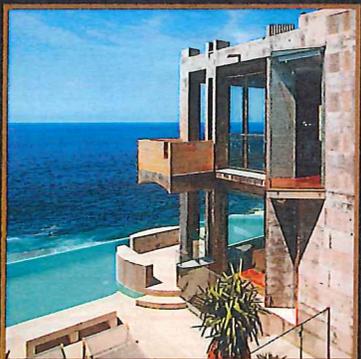
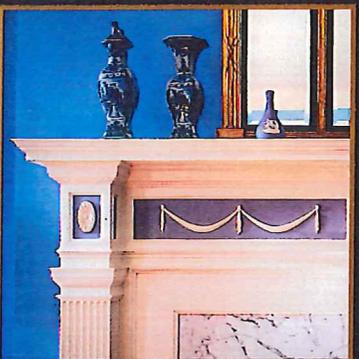
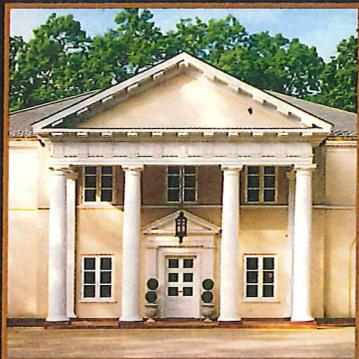
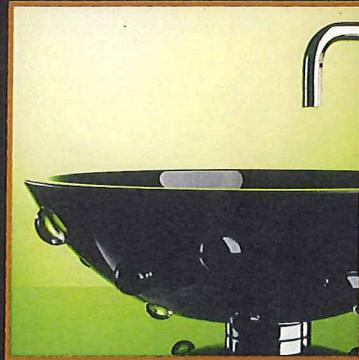
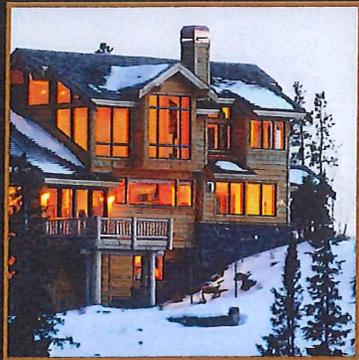


# The Robb Report COLLECTION™

Real Estate and Home Design

January 2006

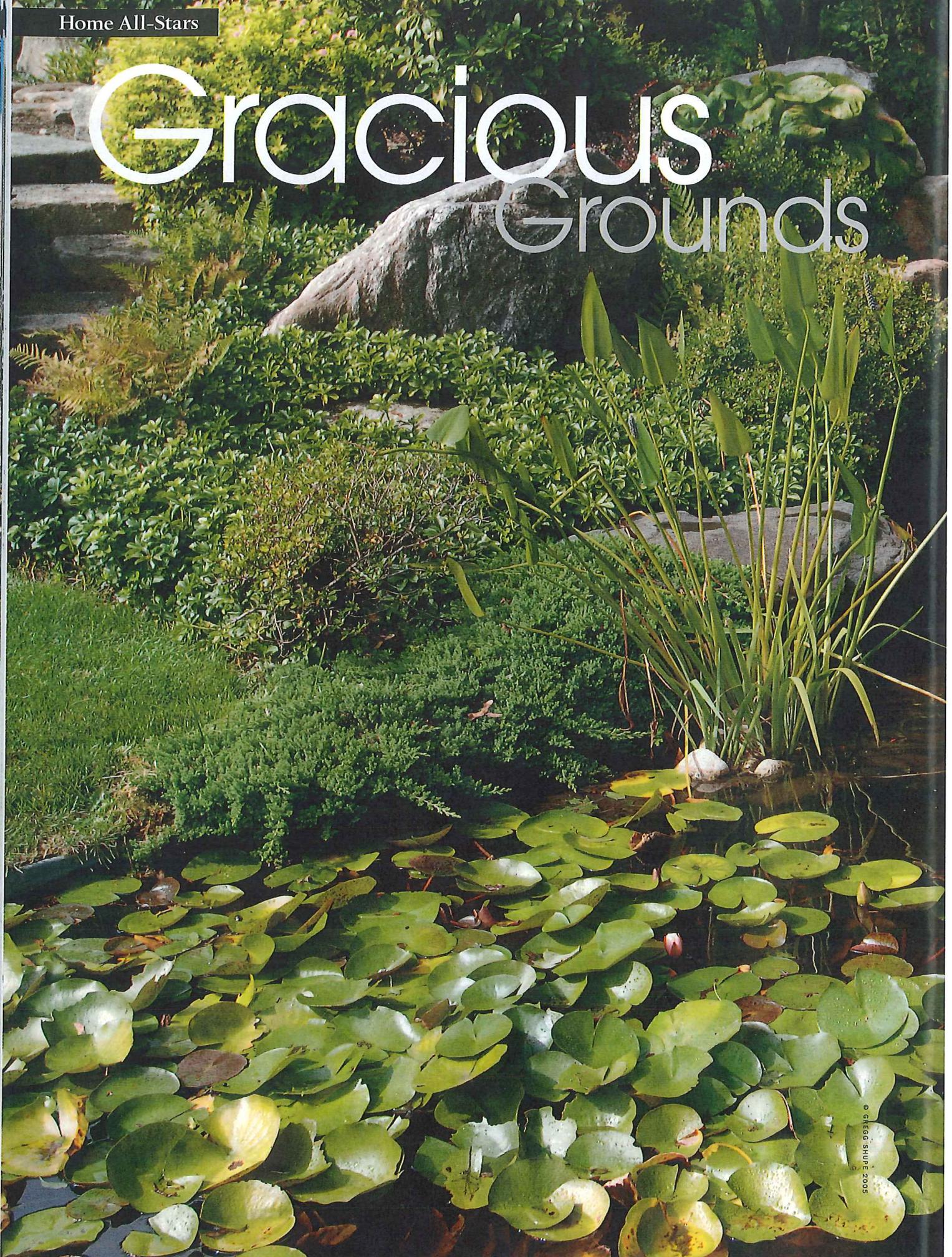


## Home All-Stars

PRODUCTS AND DESIGN THAT DEFINE AN ERA

Home All-Stars

# Gracious Grounds



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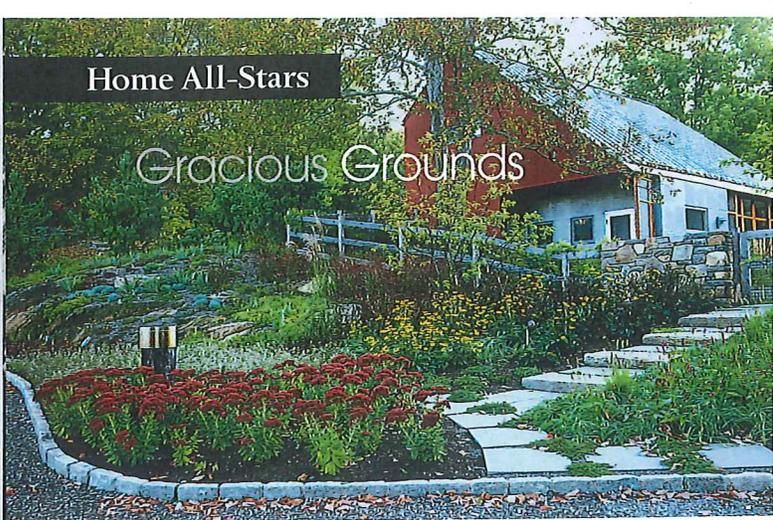


## Landscaping styles to suit every estate.

BY LAUREN OBER

**B**RITISH HORTICULTURAL writer Beverley Nichols once opined, “To dig in one’s own earth, with one’s own spade, does life hold anything better?” For those with verdant thumbs and a penchant for taming nature, the answer to Nichols’ question is an unequivocal “No.” But instead of asking if there is anything better in life, the more pertinent question to ask of a garden aficionado is “What kind of garden is best for you?” From the beginning of human civilization, the desire to beautify one’s surroundings has been of paramount importance, and gardens have played a large role in such efforts. From the austere Zen masterpieces of Japan to the opulent spreads of 18th-century France, lovers of beauty have always sought out ways to inch closer to nature. Here is a look at four of the most popular landscaping styles today, and the masters who keep the forms alive and blooming.

## Gracious Grounds



### Romantic

ALMOST DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED to the traditional, European formal garden, the romantic American garden substitutes flow for formality and Bohemianism for balance. Romantic gardens break the rigid structure and mathematical precision of formal gardens by letting nature dictate—to a large extent—which plants will go where. According to Robert E. Truskowski, a Laguna Beach, Calif., landscape architect, romantic gardens of today can be traced back to the plants and flowers in early English meadows, and more recently, to domestic designs like Frederick Law Olmstead's revolutionary vision for New York's Central Park.

Romantic gardens let the imagination run wild and allow for a more reflective approach. Truskowski says that while many of his clients prefer their house gardens to be somewhat formal, as the gardens extend away from the main building they tend to blend into the natural environment, becoming softer and more informal as they radiate out. To create that soft feel, Truskowski uses native grasses that create a billowy lushness. The rest of the plant material depends largely on the architecture of the property. "It's really a textural issue. You use a softer, gentler kind of material, not material that is crisp and hard-edged," Truskowski says.

One of the true innovators of this romantic style is James van Sweden of the Washington, D.C., landscape architecture firm Oehme, van Sweden. His new American garden style serves as a metaphor for the American meadow. "It is the antithesis of a formal garden. It represents spontaneity," he says. He likens romantic gardens to tapestries that feature perennials and ornamental grasses in a free-form setting.

Van Sweden believes romantic gardens are true American creations, though they can trace their roots to earlier European perennial gardens. However, romantic gardens in America reflect American scale. The planting areas are bigger in the United States as is the plant palette. Van Sweden says that while the material selection is vast, he prefers to work with native plants whenever possible. Fountain grass, switch grass and calamagrostis all play prominent roles in van Sweden's designs. But as in true American meadows, anything goes.

*Previous pages: An exotic tableau by ZEN Associates.*

*Above and right: Lush landscaping by Oehme, van Sweden.*



RICHARD FEUSER



## Romantic Sources

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Santa Monica, Calif.,  
310.264.0266

**Jay Griffith,**  
Venice, Calif., 310.392.5558,  
[www.jaygriffith.com](http://www.jaygriffith.com)

**Deborah Nevins & Assoc.,**  
New York, 212.925.1125

**Mario Nievera Design,**  
Palm Beach, Fla., 561.659.2820,  
[www.marionieveradesign.com](http://www.marionieveradesign.com)

**Oehme, van Sweden Assoc.,**  
Washington, D.C.,  
202.546.7575, [www.ovsla.com](http://www.ovsla.com)

**Robert E. Truskowski,**  
Laguna Beach, Calif.,  
949.494.6650,  
[www.truskowski.com](http://www.truskowski.com)

**Edwina von Gal & Co.,**  
East Hampton, N.Y.,  
631.907.9040

## Gracious Grounds

### Desert

BEFORE INNOVATIVE LANDSCAPE designers like John Greenlee and Sydney Baumgartner came along, most people thought desert gardening was a contradiction in terms. Gardens need water, and desiccation is one of the hallmarks of any desert—so the two seemed destined to be at odds forever. However, understanding the botany of deserts is the key to creating a breathtaking desertscape. It may not be a perennial garden, but it will be reflective of the history and topography of the desert.

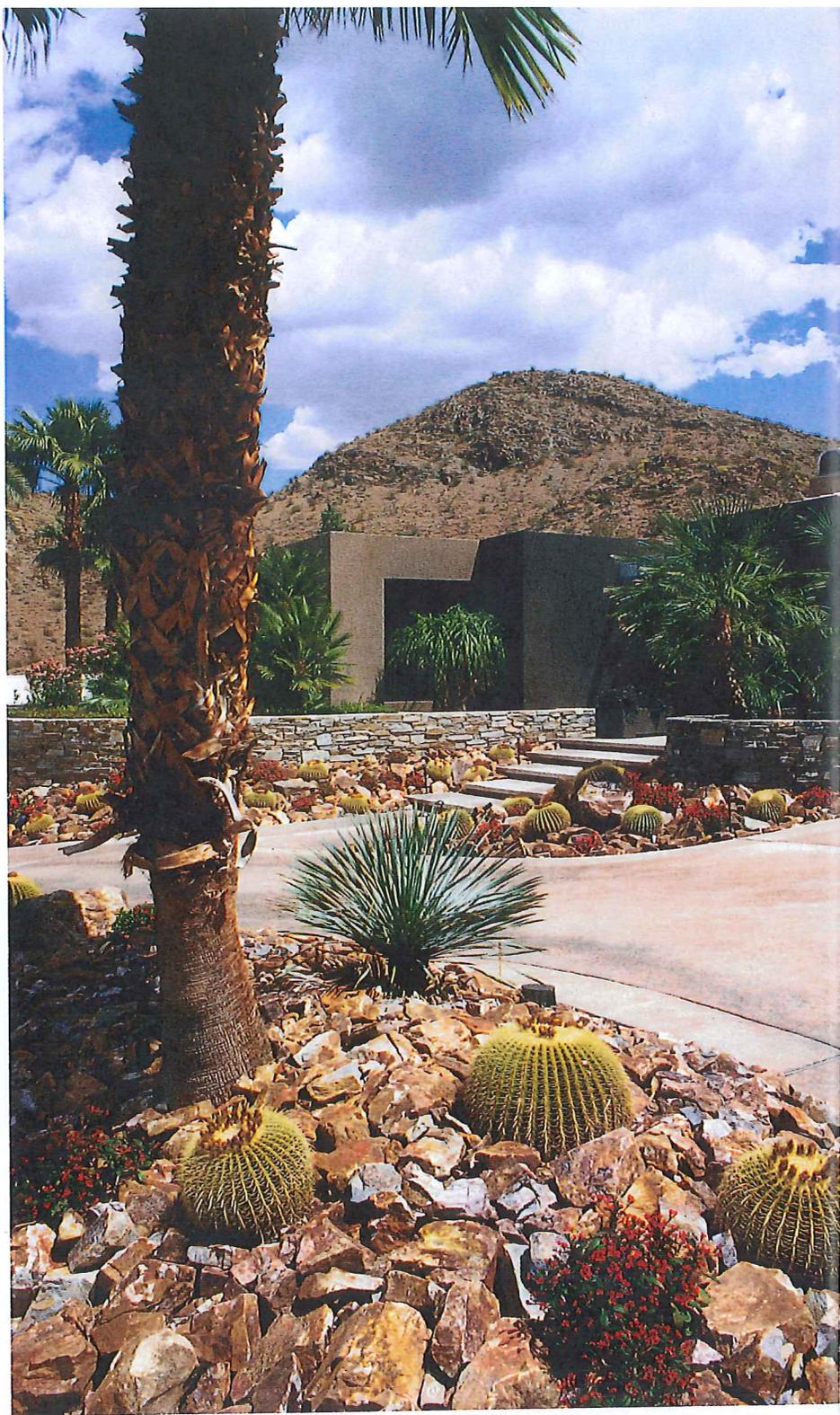
People have to understand the desert before they can garden there, says Greenlee, a designer in Pomona, Calif. “If people get to see really good desert, it can be very stunning,” he says. “But so few people have seen good desert because there is so little good desert left.” Greenlee describes a land that has been changed by natural and human forces, from urban developments like Las Vegas to high desert grassland that cattle and sheep grazing cleared out in the early pioneer days.

In Greenlee’s work, drought-tolerant grasses like salt grass, mosquito grass and blue grama grass are featured prominently. He also uses non-native grasses like vetiver, an Indian grass commonly used as a perfume base, to bolster his designs. Plant material that is heat- and drought-resistant and non-threatening to other botanical species makes up the foundation of an ecologically sound and aesthetically pleasing desert design.

The main attractions of the desert are the sweeping changes of light and shadow that occur in the blink of an eye. Sydney Baumgartner, a designer in Santa Barbara, Calif., chooses plants that will heighten the extremes of these changes. Whether using spiny cactus with other succulent back-up material to play up the shadows, or integrating crushed granite or gravel flooring to showcase the negative space, Baumgartner believes the changing light should always be considered. “The light and sunsets are so dramatic,” Baumgartner

says. “The greatest impact of the desert garden is in the night and the morning when the shadow patterns create almost a second dimension.” Like her mentor, Elizabeth Kellam deForest, Baumgartner reminds clients that it is important to mix succulents with grasses, drought-tolerant ground cover and inorganic material as a way to address the lack of water. Instead of trying to conquer the desert, the best gardens are those that work in harmony with it.

*Landscape designer Marcello Villano, based in Rancho Mirage, Calif., creates stunning vistas by using plants indigenous to the desert, including golden barrel cactus (above) and various species of desert palms and grasses (right). He also often incorporates stone boulders.*



A photograph of a desert garden. In the foreground, a series of wide, flat stone steps lead up a slope. The steps are interspersed with small, green, succulent-like plants. To the left of the steps, there are large, bushy plants with bright red flowers and some tall, feathery grasses. To the right, there are more succulents and a large, dark green plant with spiky leaves. In the background, a large, rocky mountain rises under a clear blue sky. The overall scene is a well-maintained desert landscape.

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**Sydney Baumgartner**, Santa Barbara, Calif., 805.687.2555

**Isabelle Greene**, Santa Barbara, Calif., 805.569.4045

**John Greenlee**, Greenlee Nursery, Pomona, Calif.,  
909.629.9045, [www.greenleenursery.com](http://www.greenleenursery.com)

**Marcello Villano**, Rancho Mirage, Calif., 760.401.0452

## Gracious Grounds



### Japanese

THE JAPANESE HAVE LONG BEEN considered the true masters of a pure garden aesthetic, one that lacks pretension and subtext and simply exists. But within the Japanese garden tradition lies a number of different styles, from the stark Zen gardens that date to the early Buddhist monasteries, to the strolling or imperial gardens that feature lush plant material. Regardless of the style, Japanese gardens differ from their Western counterparts because of their focus on creating places that invoke inner peace and tranquility.

Peter White, a landscape architect with the Sudbury, Mass., firm ZEN Associates, believes that one of the main principles of Japanese garden design (excluding the dry rock Zen gardens) is a naturalistic style that inspires a

sense of calm in those who experience it. These gardens are balanced and are not contained by artificial boxes or grids. There is strict attention paid to an artistic foreground, middle ground and background, and to layering plants to fit the form.

Rather than designing for color and flower variety, the overall view is paramount in a Japanese garden; color is used sparingly. "That doesn't mean the design isn't striking or bold," White says. "It's just one flower's chance to be a leading lady." White prefers to use traditional Asian plant material in his designs, including moss, dogwood, azaleas, black pine and bamboo. He notes that while the style itself remains the same, it can be composed of whatever plant material is indigenous to the garden area. "It's easy to

*Scenes from two gardens, as created by Sudbury, Mass.-based landscape firm ZEN Associates, which specializes in Japanese design.*



## Japanese Sources

**Kurusu International,**  
Portland, Ore., and Delray Beach, Fla.,  
888.441.5137, [www.kurusu.com](http://www.kurusu.com)

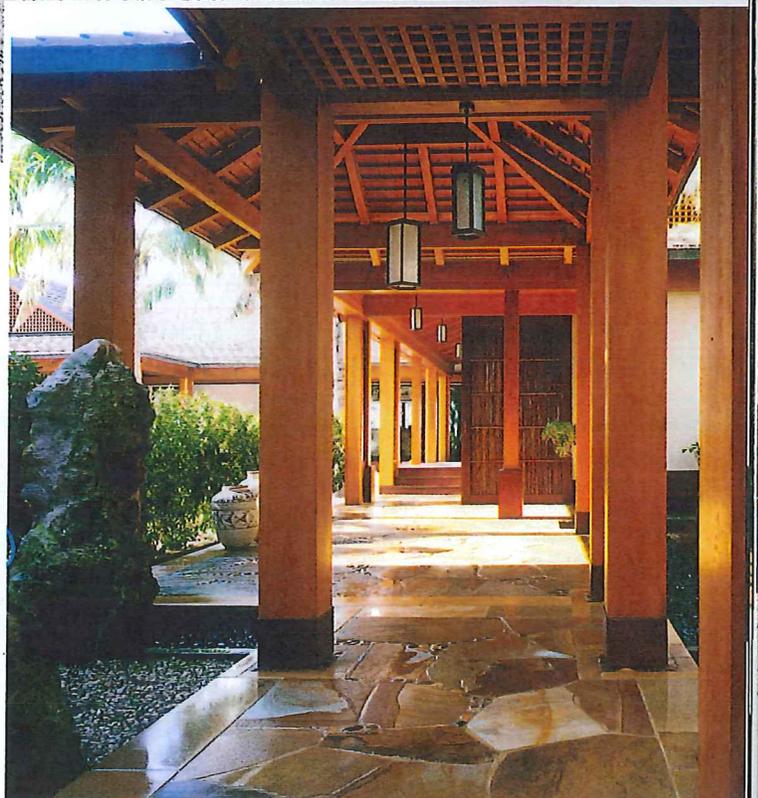
**Junji Miki, Zen Japanese Landscape Design,**  
Lynwood, Wash., 425.402.4639,  
[www.zenjapaneselandscape.com](http://www.zenjapaneselandscape.com)

**Thomas Schoos Design,**  
West Hollywood, Calif., 310.854.1141,  
[www.schoos.com](http://www.schoos.com)

**Peter White, ZEN Associates,**  
Sudbury, Mass., 800.834.6654,  
[www.zenassociates.com](http://www.zenassociates.com)

transport [this type of garden] to other cultures and climates. You could do a Japanese garden in Alaska, Florida, Maine or Sweden," White says.

Junji Miki, a Seattle landscape designer, has been designing Japanese gardens in both the United States and Japan for more than 25 years. In that time, he has learned to meld the traditional Japanese style with a more contemporary, Western feel. While few clients want austere Zen gardens—with the traditional rocks and gravel symbolizing the mountains and oceans—many want to incorporate a Zen feeling into the more contemporary Japanese garden's greenery. Miki uses a number of trees and shrubs in his designs, including mountain maple, weeping Japanese maple, cherry trees, camellias and hydrangeas. "Most people love Japanese gardens," Miki says, "because they feel calm and quiet and they are not as active as some Western gardens."



## Gracious Grounds



## Formal

ANYONE WHO HAS VISITED Hampton Court Palace outside of London or Louis XIV's Versailles can appreciate the exacting mathematics that go into creating a formal garden. In the extravagant days of European royalty (in particular the French and English), formal gardens, with their pure geometric forms and precise symmetry, symbolized wealth and influence. They required dozens of workers to maintain the parterres, or patterns, created by the flora. Today, at least in the United States, garden designers have moved away from such formality and lean toward a more natural, free-form design. But for those who still practice the form, nothing can take the place of its original mandates for balance and precision.

Many homeowners want low-maintenance gardens these days, says Troy, Va., landscape designer Susan Schlenger. The rewards from cultivating a labor-intensive formal garden, however, are abundant. And "formal" does not always negate "contemporary"—the two coexist quite comfortably in many an estate.

Schlenger regularly uses formal edges of boxwood in her designs, but says that hedges can be made from many different

types of plant material, including burning bushes, rhododendrons and inkberry holly. Creating a formal display is not so much about the specific plant material, she notes, but in how it is used.

The origins of formal gardens are rooted in Western European political history. High French parterres, with fleur-de-lis flourishes and artistic topiary, exemplify the indulgence of the Sun King. Victorian English display gardens were more staid, yet just as exacting. As society became less formal, so too did its gardens, Schlenger says.

Formal gardens are still alive and well in the United States, says designer Emily Fronckowiak, whose company, Historical Courtyards & Gardens of Berkley, Mich., specializes in European-style display gardens. "Americans just don't understand formal gardens. It takes a special mind-set," Fronckowiak says. Formal gardens serve our need to organize, as each is built on a mathematical grid. André le Nôtre, architect of the gardens at Versailles, understood this human need for order, as did acclaimed British designer Capability Brown. And as a testament to the formal garden's charm, many have stood the test of time and exist today in their original form. □

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Bristol, England,  
[www.bannermananddesign.com](http://www.bannermananddesign.com)

**Madison Cox Garden Design,**  
New York, 212.242.4631

**Emily Fronckowiak, Historical  
Courtyards & Gardens,**  
Berkley, Mich., 248.544.1218,  
[www.historicalcourtyards.com](http://www.historicalcourtyards.com)

**Penelope Hobhouse & Assoc.,**  
[www.penelopehobhouse.com](http://www.penelopehobhouse.com)

**Susan Schlenger,**  
Troy, Va., 434.996.1609,  
[www.susanschlenger.com](http://www.susanschlenger.com)

**Tom Stuart-Smith,**  
London, +44.20.7253.2100,  
[www.tomstuartsmith.co.uk](http://www.tomstuartsmith.co.uk)

*English designer Tom Stuart-Smith enlivens a somewhat rigid layout with whimsical color combinations and unexpected height variations.*