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The atrium makes a dramatic first impression on visitors to Peter and Sabrina Smith's house, as it did on Peter himself when he first saw it. "I thought the atrium [would be] a really great place to entertain," he says. He was right; "people start out there and they stay there." In addition to offering the diversion of a walk-through Japanese garden—complete with a pool of fish—the atrium features a wet bar hidden behind Japanese screens on the right. The screens are functional both in purpose and also in décor, funneling warmth into a room that, like others in the house, needed it badly.

The Atrium





Boston Home

Spring 2003 Design Special

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Living Large

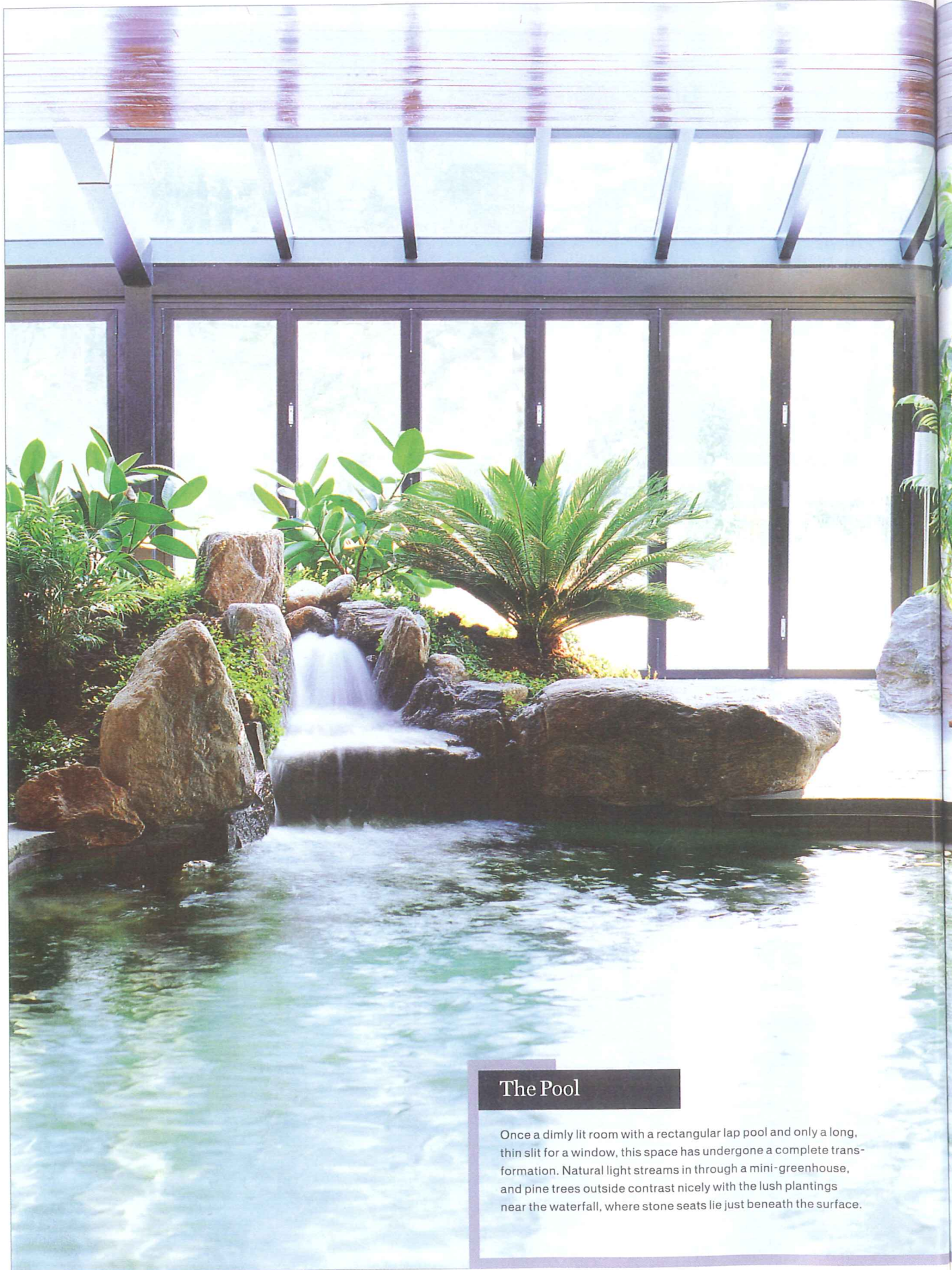
Where most people saw a cold, bunkerlike building, one couple spied a cozy, modern retreat. Their vision led to a redesigned house that's now as big on style as it is in square footage.

By Sarah Adams. Photographs by Keller and Keller

THE SHORTEST DISTANCE BETWEEN TWO points isn't always a straight line—especially if your taste is out of the ordinary. The road to Peter Smith's suburban sanctuary, for example, took a few detours. But the end result, he says, was worth the drive.

"I wanted a large, comfortable space with lots of land—a kind of getaway from city living," the fortysomething executive explains. After touring several properties west of Boston that missed the mark, he was smitten by a sprawling, one-level contemporary with a staggering 18,000 square feet of floor space on a five-and-a-half-acre plot. "It was unusual," Smith says, referring primarily to the Japanese landscaping and the house's cavernous, sunlit atrium. "It matched my taste." And it certainly was big. But comfortable? Not even close. "It was like a bunker," says Amy Dumas Mall, a straight-talking designer for Roche-Bobois who helped infuse the dreary 1980s domicile with modern luxury.

The names of the owners of this house have been changed at their request.



The Pool

Once a dimly lit room with a rectangular lap pool and only a long, thin slit for a window, this space has undergone a complete transformation. Natural light streams in through a mini-greenhouse, and pine trees outside contrast nicely with the lush plantings near the waterfall, where stone seats lie just beneath the surface.



A plasma television set is the focal point of the media room. Screens flanking the TV hide unsightly electrical wiring while adding a dose of natural-looking light that is the result of directing the beams downward behind the panels. The room gained valuable openness when a wall on the right side was knocked out, allowing easy access to a hall that leads to the garage.

The Media Room

**Boston
Home**

Dumas Mall says, recalling the lawn's tall, majestic pines and Japanese maples. "You could see the yearning for the house to go in this direction."

Nowhere is that yearning stronger than in the atrium, a cavernous, glass-topped area that serves as the hub of the house. At 40 by 50 feet, it's enough to make anyone feel Lilliputian, were it not for the soothing Japanese garden and red benches at the edges. Before Smith redesigned it, the garden consisted of scattered rocks and tufts of greenery surrounded by a square pool with a bed of pebbles. He enlisted the landscape design firm Zen Associates to fill the space with tall, graceful bamboo trees, queen palms, baby tears, and creeping fig plants. The firm also added more boulders, confined the water to a small pool—complete with multicolored koi fish—and installed a stone path that runs down the center of the garden, creating a surreal homage to the lush oases that grace Japanese monasteries. The Eastern aesthetic is further ignited by bright red upholstered benches, bamboo ladders, and shojis, or Japanese screens, that slide back to reveal a wet bar.

Sabrina focused on filling in the details. With so much wall space to cover, she needed attractive artwork in large quantity. She found it at Complements, a Warwick, Rhode Island, gallery that designer Shirley Novack tipped her off to. (Novack also helped the Smiths select window treatments, cabinetry, and plants for their new quarters.) A dealer at the gallery who shared their taste for the modern steered them toward pieces for their living room, exercise room, and bedroom. "We're new at collecting," Sabrina confesses, but her eye is that of a seasoned aficionado. The house brims with the bounty of the couple's travels: A trio of paintings found in a Stockholm gallery hold court on an arcing recessed wall in the dining room; a painting of fish like those in the atrium pool, the souvenir of a Hawaiian vacation, hangs beside the front door.

[Continued on page 116]

How It Began

Before the renovation, the Smiths' house was cold and unwelcoming. From top, the atrium, says designer Amy Dumas Mall, "was very stark. It was like entering an office building." The walls were painted in warm white hues, and a Japanese garden was planted. Red benches now warm the space. The living room also needed warmth, and now benefits from hardwood flooring, light from two new windows, and dark wooden cabinets. The master suite's bookcases were untouched, but the carpet was replaced with hardwoods and windows were added for more light. Richly colored fabrics now lavish the room with coziness. The media room's dark gray lacquered storage unit was replaced with simple screens that hide the television wiring. The right-hand wall was torn down, opening up the room.



Living Large [Continued from page 111]

The most breathtaking scene, though, may be the one outside. "Peter is really into beautiful landscaping," Sabrina says, surveying the Japanese maples and pine trees on the lawn, which slopes down to a pond. Nature has been infused inside, too. The living room, Smith's favorite spot, displays organic materials that pop up at every turn—Brazilian cherry floors, a cedar ceiling, and a stone fireplace—made cozy by large rectangular sofas and soft crimson pillows. The couple is drawn



NOW AND ZEN: The Japanese garden.

here when relatives visit, and it's here that they play heated games of Cranium on a square table meant for serving tea.

Smith invited nature into the pool area, too, with a poolside waterfall nestled between lush palm trees against the backdrop of pines in the yard. The house's linear character, defined by its high ceilings and long, narrow hallways, is softened here by the curves of the pool, where stone seats are grouped near the waterfall just beneath the water's surface.

Next to the pool, the exercise room is warmed by large windows and potted plants clustered around a Jacuzzi. It's a far cry from the space's previous incarnation—two offices with solid walls. "We decided, 'Okay, if we open windows here and there and take the walls away...'" Smith says, describing the facelift technique used in this room and throughout the house. On [Continued on page 118]