

## Learning Series: The Wonder and Natural Beauty of Rocks

### THE NATIONAL BONSAI & PENJING MUSEUM VIEWING STONES COLLECTION AT THE U. S. NATIONAL ARBORETUM

The Museum is well known for its display of masterpiece living specimens of bonsai and penjing. Less well known is the Museum's world-class collection of viewing stones.

Bonsai and viewing stones are closely related art forms, each reflecting a deep respect for nature. While a bonsai is cultivated to evoke the qualities of a venerable old tree, a viewing stone is usually displayed to suggest an aspect of the natural landscape, such as a distant mountain or a waterfall. Thus, when these small-scale forms are viewed together in a complementary arrangement, the whole of nature can be imagined.



The collection began with six Japanese viewing stones that accompanied the gift of bonsai from Japan on the occasion of the American Bicentennial in 1976. Today there are 105 stones from different countries: Japan, China, Indonesia, South Africa, Zaire, Namibia, Italy, Canada, and the United States. The viewing stone collection has expanded to include stones outside the formal requirements of Japanese viewing stones—such as Chinese scholars' rocks and abstract natural stones.

The stones are displayed in and around the Museum's Mary Mrose International Pavilion. Cases in The Melba Tucker Suiseki and Viewing Stone Display Area are periodically installed with different stones. The displays in the Japanese tokonoma (an alcove for art display in a Japanese home) and the Chinese scholar's room provide a cultural context for the appreciation of different types of stones and related arts. The Special Exhibitions Wing provides a place for thematic exhibits which incorporate accessories in a more formal display.



**Dry Waterfall Stone**  
**From New York State, USA**  
**10 x 15 x 10 cm**  
**Donated by Martin Schmalenberg**  
**1990**



**Hut Stone**  
**From California Desert, USA**  
**3 x 16 x 5 cm**  
**Donated by Cheryl Manning**  
**1996**



**Near Mountain Stone  
From Delaware County  
Pennsylvania, USA  
9 x 25 x 13 cm  
Donated by Jim Hayes  
1996**



**Mountain Stone  
From Eel River  
California, USA  
14 x 43 x 22 cm  
Donated by Harry Hirao  
1995**



**Chrysanthemum Stone  
From Neodani  
Gifu Prefecture, Japan  
30 x 27 x 22 cm  
Bicentennial Gift from Nippon  
Bonsai Association  
Donated by Kiyoshi Yanagisawa  
1975**



**Chinese Scholar's Rock**  
***Taihu stone***  
**From Lake Tai**  
**Jiangsu Province, China**  
**83 x 38 x 30 cm**  
**Donated by Kemin Hu**  
**2000**



**Chinese Scholar's Rock**  
***Lingbi stone***  
**From Lingbi**  
**Anhui Province, China**  
**73 x 34 x 20 cm**  
**Donated by Kemin Hu**  
**2000**





**Pattern Stone – Geisha**  
From Mohave Desert  
California, USA  
22 x 20 x 15 cm  
Donated by Mariana Haug, in memory of  
her mother, Melba Tucker  
1997



**Dwelling Stone**  
From Ciniru River Valley  
Kunigan, West Java, Indonesia  
13 x 20 x 15 cm  
Gift from Indonesian Suiseki Association  
Donated by Ismail Saleh  
1994



**Chrysanthemum Stone – Moon Night**  
From Neodani  
Gifu Prefecture, Japan  
42 x 58 x 20 cm  
Gift from Nippon Suiseki Association  
to President Gerald Ford  
Donated by Tanekichi Isozaki  
1975

## **Museum and Arboretum Visitor Information**

**The National Bonsai & Penjing Museum is located on the grounds of the U. S. National Arboretum at 3501 New York Avenue N.E. – Washington D.C. 20002**

**The National Arboretum is open every day from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM.**

**The National Bonsai & Penjing Museum is open every day from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM.**

**There is no charge for admission to the Arboretum or the Museum and parking on the grounds is free.**

**The Arboretum and the Museum are closed on New Year's Day, Martin Luther King's Birthday, President's Day, Veteran's Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.**

**Editor's Note:** "Penjing" is defined as tray landscape, potted scenery, potted landscape, or miniature trees and rockery, and is the ancient Chinese art of depicting artistically formed trees, other plants, and landscapes in miniature.

"Viewing Stone" is a modern term embracing several traditional Asian art forms where unusual stones, ideally shaped by natural forces, are selected because they represent "microcosms" – worlds in miniature – or capture the essence of the Earth's life-energies.

Japanese suiseki (miniature landscape or object stones) and Chinese gongshi (scholar's rocks) are traditionally displayed on an individually carved wooden base, in a ceramic container, or in a tray of sand according to long-established aesthetic conventions. Once shown only in temples or elite residences such as the palaces of nobles and scholar's studios, they are now found in our homes and offices as well as museums around the world. These microcosmic "spirit stones" become objects for contemplation and meditation; they beckon us to embark on mental pilgrimages to special places, real and imagined, from our memories and dreams.

American viewing stones reflect our desert and mountain landscapes and unique aesthetic tastes while still respecting the Chinese and Japanese traditions.

For a look at additional viewing stones, check out the archive links to the museum's past exhibits at <https://www.bonsai-nbf.org/past-exhibits/>.

Source: <https://www.bonsai-nbf.org/viewing-stones-collection/>

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