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## THE QIANLONG GARDEN

### BACKGROUNDER

Covering almost two acres, or about 6,400 square meters, of the Ningshougong (Palace of Tranquility and Longevity) District in the northeast quadrant of the Forbidden City, the Qianlong Garden was built between 1771 and 1776 by the fourth Emperor of the Qing Dynasty to serve as a part of his residence after his 60-year reign. Known as much for his artistic interests as for his political leadership, the Qianlong Emperor designed the Garden as a “mini-Forbidden City” within the Forbidden City. The Garden’s opulent buildings in the complex preserve decoration and furnishings from a time widely considered to be one of the boldest and most extravagant periods of interior design in China’s history.

The Qianlong Emperor’s reign coincided with a key moment in the history of China. Under his sovereignty, China was the world’s largest and richest nation, and was extensively engaged with Europe and America. While the impact of Chinese art and architecture on European art of this period is well known, Juanqinzhai (Studio of Exhaustion from Diligent Service) and other interiors of the Qianlong Garden reveal that this influence was reciprocal. The large-scale trompe l’oeil paintings and wall coverings in a number of the Garden’s buildings were influenced by Giuseppe Castiglione, a Jesuit missionary and painter who settled in China around 1715. The large trompe l’oeil silk murals, which incorporate European methods of perspective and chiaroscuro, are some of the very few surviving examples of their genre not only in the Forbidden City but in all of China.

The Emperor made use of the best available materials and artisans for his Garden buildings to create sumptuous and elegant interiors that represented the pinnacle of Chinese design and decorative arts at the time. The exquisite attention to detail is also seen in the architectural features of the Garden. The rhythmic, asymmetrical layout of the buildings and garden elements among the four courtyards, the dynamic surface patterns on exterior walls and stone pathways, and the extensive and unusual use of rockeries, are all perfectly harmonized within the site.

Today, much of the most delicate decoration of the interiors, including bamboo marquetry, white jade cartouches, and double-sided embroidered silk, is disintegrating. The rooms of the Garden buildings, including Juanqinzhai until its restoration began in 2002, have remained largely untouched since their creation, and have been seen by very few people since 1924, when the last emperor moved out of the Forbidden City.

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The Garden has survived this long because of a remarkable imperial edict that the Qianlong Emperor issued during his lifetime: this area of the Forbidden City would be preserved in future years as part of a palace for “super sovereigns,” i.e., emperors who retired. Were it not for that edict, it is likely that this complex would have been significantly altered by subsequent reigning sovereigns in the Forbidden City, as was common practice. For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a lack of available financial resources protected the site from alteration—a form of benign neglect. The Qianlong Garden is now poised for a complete restoration.

### **Master Plan for the Qianlong Garden**

In 2004, the Palace Museum and the World Monuments Fund made a comprehensive review of the entire Qianlong Garden site and developed a master plan. The restoration of the entire Qianlong Garden will be carried out in four distinct phases, all to be completed by 2017, with each phase focusing on one or two of the four courtyards.

The project will restore the architectural and physical integrity of the Garden, its buildings, interiors, garden rockeries, and plantings. Most of the Garden’s buildings are structurally sound, but many of its elaborate interiors require extensive restoration. At the same time, the Garden’s infrastructure, including heating, drainage, and electricity, will be rehabilitated and modernized.

### **Palace Museum - World Monuments Fund Collaboration**

The full-scale commitment by the Palace Museum and the World Monuments Fund to the Qianlong Garden restoration over the next ten years is bringing together the best resources and expertise from around the world in a wide range of areas, including conservation, architecture, technical and craftsmanship training, and museum methodologies such as planning, education, site interpretation, and exhibition. The Palace Museum and the World Monuments Fund expect that their work at the Garden will serve as a learning laboratory for restoration, planning, and site interpretation in other areas of the Forbidden City, and perhaps other sites in China. In addition, the project will expand opportunities for international technical and cultural exchange among conservation and museum professionals in the U.S. and China.

### **Donors**

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