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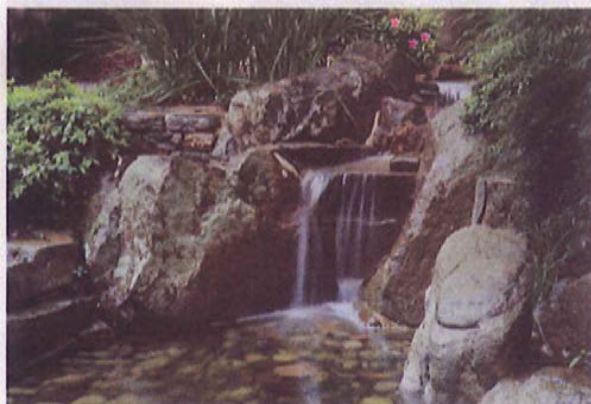
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Music of the Earth

Landscape designer Shin Abe composes a Japanese-style garden in Bethesda

*By John D. Adams
Photography by Robert Brantley*

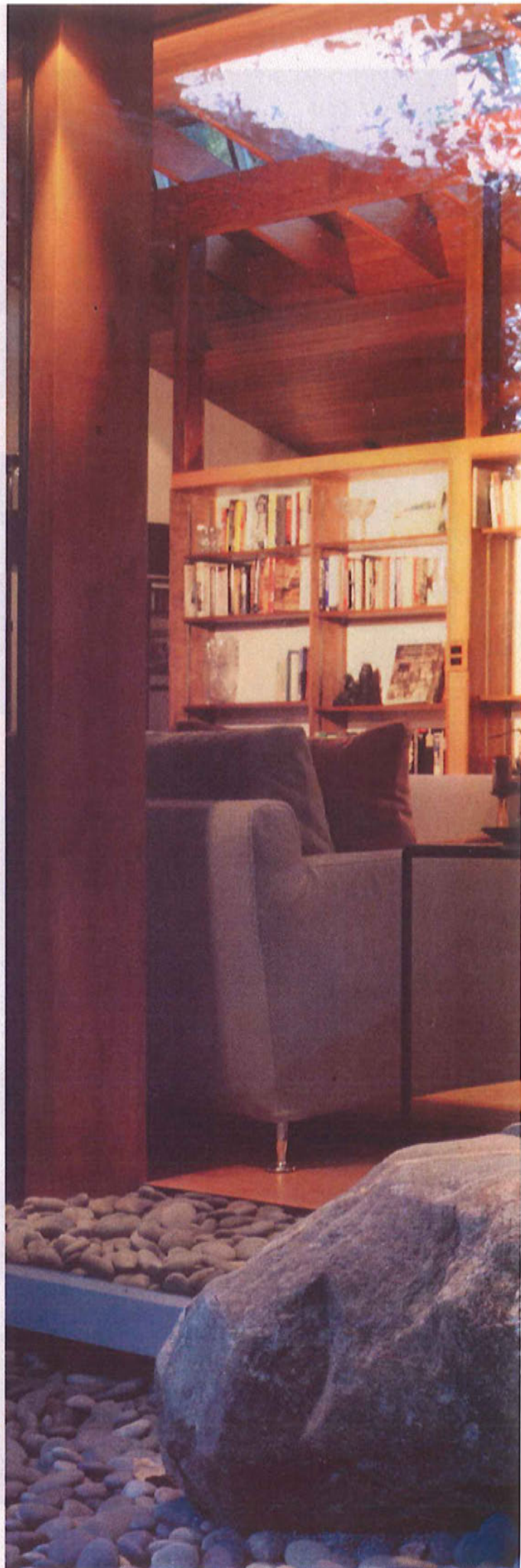


Abe placed a bisected boulder on either side of the living room glass wall to blur the line between indoors and out (right). A waterfall in the garden (above) creates a visual—and audible—focal point.

The man stands, his slight frame casting a reedy shadow onto the untouched landscape. He casts his gaze to the left, to the right and straight ahead. He moves around the property, surveying the home and its relation to the viewing garden that he will create on this land. In his mind's eye, Shinichiro Abe sees a dry creek bed, a waterfall, clouds and mountain ranges amid trees, flowering plants and shrubs.

When owners Jorge and Sandy Goldstein began the

Landscape Design: Shinichiro Abe, ZEN Associates, Inc., Sudbury, Massachusetts, and Washington, DC
Architecture: Salo Levinas, Shinberg.Levinas, Bethesda, Maryland







A tall, narrow window frames the view of the waterfall in the garden (above). Modern wicker furnishings from Thailand make the redesigned outdoor porch a truly livable space (right).

daunting task of renovating their mid-century style home, they had little knowledge of its impressive provenance. Named one of the 20 most significant American houses of 1961 by the editors of *Architectural Record*, their home in the Bradley Hills neighborhood of Bethesda had been a legend in its day, hosting public tours and nicknamed the "Hoo-Hoo House" or "House of Wood." The architectural and interior design was called "experimental" back then, but was really devoted to the celebration of wood and the natural environs surrounding the residence. "We liked that it had such an open floor plan with floor-to-ceiling windows that bring the outdoors in," says Jorge, who bought the home from its second







Plantings were selected with the forethought of how they would appear in different seasons. The majority are evergreens, with a Japanese maple adding a burst of color (above). Next to the porch, Abe created a "resting" area from flat pebble stones carefully placed within a granite frame (opposite). From there, guests can enjoy the depth of the pebble garden and survey the pond and waterfall.

owners in 1993. Its low-slung roofline and Japanese sense of minimalism appealed to the Goldsteins. "We wanted to create a landscape that matched the sensibility of the house," says Sandy.

Enter Shin Abe, principal landscape designer for ZEN Associates, Inc., a Massachusetts-based environmental design firm with a satellite office in DC. The Goldsteins immediately warmed to Abe's enthusiasm and vast experience with the history and execution of Japanese-style Zen gardens. Indeed, Abe (pronounced ah-BAY) has recently completed the incomparable Peace Bell Garden on the grounds of the United Nations buildings in New York City.

By working closely with the Goldsteins' architect, Salo Levinas, the home underwent a dramatic renewal, opening even wider to the outdoors. Levinas placed a tall, narrow window from the living room floor to the top of the cathedral ceiling; it frames Abe's outdoor waterfall. "It's breathtaking," says Sandy. "You can actually see the waterfall across the length of the home into the master bedroom." Abe says the window "lends architectural interest and beckons you to see what is out there." The use of nat-

ural stone, wood and earthen colors throughout the interior only serves to dramatically blur the lines between indoors and out.

The living room walls were partially removed and replaced with floor-to-ceiling glass. To accentuate the unity of indoors and outdoors, he bisected a large boulder, placing it on either side of the window. "I created a dry rock garden to accentuate interesting visual points of reference," says Abe. He placed gray Mexican beach pebbles along the floor, butting to the windows and continuing away from the house in a stunning, uninterrupted flow. "They are a larger pebble, but it creates an interesting texture. I wanted the flat pebbles to be an expression of water." He also chose larger pebbles because guests can walk on them without disturbing the design.

Abe and Levinas also collaborated on the re-design of the property's existing porch to create an indoor/outdoor structure that would mirror the changes taking place in the house. The new porch combines an ipê deck, stacked-stone cladding and a hanging trellis made of cypress. The family enjoys

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Music of the Earth

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meals out on the porch, which is furnished with a dining table and modern wicker furniture from Thailand.

For Abe, the design of the Japanese garden was like creating a painting in three dimensions. "You can't ignore the existing surroundings, but you can create height in one area, lower areas somewhere else." He continually walks the grounds, silently developing the plan until he "sees" a new landscape taking shape. In the design stage, he must decide where and how many focal points there will be. Then he determines how high they will be and what types of boulders are going to be used. "You also are involving time," he says. Unlike a painting, which can be seen from just one point of view, in a garden you are within the painting, so you can see from every angle. "As you walk through, you are moving through time, so you must plan for the person's experience of moving through time, through the garden, and to have the visitor come away with some emotion. A sense of balance and energy," says Abe.

Abe begins with the hardscape—the stones and pebbles, the "backbone" of the project. He always uses Japanese triangulations with three stones in a grouping, with the largest in the back. The effect creates an illusion of depth, as if you were looking at a vast mountain range. "You must remember that the middle-ground stones will move with you when you walk, but the foreground and background stay more stationary. You must plan for that. In Japanese design, you must never have an overlapping of the stones in your field of vision," says Abe.

The Goldsteins were amazed at Abe's dedication to detail. "He actually flew in when they were placing the stones," remarks Jorge. "He would step back and survey the results like an artist looking at his painting."

Plantings are placed in the same triangulation as the stones. A red Japanese maple brings a burst of color into the garden that is balanced by a smaller green maple on the other side. The pond and waterfall were placed as both visual and audible focal points. The porch floor hangs over the water so that it appears to float.

"I love staring at the garden from the living room, especially when it is covered with snow in the winter, as much as I love going out and standing on a path or sitting in the porch," says Jorge.

"The garden is like music in a way," reflects Abe. "You are creating an environment that the listener is steeped within. In the garden, there are moments of great drama mingled with moments of quiet reflection." ♦

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