Upcoming tea ceremonies are steeped in Japanese tradition

The anonymous donor behind the charming Sokiku Nakatani Tea Room and Garden at Sacramento State’s University Library will continue to honor the woman for whom they’re named by funding a series of springtime teas.

“Tea season” begins Tuesday, Feb. 26, with 17 ceremonies scheduled through April 11. All are offered free to Sac State students and the general public, and at no cost to the University.

The donor’s gift pays for tea masters from San Francisco’s Urasenke Foundation to demonstrate chado, or the “way of tea,” and provided funding to build the tea room and its adjacent garden. Another part of the gift was a valuable collection of tea ware, some of which is used in the ceremonies.

“The tea room has been, in many ways, a jewel for the University, highlighting the ancient tea ceremony from Japan,” says ethnic studies Professor Timothy Fong, who collaborated with the donor to get the project built. “It was an opportunity we couldn’t pass up, and it’s something to be proud of.”

More than 230 ceremonies have taken place in the Sokiku Nakatani Tea Room since its dedication in 2007.

“It’s the best demonstration tea room in the United States,” says Fong, because of its garden, attached kitchen and large TV screen for better viewing.

Those who attend a ceremony can enter the tea room from the Library’s basement or through the garden, where they follow a deliberately crooked pathway to the door.

“It’s believed that evil travels in a straight line,” says Sally Hitchcock, University Library’s coordinator for community outreach. “The idea of the garden is that it’s like a path leading into the purity of deep mountains. It’s a place to drop the ‘dust’ of the world – all the cares and stress – before entering the tea room, so that each person will be receptive to living in the present moment and discovering the beauty of the ordinary moments in life.”
Each tea presentation lasts about 75 minutes. Most attendees sit in chairs, classroom-style, but two or three will be invited onto the tatami, or straw mat, to experience the tradition firsthand. They will be expected to kneel, or sit cross-legged or on one hip for the duration. Everyone in attendance will receive a steaming bowl of green tea.

Chado is a centuries-old Japanese practice of meticulously preparing, offering and receiving a bowl of tea. It’s a simple, yet elegant, embodiment of the principles of tranquility, harmony, purity and respect. Mrs. Nakatani lived in Sacramento for many years before moving to Los Angeles, where she began her study of chado. Some of her ceramic and bamboo tea ware, along with her kimono and obi, are displayed in the tea room. Other pieces are stored in the University’s Special Collections & Archives.

If you wish to attend a tea ceremony, call Sally Hitchcock at (916) 278-5954.

Here is the spring 2013 schedule:

- Tuesday, Feb. 26: 10:30 a.m., noon, 1:30 p.m. and 3 p.m.
- Wednesday, Feb. 27: 10:30 a.m., noon and 1:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, March 19: 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. (The noon class is full.)
- Wednesday, April 10: 10:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and 4:30 p.m.
- Thursday, April 11: 8 a.m., 9 a.m., 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.

To learn more about the Sokiku Nakatani Tea Room and Garden, go to [apps.lib.csus.edu/tearoom/](apps.lib.csus.edu/tearoom/).

For media assistance, contact Sacramento State’s Office of Public Affairs at (916) 278-6156.

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