

# VERSIONS OF ZEN

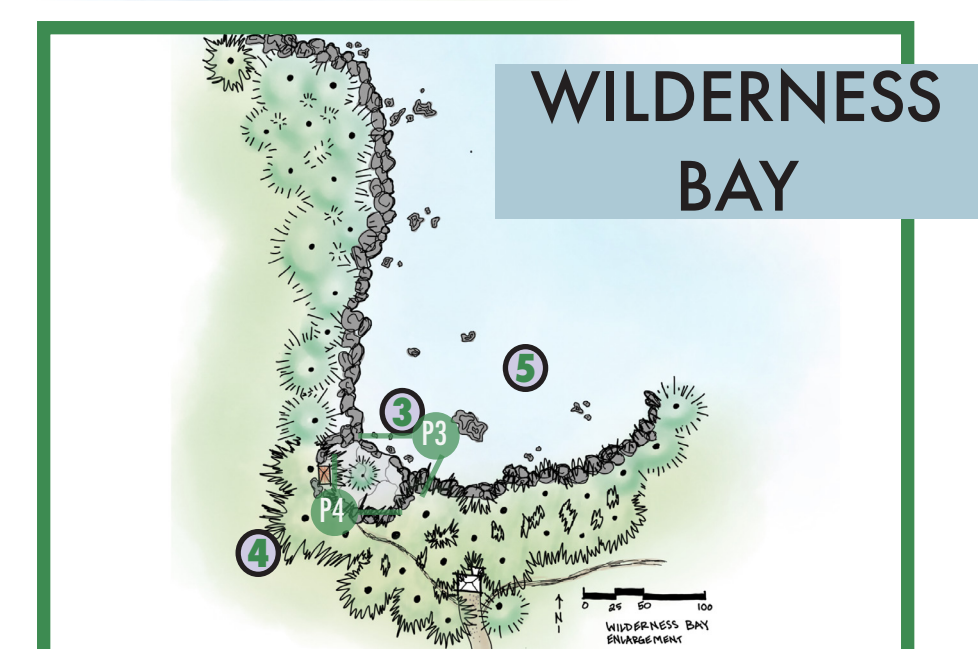
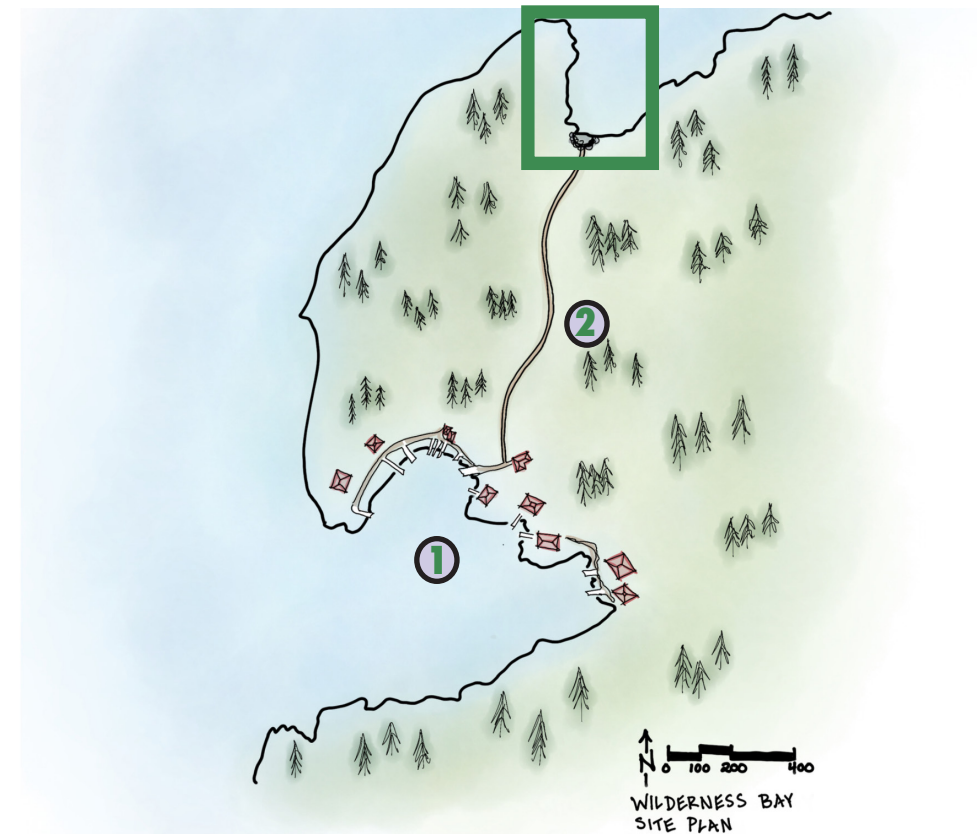
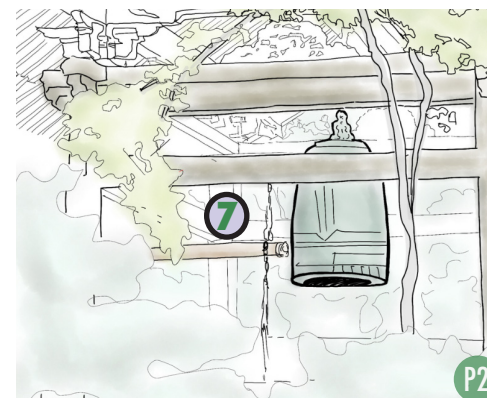
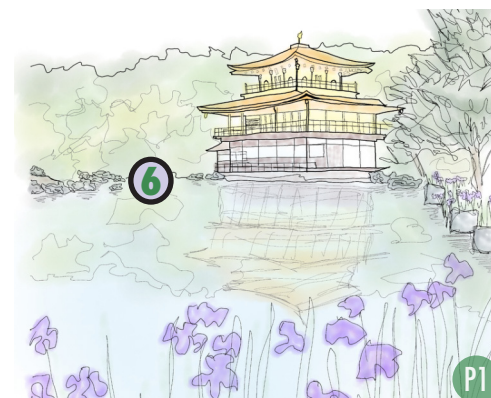
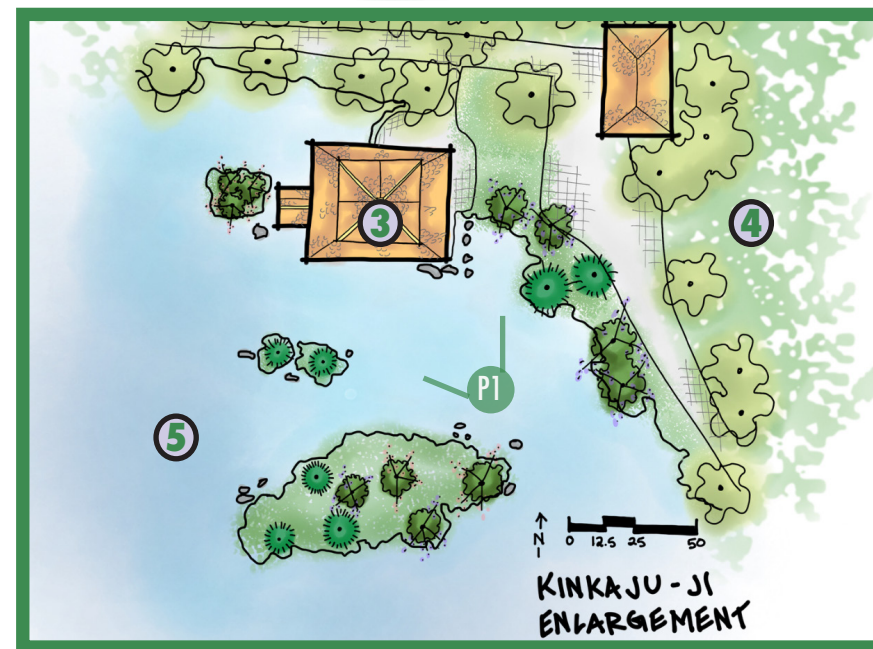
When I was a kid, we used to have family vacations at this small lakeside resort called Wilderness Bay which is located on the edge of the Boundary Waters in a town called Ely in northern Minnesota. We slept in cabins at night, and during the day my cousins and I would explore the nearby woods. On our first vacation there, we stumbled upon a semi-circular rock out-cropping right on the edge of the lake. It was shady and not too far from the main trail so we decided to make that our basecamp for further exploration. That outcropping was a sanctuary and deeply sensory experience. You could smell the pine resin from the towering trees that enclosed us, the sun-warmed dirt dusting off of the main path, and the lake water (so strong you could almost taste it). If you sat quietly, you could hear the whisper of the waves lapping against the rocks a few feet below and the tinkling of a fish chain stringer (typically used for transporting freshly caught fish, I repurposed the one I found on the rocky shore into windchimes that I hung from the sapling that was growing in the center of the camp). As time went on we built a lean-to that was backed by the coarse bark of a pine that was growing between the stones that comprised the semi-circle. My sacred campsite echoes many of the zen components that are present in Kinkaju-ji.

Kinkaku-ji is a Zen Buddhist Temple located in Kinkakuji-cho, Kita-ku in the northwestern part of Kyoto. Originally built as an aristocratic villa, the site has become a spiritual sanctuary. It was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1994. While much more skillfully arranged at Kinkaku-ji, the following elements underscore the zen essence of both sites.

- 1 Kinkaku-ji and my sacred campsite both require an intentional and extended journey through nature in order to be reached. This journey can be viewed as a walking meditation before reaching the spiritual site. Meditation is a cornerstone of zen practice.
- 2 The paths at each location mimic and emphasize the natural forms present in the environment surrounding the site.
- 3 Both locations can be classified as Genius loci due to the spiritual significance of the location in which they are set.
- 4 The embrace of the surrounding woodland serves to cushion each site from the outside world. This allows the visitor to turn their intention inward and engage in a spiritual practice.
- 5 Both sites utilize stone and water to generate forms. The juxtaposition between these two materials is essential in creating the peaceful atmosphere that acts as a cornerstone for spiritual reflection.
- 6 Both sites use the beauty of their surroundings as a backdrop to emphasize important spiritual locations on the site such as the Golden Temple at Kinkaku-ji and the central sampling at Wilderness Bay.
- 7 In Zen Buddhism, sound is used to pacify the soul and bring peace to spiritual practitioners. Unknowingly, I achieved the same effect with my tinkling fish hook windchimes.

The strongest connection between zen buddhism, Wilderness Bay, and Kinkaku-ji is in the intent behind the construction of both of the sites. Kinkaku-ji and Wilderness Bay were built as retreats from the distractions of society with the goal of bringing the visitor closer to their spiritual self. By celebrating and emphasizing the beauty of the nature around them, these sites provide the visitor with an opportunity to understand themselves and the world better through self-reflection. While Kinkaku-ji has received protection as a UNESCO World Heritage site, the heavy influence of corporations in the United States of America has left the Boundary Waters vulnerable to pollution from proposed mining operations in the area. Work is being done to protect this sacred site from corporate greed. More information on these efforts can be found at: <https://www.savetheboundarywaters.org/action-center>.

## KINKAKU-JI



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