities.

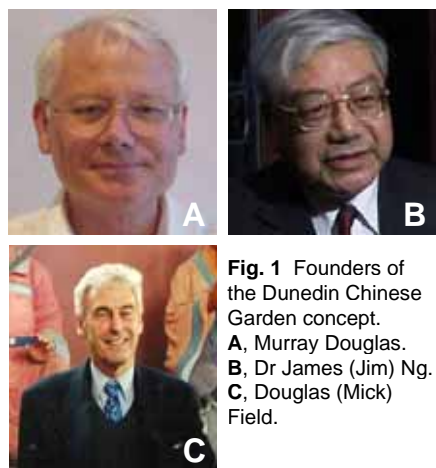


Fig. 1 Founders of the Dunedin Chinese Garden concept.
A, Murray Douglas.
B, Dr James (Jim) Ng.
C, Douglas (Mick) Field.

It was on a trip to Shanghai in May 1996 to organise events for the 1998 sesqui centenary of Dunedin, according to Jim Ng, that Murray raised the idea of building a Chinese

Garden. Murray was also involved with the Hamilton City Council's development of a Chinese Scholar's garden in the 1980s. The idea took root, and in mid 1996 I attended a meeting at Dr Ng's house to discuss the possibilities of building such a garden. The essential idea was that the wider Dunedin and Otago Chinese community would be asked if they would present the city with a garden as their contribution to mark the 150th celebration of settlement of the province. The city had earmarked NZ\$50,000 for the Chinese input to the sesqui centenary and Jim Ng himself was enamoured with the idea as it meant recognition of the contribution that the Chinese had made to the province for well over 100 years.

As a result, I was charged with the task of managing a steering committee to assess the feasibility of building a garden in Dunedin (Fig. 1C).

The Chinese community

It was clear to me that the opportunity of presenting some of the Chinese culture to the wider New Zealand community was very important to many of the older Chinese residents. On reflection it was obvious that their culture was substantially if not completely suppressed in New Zealand. There was little or no outward and visible expression of this rich and ancient culture to be seen anywhere. While the ignorant and inhumane treatment of 19th and early 20th century Chinese had disappeared, none the less Chinese people had a low profile in the community until the late 20th century. My observation was that the people with whom I worked were overjoyed by the opportunity of developing a garden. Not a 'Kiwi' idea of what a Chinese garden might be but one that encapsulated the depth of culture

that emanated from their souls. To my mind, this desire to express their culture was such a driving force that it helped overcome the many difficulties and obstacles that lay in the path ahead.

Initially, the people involved in developing the concept were Chinese with the help of a few Europeans. Later, many more Europeans joined in to help when and where they could.

Steering committee

The committee established to deal with the garden reported to Jim Ng who was in charge of the overall Chinese input to the sesquicentennial celebration. Jim effectively functioned as 'de facto' head of the Chinese community.

On the steering committee were Frances Wong, Duncan Sew Hoy, Alex Tang and myself. Frances and Duncan were from long-established Dunedin Chinese families while Alex was an engineer from Hong Kong.

Our first tasks were to locate a suitable site and find an architect familiar with the design principles of the classical Chinese garden. Clearly, this person had to be Chinese. Here Alex was helpful because he knew an architect (Bruce Young) who was a 'Kiwi' Chinese now living in Auckland but who had worked extensively in Hong Kong and was familiar with the design of Chinese gardens. Perfect! All we had to do was persuade him to take the job on. Alex made the initial contact with Bruce Young and upon his expression of interest I also made contact with him.

Site

The task of finding a suitable site was not easy. First, there was no concept design that would provide an idea of the space needed; second, no money was available to purchase land, and third, the garden needed to be sited close to the city centre to function as

¹ Field Landscapes, PO Box 6150, Dunedin North, Dunedin; douglas.field@xtra.co.nz

the tourist attraction we envisaged. In order to establish a feel for the amount of land needed, we required a general conceptual notion of what was essential for the garden to work as a tourist attraction.

I sought the assistance of the property department of Dunedin City Council (DCC) to see what land was available and what level of cost was involved. About eight sites were presented, being a mixture of privately and council owned property, ranging in size from about 300 m² to about 1800 m². All these properties were really too small or ultimately unavailable to us. It was clear to me that we had to find a way to increase the amount of space available if we were ever to make a garden of any consequence. Also, at this juncture, the only land that could be considered had to be publicly owned.

There was the usual thrust to have the Chinese garden built in Dunedin Botanic Garden. Anyone who works for local bodies knows about the demands placed upon reserves for purposes other than for what they are intended. In this case I asked the Curator of the Botanic Garden to explain to the committee why that location was inappropriate. He outlined the purpose and function of the Botanic Garden and highlighted the potential conflict of purpose between the Botanic Garden and the Chinese Garden.

The only site that presented any opportunity of expansion was the Rattray Street reserve site. In itself it was inadequate with many underground utility services including water, sewer, electricity, gas, and telecommunications. The area was about 1800 m² and was really a stopped part of Rattray Street. Its virtue lay in the undeveloped land to the north and south of this reserve. The land to the north was owned by the DCC and earmarked for Settler's Museum expansion. The land to the south was owned by Kai Tahu as part of a land settlement agreement. If anything was to be gained here it was necessary to discuss the proposals with both the Museum (DCC) people and the local Iwi.

A site meeting was held on 2nd October 1996 with local Iwi representatives followed by further

meetings with Dunedin City Council's Chief Executive in an attempt to secure land in that area, but ultimately with no success. While the local Iwi were enthusiastic for a cultural-type development the real power regarding the land use lay with the Christchurch-based Iwi whose interests did not align with the local people. At the same time, meetings were held with the Director of the Settler's Museum to develop a working relationship with the museum but also to secure some of their land for the garden. The first meeting with Elizabeth Hinds on the 14th October 1996 was most encouraging as she understood the potential of the proposal and its obvious synergies with the museum. This meant that a positive relationship could be established which resulted in Bruce Young's concepts for development.

Sadly, not long after our meeting, Elizabeth Hinds retired from the museum for health reasons and the vision she shared was not possessed by her successors, so the relationship subsequently withered. However, on the strength of these initial discussions with Elizabeth, the Chief Executive decided that the garden could occupy at least 2600 m² of land to the north of the Rattray Street reserve. This, together with that reserve space provided us with certainty for the garden.

Initial ideas

Initial ideas for the garden were now being formulated in the minds of the steering committee. We knew the site needed to be in the central city to work as a tourist attraction. We realised there would be synergies if it could be associated with the Settler's Museum and that there was a possibility of increasing the size of the site there. We hoped there could be an association with the local Iwi who might develop a garden depicting Maori culture. We believed commercial developments in association with the garden would assist in its viability as a tourist attraction.

This distilled into a concept that divided into three stages.

Stage 1: The garden.

Stage 2: The commercial development (restaurants and shops)

to be developed in conjunction with the private sector.

Stage 3: A cultural centre linked to, and developed in conjunction with, the Settler's Museum.

All this was conveyed to Bruce Young who by now had agreed to provide the concept plans.

The total area of the site adjacent to the Settler's Museum was about 7800 m². All three stages would have provided a truly exciting tourist attraction. The garden including the car parking area now comprises 3900 m² and more or less represents stage one of the initial concept.

Concept plans

Bruce Young visited Dunedin in December 1996 and by early March 1997 produced the first concept sketch plans providing some substance to our ideas (Fig. 2). These were presented to the City Council by Jim Ng and Cr Peter Chin in a briefing of the Community Development Committee.

Site Plan:

Options Considered to Extend Garden to 3 Development Stages

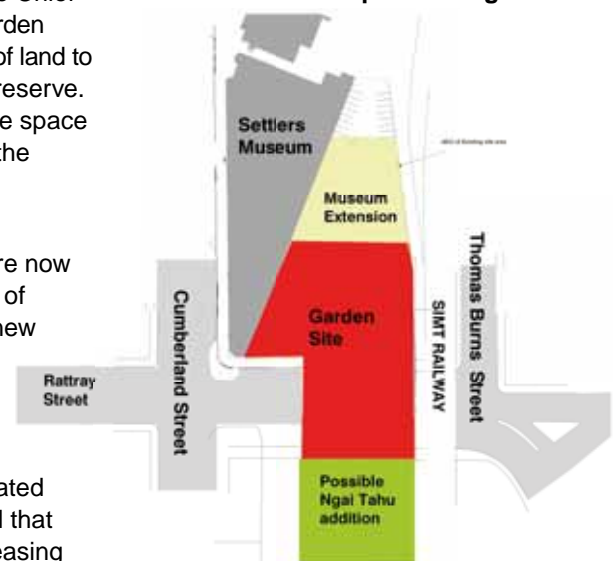


Fig. 2 Initial site plan with options to extend the garden area to three development stages.

Visit by Shanghai Museum officials

On April 23rd 1997 a group of officials from the Shanghai Museum led by Mr Hu visited Dunedin to facilitate an exhibition of the Chinese Splendour Art Exhibition at the new Art Gallery. Duncan Sew Hoy arranged for them to meet with the steering committee to discuss the Chinese Garden proposal.

This transpired to be perhaps the most significant step taken to date and ultimately changed the whole direction of the garden's development. The delegation discussed the concept and viewed Bruce Young's designs. They offered help and advice and suggested that we visit them and view the gardens in Shanghai. This began a lasting relationship with the Shanghai Museum that culminated in their arranging the design and development of the garden we see today.

Formation of the Trust

To progress the development of the garden, the Dunedin Chinese Gardens Trust was formed and registered on 17th July 1997 with Peter Chin as Chairman and 20 trustees. It began setting priorities for work that needed to be done. This broke down into several parts.

Raising the funds for the gardens development was the overarching priority but before that, there were numerous jobs to do to even determine the amount of funding that was needed. There were many questions:

- What is the order of work?
- Do we raise funds for all three stages or part of that?
- What was the cost of the project?
- What consents are needed?
- Who knows how to construct Chinese designed structures in New Zealand?
- Where is the expertise for this?
- Who can cost such work?
- How do we promote the project to raise funds?

The trustees were sure of one thing. They would have to begin fund raising within the Chinese community to establish credibility. How could they possibly ask others for assistance if they first had not made a contribution themselves?

This led to plans for the so-called 'soft launch' for fundraising aimed primarily at the Chinese community. While this initiative was the primary goal, other issues, particularly relating to planning and consents were dealt with concurrently.

European heritage

Concerns regarding European heritage were codified in the law

of the country and the provisions of the District Plan. Planning and building consents and requirements of the Historic Places Trust had to be worked through in an orderly fashion.

Planning and consent issues

The site lay within an area called TH12 Queens Gardens Heritage Precinct of the District Plan. As such special considerations were required before approvals could be given to build the garden here.

The Historic Places Trust was consulted. They were concerned about the reclaimed area and the remains of old piers and wharfs that once were located in the area. They needed to examine all excavations. They were also concerned about the rear facade of the old NZ Road Services building (an Art Deco Structure of the 1930s), and required a 10 metre strip along the eastern face to protect the view (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3 The space between buildings was kept clear so that this facade of the old Art Deco building (left) could be viewed in its entirety.

The facades of the buildings in Cumberland, Bond, Crawford and Rattray Streets were all important in terms of Townscape quality being in the Queen's Gardens Townscape Zone (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4 Cumberland Street facades south of Rattray Street.

The District Plan states:

"Townscape is concerned with the quality of the urban environment. Dunedin's townscape is a product of its setting, history and growth, and the changes that have occurred during its development.

Dunedin has retained many townscape qualities that were a result of the activities of the early settlers and retained more of its early character than any other city in New Zealand. These factors combine to give the central City the charm which is cherished by its inhabitants and appreciated by its visitors."

The proposed introduction of a totally alien architectural style challenged the sensitivities of the planners and their reaction to dealing with it was, to say the least, 'guarded'. The references related to buildings. We argued that we were creating a garden.

There were other quite practical issues relating to building permits that were also challenging in terms of the relevant Acts. There were to be no spouting or drainpipes on these Chinese buildings and to even consider doing this would destroy the whole ambience of the place (Fig. 5). Conventional spouting and drainpipes do not 'sit right' with the roof design of these pavilions.



Fig. 5 Northern courtyard and pavilion – note the roof tile detail and the 'swallowtail' roof line. Rainwater is allowed to discharge onto the paving where it is collected into drains and discharged into the drainage system.

We needed a generous interpretation of the building codes that could separate our garden from the normal structures that the building inspectors encountered. Fortunately the chief building inspector at the time possessed the acumen and breadth of understanding to navigate his way through all the ordinances and requirements of the relevant codes and acts that would allow these pavilions and covered ways to be built in accordance with Chinese customs. Drainage could be taken care of within the garden site. It helped that he had recently toured China and had developed a professional understanding of the way they did things.

Maori heritage

Chinese settlers have traditionally related closely with the Maori community. From the outset of the project, the committee were anxious to meet with the local Iwi to discuss their plans to introduce elements of the Chinese culture into New Zealand. It was as though they believed the Maori were the 'seniors' in regard to heritage and culture in this country and felt they needed to exhibit their 'respect' for this. It was not discussed in those terms but the underlying attitude exuded these sentiments. This was formalised in a meeting held 8th March 1997 at the Karitane Marae where the committee was allowed to address the combined Runanga to discuss the reasons why they wanted to build the Chinese garden in Dunedin.

This respect for cultural recognition extended throughout the development process and was publicly manifest at the blessing given by the local Iwi at the dawn ceremony when the foundation stone was laid in March 1998 (Fig. 6), and again at the formal opening of the garden in September 2008.



Fig. 6 Blessing of the site at the dawn ceremony.

Apart from cultural ties, there was the hope that the local Iwi might be inclined to build a garden of their own adjacent to the Chinese garden. The long history of Maori horticultural expertise, especially related to production of plants for garment making and food, was well known. It seemed that here was an opportunity to develop that theme side by side with the Chinese.

Chinese heritage

The Chinese gold miners who came to Otago in the 1860s were mainly from California and Alaska searching for their fortune in the 'Sun Gum Shan' (the new golden mountain) as the Victorian and Otago gold fields were to be called by them. Later the fields in California and

Alaska were called the 'Gow Gum Shan' or old golden mountain. The Chinese brought expertise and a very strong work ethic with them. Their endeavours were not confined to digging up gold with pick and shovels although undoubtedly and judging by the early photographs in museums, many of them did. But there were the entrepreneurs like Choie Sew Hoy who provided supplies and developed gold dredging, among other things (Fig. 7 A–B).



Fig. 7 The Sew Hoy family created well established businesses in Otago. A, Choie Sew Hoy. B, The Sew Hoy Dredge, a direct prototype of what was to become the New Zealand gold dredge.

The present generation of the Sew Hoy family has been strongly associated with the development of the garden.

When the gold ran out, many Chinese returned to their homelands in China but others stayed on to establish a range of businesses, mainly market gardens, laundries and takeaway fish and chip shops. Later, they became doctors, lawyers, accountants and other professionals. Their contribution to New Zealand society is now well known.

Their heritage from mainland China is not well known in New Zealand. Most of us only have a vague idea of the extent and range of their culture except perhaps the knowledge that China is the eastern cradle of civilisation stretching back thousands of years. If these New Zealand

Chinese celebrated their culture here it was not apparent to other New Zealanders.

In Jim Ng's words the opportunity to participate in the 1998 celebrations of settlement in Otago was grasped with alacrity: "It did not happen in 1948 but it was happening now in 1998 and isn't it appropriate that the Chinese community give (them) a gift to mark the occasion?". To me this statement summed up the relief of more than 100 years of suppression of any overt expression of their culture. It explained to me the joy they felt in developing the garden.

So these varied strands of the cultural background of our Chinese citizens needed to be expressed somehow in the garden.

A garden seemed the best way to express the culture of China. It was seen to be a non-threatening element that anyone could appreciate. Moreover, a Chinese Scholar's garden is much more than a place where plants grow. It is more like a centre of culture in the same way that the great houses of Europe were a focus of culture in the 18th century, where art, music, theatre and horticulture were all put on display for visitors.

The heritage issues all had a bearing on the garden in different ways. The European aspects had to do with constraints, consents, and site infrastructure, and as such were rather cold and logical. They were dealt with in a pragmatic and systematic way, with no emotional connection.

The Maori issues were to do with political and financial matters with a much deeper undercurrent of shared spirituality. In the end the value of the site was reduced to dollar terms and the spiritual values were set aside.

But the Chinese cultural issues went to the heart of the design and purpose of the garden. They fired the imagination and brought joy, amusement, pleasure and intellectual stimulus.

Site determined

All of these matters had a bearing upon the precise location and amount of land that could be made available for the garden. The opportunity of expanding to the south was lost when negotiations with Kai Tahu closed.

The museum land that the Chief Executive allowed was reduced by the 10 metre wide strip required by the Historic Places Trust to provide a view of the eastern façade of the NZR Railways building. The land to the north that we wanted for stage three (the cultural centre connected to the Settler's Museum) was now a more distant possibility and not worth pursuing at this stage. That could still be considered later. We decided to progress with stage one, the garden. Thus the site was determined (Fig. 8).

Land Identified for Garden Development (1996)

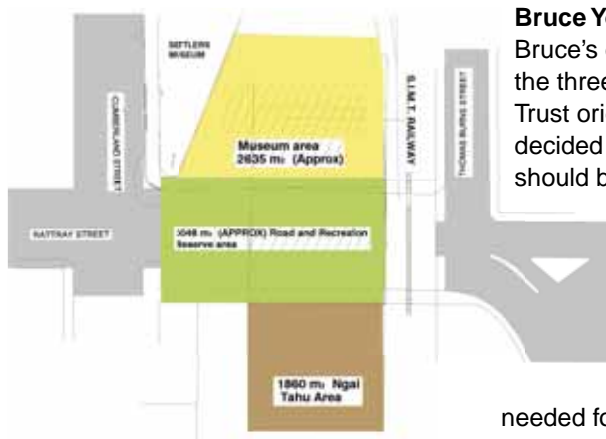


Fig. 8 Final land area for garden development (c. 4000 m²).

Relationship with Shanghai

The offer from the Shanghai Museum for members of the steering committee to visit Shanghai was taken up. The architect (Bruce Young) and I visited in November 1997. The purpose was to study the gardens in the Suzhou area and to take the advice of the museum experts first hand. The effect of this was that Bruce refined his designs to meet traditional styles more truthfully, but he was also more acutely aware that the nature of construction, particularly of the roofs, was beyond the skills of tradesmen in New Zealand.

The hand made structures with hand cut mortise and tenon joints were of great interest to Bruce during his visit. He photographed examples of them wherever these were shown to us (Fig. 9), evidently with the intent of detailing these for construction later on in New Zealand. We discussed the pros and cons of the detailing of the built structures. He was clearly concerned about the ability of New Zealand tradesmen to produce these at a competitive price.

The garden that most closely approximated the space we had in Dunedin was the Master of the Nets garden (Wangshi Yuan) in Suzhou (Fig. 10). Bruce knew of this garden from earlier visits to the Chinese mainland and had based his original designs on this. His refinements made use of this closer observation of the garden.

The Suzhou visit was followed by another with Peter Chin and Jim Ng in which the role of the Shanghai Museum was defined as our agent in China to obtain authentic material which was unavailable in New Zealand.

Bruce Young's design

Bruce's designs (Fig. 11) refined the three stage concept that the Trust originally defined but we soon decided the main focus of attention should be stage one, the garden, and that the rest could be dealt with later.

There still remained the tasks of detailed design, fundraising, promotion and the underlying research needed for marketing the project. All of these were needed to provide the resources to persuade contributors to give us funding.

The designs were central to 'selling' the project. The Shanghai Museum suggested we build a model of the garden as a tool to promote the full-scale garden. I was opposed to this, preferring a video which is a much more flexible means of communication than a static model.



Fig. 9 Hand made roof structure.



Fig. 10 The Master of the Nets garden in Suzhou, China. The similarity to Dunedin's Chinese Garden is striking.

When Bruce provided elevations, sections and hand drawn graphics, a video was made using AutoCAD. Jim Ng provided the 'voiceover' and the video used widely to promote the concept and as our initial tool for fundraising.

Promotion and fundraising

The 'soft launch' to the Chinese community was made on 19th February 2000 with more than 200 people attending. The first estimates of costs (NZ\$2m) were made, as were the first promotional materials including, video, brochures and donation forms.

The funds raised provided the means to expand the funding strategy towards the wider public,

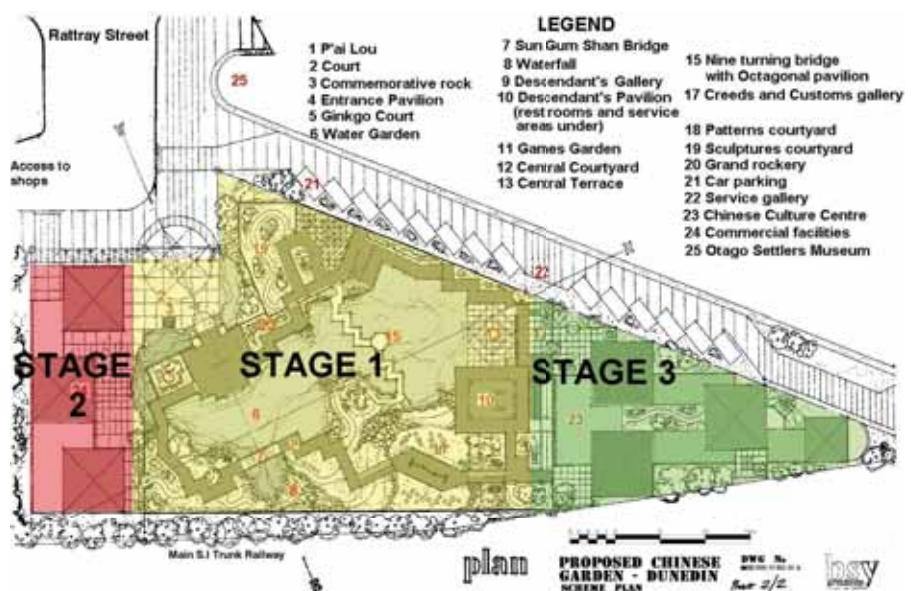


Fig. 11 Bruce Young's design.

the Community, McMillan, Poll Tax Trusts, the City Council, and others. Fundraising was also widened to expatriate Chinese business people, graduands and ethnic Chinese from all over New Zealand. Ultimately assistance was sought from the New Zealand government.

Wider professional assistance and expert advice was sought and given by the University of Otago, Otago Chamber of Commerce, and successful local business people such as Eion Edgar. All this expertise was focussed upon marketing, promotional techniques and research data that proved the economic value of the project to the city and region. This was essential in order to give funding providers confidence that the project was indeed not only worthwhile but also economically viable.

Shanghai visit to Dunedin

After the initial launch, planning issues were resolved and the fundraising effort was expanded. In January 2002, Messrs Hu, Tan and Shi visited Dunedin to further their functions as 'agent' for the Trust.

This turned out to be a momentous occasion. After intensive discussions regarding design and materials, our Shanghai guests visited Central Otago where they were shown sites where the early Chinese miners worked. They were moved by what they saw of the early days of the miners in Central Otago. The focus upon 'authenticity' – a cornerstone of the Trust's intent from the beginning – was taken up by the Shanghai delegation. It seemed to me they realised we could not provide the level of authenticity we wanted, but they could. It was on this visit they first offered to build the garden in Shanghai and to ship the disassembled components to Dunedin. This changed the whole nature of the project. The problems that Bruce could not resolve within New Zealand evaporated with this offer. Also, the cost of the project could now be accurately assessed because the imponderables were eliminated.

In order to do this, a Shanghai contracting firm would have to be engaged and new sketches produced. Working drawings would also be needed, and methods of dealing with

components constructed in China and items that necessarily had to be built in Dunedin had to be resolved.

This was a breathtaking change and concerns about the relationship dissolved when the principle of 'trust us and we will trust you' was agreed on as the basis for moving forward. We realised the visits that had taken place between the two parties had been, apart from the learning process, a prelude to establishing trust.

It was a lesson in relationship building that we Westerners were too not familiar with.

Finalising the building process

Thus began a procession of visits both to Shanghai by New Zealand delegations and reciprocal ones to Dunedin by the Chinese. The Chinese Gardens Trust visits were initially focussed upon the growing level of assistance being provided by the Shanghai Museum. Later they were concerned with agreements to revise the concept plans (Fig. 12), produce working drawings, budgets, and ultimately to build the garden.



Fig. 12 Stunning concept illustration produced in Shanghai.

The politics

Throughout the project, running alongside it like a doppelganger, were the inevitable politics. Politicians were at once mesmerised by the exciting vision on one hand and apprehensive about being pilloried for extravagant waste of public money on the other. This tension existed at many levels. There was much public criticism of the project in financial terms, in terms of the site selection and – well just because Dunedin people like to criticise. There were other interesting political nuances to observe. The fact that the mayor of the city at the time was Indian and the councillor leading the Trust was Chinese may have

had an effect. It is on public record that Mayor Turner criticised Cr Chin, not for anything that he did or said, but for his 'body language'. There was also the matter of having to visit Shanghai during her term as Mayor which seemed uncomfortable for Sukhi Turner. This is not to be critical of anyone but merely an observation of political cut and thrust. Certainly when the Trust visited local Labour politicians for financial assistance from central government, there was a clear signal given to the mayor, who was present at that meeting, that the city needed to shape up with real assistance before any help from the government could be considered. The city had been tardy in coming forward with a major financial commitment and maybe this was a timely shot across the bows.

It was not lost on the Trust that its building of a strong and acclaimed relationship with the Shanghai Museum might well be useful for central government in its endeavours to build close economic ties with China. A success story in cultural

ties is always a good story to present when you need one. We believed that the then Prime Minister Helen Clark, who took a keen interest in cultural portfolios, was well aware of any advantage she might gain from this quarter. But apart from these somewhat Machiavellian observations, we knew that the interest of all the politicians was genuine. They truly believed that the project was right for the right reasons and they also knew that the garden was going to be splendid.

Development and construction

After two years of negotiating and fundraising, the time to get down to the real work arrived. This was the meeting in December 2004 in

Dunedin between the Shanghai Museum and their contractors and the Trust and its technical team and contractors to deal with the physical building of the garden.

It was a week of intensive negotiation of who did what, when and how. The work to be done in Shanghai and New Zealand was clearly defined – how they related to each other, the order of work and the detail of matching the New Zealand and Shanghai components.

The Shanghai Museum had appointed its contractor (The Shanghai Building and Decorating Group). The Trust had appointed its team comprising the Project Manager (Octa and Associates), the Design Manager (John Henderson), its Principal Consultant (John Beekhuis), and other consultants as well as its principal contractor (Amalgamated Builders).

The price for the Chinese component was set in US dollars. It would not be varied. The New Zealand component had yet to be costed accurately. In particular, the provision of water for the lake was problematical and had not been satisfactorily assessed up until this time.

When this was done an application to central government for the Significant Community Based Project Fund had to be made. Until this was secured the project could not proceed.

The Chairman now had his first meeting with the then Prime Minister to broach the possibility of funding from a central government source. The ground for this had been prepared by the local members of parliament and cabinet ministers who were supportive of the project.

Between 2005 and 2007 when building began, the main task was to present all the material needed to fulfil the exacting requirements necessary to secure full funding. The cost of the project was now assessed to be NZ\$6,500,000 of which some NZ\$2,725,800 had been raised. There was still a long way to go to reach the target.

In due course the then Prime Minister Helen Clark presented the Trust with a cheque of NZ\$3,774,200. The quest for funding was completed and we had found our 'Sun Gum Shan'.

Building

Once the funding was secured the building began both in Shanghai for the above ground components and in Dunedin for the below ground work. Concurrently the plants were being raised at a local nursery. The Dunedin input was to build the lake or pond, build the foundations to all the structures, provide the underground services of water, drainage, power, and communications as well as basic paving. Other paving surfaces would be provided from Shanghai and laid by the artisans when they were in Dunedin. Provision of water to the quality required was an expensive part of the Dunedin input and had been underestimated in earlier assessments of costs.

All the above ground material and structures would be provided from Shanghai. The structures would first be assembled in Shanghai to ensure all was correct, then shipped to Dunedin and reassembled. Even the rocks (the famous Lake Taihu rocks) for the rock 'mountain' would come from China (Fig. 13 A–B).



Fig. 13 A–B The famous Lake Taihu stone being mined and prepared for use.

All work done in China fulfilled the Trust's objectives for authenticity of this garden (Fig. 14 A–D).

The work that had to be done in Dunedin was a matter of practicality (Fig. 15). In effect, this local work was supportive of the visible Chinese content and in general, not evident to the eye so it did not detract from the effect the completed garden presented.



Fig. 14 Construction work in Shanghai. **A**, assembling the wooden structures. **B**, cutting bridge granite. **C**, hand made roof tiles. **D**, roof tiles boxed and ready for shipment.



Fig. 15 Overview of site works – the Dunedin input.

Assembling the components

The arrival of the artisans from Shanghai heralded the final phase of the work. This was the moment of truth for the two 'limbs' of the development as they were brought together. It was a meeting of two cultures and in the words of Warren McEwen "they knew as much English as I did Mandarin but we understood each other". The site management was under Warren's overall control but he worked closely and formed a good rapport with the Chinese foremen of their team. The skills and techniques they brought to the site were about as alien to us as the structures they built.

However, in the end tradesmen are the same throughout the world in that they know their work and want to get on with it without any fuss (Fig. 16).



Fig. 16 The old fashioned method of transferring heavy granite stones by hand for the bridge might not appeal to New Zealand tradesmen but was a quick and efficient means of moving heavy objects in a tight space with no room for machinery.

Building the rock mountain was also a work of art. Every gardener knows that although you can design a rock garden in conceptual terms, the actual building needs the on-site skill of considering the merits of each rock and its place in the scheme of things. Mr Gu, the acknowledged rock expert in Shanghai, knew this too and was skilled at his work.

Lake Taihu rock is much prized in China for building the mystical representations of mountains into a garden art form. Mr Gu is illustrated building his Dunedin masterpiece (Fig. 17). The techniques used would boggle the Farrer's² of this world but he is not imitating nature. He is distilling it.



Fig. 17 Mr Gu building his rock mountain.

By the time the Chinese artisans had finished their work the feeling of the place was apparent (Fig. 18).

The structures, roofs, and stonework were completed. Now it was time for the electricians and gardeners to enter the scene. The spaces for the gardens were small and while the Chinese insisted on having large specimens to begin with there was no room for large root balls. The water table was less than 500 mm below the surface!

The only parts of the garden visible to the public that were sourced within New Zealand were the plantings.



Fig. 18 The newly completed structures.



Fig. 19 These container grown trees were as big as the root zone would allow – 500 mm to the water table.

These were initially selected by the Chinese designers and based upon tradition. There are folklore stories attached to many of these plants and their uses in the customs of the people. These connections are important to the Chinese but not necessarily known or understood by Europeans. So it became important that plants representing Chinese traditions were used in this garden. Of course, some of them were not suitable in Dunedin for climatic or other practical reasons. In general, the selections of plants initially made were trees and shrubs (Fig. 19). They could be described as the structural plants.

The selection of plants for ground cover was largely left to us to do. We were given NZ\$10,000 worth of plants from a local nursery from which we selected plants we thought suitable for the purpose (Fig. 20). Some of our choices were not right but others work. Simplicity is the key for a garden such as this.



Fig. 20 Other plantings including ground covers.

We will be given guidance from the people of Yu Yuan to refine the selections in due course. This is part of the ongoing relationship with Shanghai.

An example of the folklore importance is the 'ten famous flowers of China' (azalea, camellia, chrysanthemum, fragrant tea olive, jonquil, orchid, peony, plum, rose, and water lily or lotus) some of which are represented in the garden (Fig. 21, 22 A–C). Those that are not will be introduced later so the stories attached to them can be told in the interpretation of the garden. There are other significant plants such as those relating to the signs of the zodiac or the years of the rat, horse, and dog etc. These are intriguing to the Westerner and add a dimension to the garden that we do not normally encounter.



Fig. 21 The garden photographed on Chinese New Year. The willows were added because they could cope with the close proximity of water. The *Nelumbo* (lotus) growing in the lake was a 'must have' as it is one of the 10 famous flowering plants of China. It remains to be seen how it copes with the Dunedin winter.

In all, more than 3000 plants have been used in this garden. Most are within the walls, although there are over 1000 plants outside the garden proper in the entrance courtyard, between the carpark and shops to the south, between the museum and garden on the western side, and to the north near the tower pavilion.

² Reginald Farrer (1880–1920) was an English traveller and plant collector best known for his influences on rock garden design. In 1907 he published *My Rock Garden* which was continuously in print for more than 40 years.



Fig. 22 Three of the ten famous flowering plants of China. They all have stories attached to them and are interesting additions to the garden. **A**, *Osmanthus fragrans* (fragrant tea olive). **B**, *Paeonia suffruticosa* (tree peony). **C**, *Prunus mume* (Chinese plum).

Conclusion

The Dunedin Chinese garden itself has only just begun. Like all gardens its development will never end even though the essential form is now complete. The plants will grow and will need to be shaped and formed to assume the character that tradition prescribes. Some plants are not suitable and will be changed. Paintings and other artefacts will be donated and performing artists will come to animate the spaces from time to time. This is just the beginning.

Douglas (Mick) Field has a long and varied career in horticulture.

He completed an apprenticeship at Christchurch Botanic Gardens in the early 1950s, and then studied for a National Diploma in Horticulture before going to England where he continued his horticultural studies at Wisley and Lower Basildon.

Returning to New Zealand in 1962 he again worked in Christchurch where he designed and built several parks/sports-fields. From Christchurch he moved to Australia and was involved in construction of the Mt Lofty Botanic Garden, design work at the Adelaide Botanic Garden and the teaching of students.

From Adelaide, Douglas moved back to New Zealand, working from 1971 for the Dunedin Parks and Recreation Department as a Landscape Architect. Following local body reform in 1987 he was appointed Recreation Planning Manager. In 1988 he was made a Fellow of the NZ Institute of Parks and Recreation Administration.

His work in Dunedin has included input into the development strategy for the Otago Harbour, boat harbour development, cemetery design, establishment of Polytechnic Training for Ornamental Horticulture and numerous community amenities, latterly as a private consultant.

