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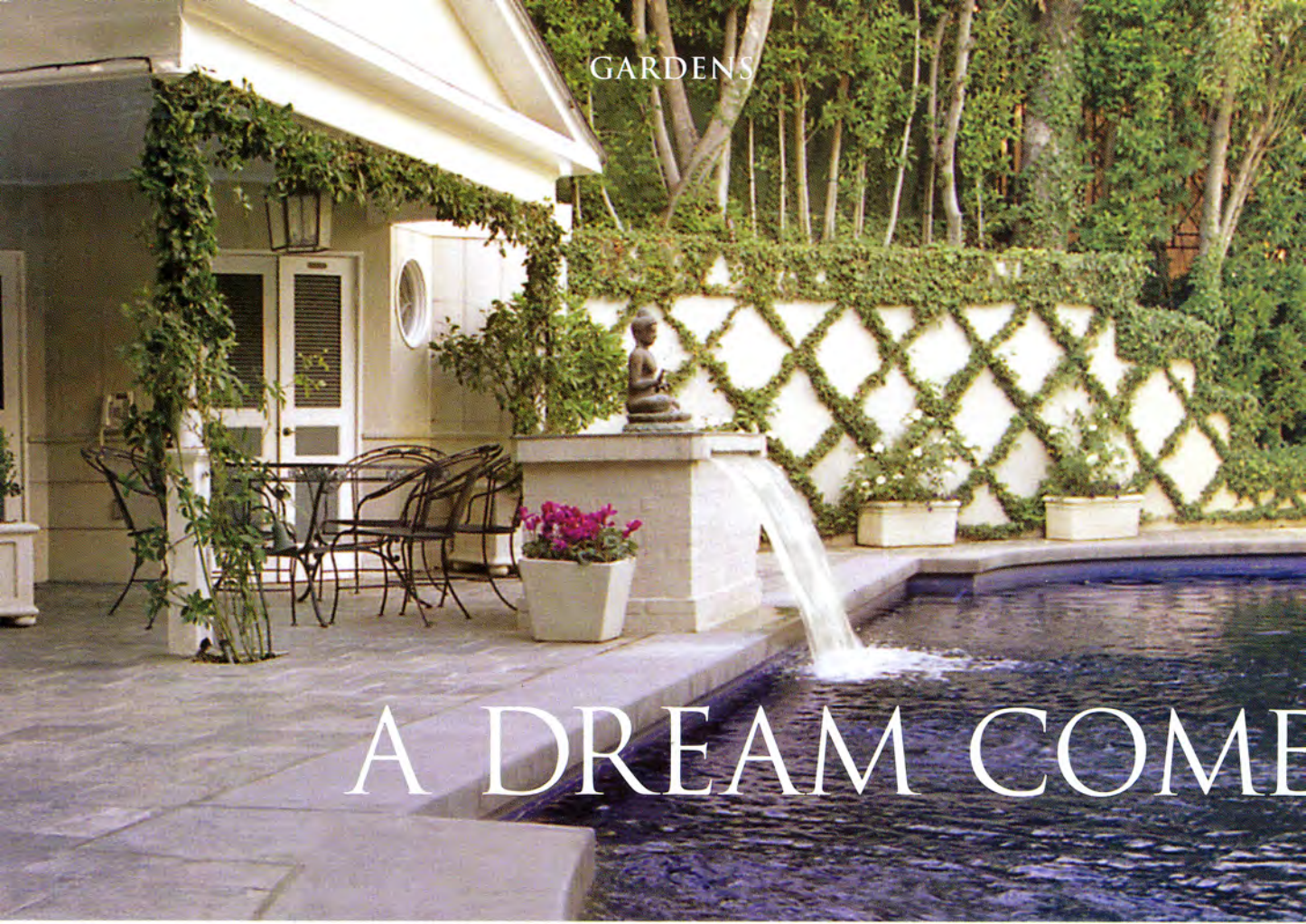


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A DREAM COME

A SERENE BEVERLY HILLS sanctuary is
created in the former home of BETTE DAVIS

W

BY KAREN DARDICK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREENTREE LANDSCAPING

HEN MARK AND JULIE JACKSON UKRA purchased a Mediterranean Colonial manor in Beverly Hills, they transformed what had been a glamorous movie star residence into a serene yet sophisticated sanctuary in the Holmby Hills region of Beverly Hills. With the help of talented landscape designer Michael Baer, owner of Greentree Landscaping, and renowned interior designer Vincent Jacquard, the one-acre estate successfully retains its original character with many improvements. Asian influences reflect the owners' appreciation of simplicity and serenity. Both interior furnishings and décor and outdoor landscape seamlessly meld the two influences. The new landscape is both sophisticated and practical, providing privacy from surrounding neighbors by the clever use of fast-growing trees and hedges, with attractive spaces for entertainment and relaxation.

ABOVE AND RIGHT PAGE: this formal landscape combines Asian and English influences through garden art like the Buddha statue in the rear garden (top) water rill accent at the front entrance, (above right) and liberal use of 'Iceberg' roses along the manor entrance.

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BUILT IN 1931, FOR MANY years it was the home of the late actress, Bette Davis. Now the manor serves as a home for Mark, Julie, their nine-year-old daughter, Lucky, two basset hounds and two dachshunds. The elegant 7,000 square-foot house showcases valuable works of art, a reflection of Julie's passion for art (she's the owner of Galerie Michael offering fine art from Rembrandt through Picasso). There's a home office for Mark, a lawyer who owns a real estate and investment firm, and it's a site for social events large and small. The family enjoys entertaining, informally and formally, both indoors and outside. Michael Baer seamlessly combined privacy screens of birch trees, quick-growing bamboo, Indian laurel fig hedges to create intimate and enticing outdoor spaces for entertaining, contemplation and play.

ABOVE LEFT: A fountain spills into a water rill that courses along the front walkway and entry steps. Nearby, a graceful, arching fortnight lily plant accents a birch tree. BOTTOM LEFT: a life size Buddha fountain is the focal point of this serene garden filled with black and giant timber bamboo, ferns and colorful accent plants in ceramic pots. BOTTOM, RIGHT: English touches are evident in this skillful diamond espalier pattern of English ivy with 'Iceberg' roses in the foreground.



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GARDENS

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ABOVE: White-trunk birch trees, gnarled olive trees and a dense Eugenia hedge provide privacy.

Before the renovation, the street entrance was exposed to public view. Swaths of agapanthus and several overgrown eucalyptus trees were the main garden elements. Now, a multitude of 'Climbing Iceberg' roses soften the walls and fences enclosing the manor. Visitors enter by stone steps clad in Bouquet Canyon stone and edged on one side by a water rill spilling out of a circular fountain on an upper level. Baer added it to create a border for a new swath of green lawn and to camouflage street noises with the sound of cascading water. Eucalyptus trees were removed because their roots were endangering the house foundation. In their place is a forest of white-trunk birch trees, gnarled olive trees, and a dense eugenia hedge. Red fountain grass adds movement and texture and lavender perfumes the air. Near the house entrance is a long border edged with boxwood and containing espaliered Meyer lemon trees.

The formal front garden segues to an Asian influence in the side and rear gardens accessible from the living and dining rooms. Mark calls it the Buddha Fountain Area, so named because of the life-size Buddha with water gently coursing from the head to a collecting pool at the base.

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GARDENS

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ABOVE: The green and white color palette creates a sense of formality for the landscape. Dwarf citrus trees in containers add sweet fragrance.

Black bamboo in ornate pots fill corners, 'Alphonse Karr' and giant timber bamboo provide privacy screens from a neighboring house, and a seating area provides a convenient place for contemplation.

The back garden combines English influence with Asian touches. A meditating Buddha sits on a five-foot pedestal camouflaging the pool filter and backfill. Water cascades five feet into the oval swimming pool that Baer refinished. The original coping was replaced and the pool depth changed from nine to six feet. Lined with cobalt blue tiles, the water appears dark and mysterious. The retaining walls around this space are decorated with an elaborate diamond espalier pattern of English ivy. Potato vines swirl around and above the house, and 'Iceberg' roses climb to the second story facing the pool and outdoor pavilion. Dwarf citrus trees in containers enliven the air with sweet smelling flowers, followed by vibrant orange fruit. An outdoor fireplace adjacent to an informal dining table and chairs is a popular gathering place.

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By restraining the plant palette chiefly to green and white, the effect is sophisticated elegance, cooling and soothing. Baer accents the landscape with restrained punches of blue, yellow and occasional splashes of red provided by annual plants changed out seasonally. In winter, cyclamen, pansies and hydrangeas predominate, replaced in summer with heat loving plants like petunias.

Baer's greatest challenge in designing the landscape was to surmount the different light patterns. In winter, when the sun is lower on the horizon and quickly disappears behind surrounding hills, shade predominates. But in summer, intense sunlight floods the garden. Tree canopies filter the summer sun and Baer selected permanent plants like roses and lavender that flourish in summer and are dormant in winter. 'Climbing Iceberg' is the rose star of the landscape. Baer and his crew planted 150 from 15-gallon containers to provide instant maturity both in the front and rear gardens. A compact rose garden containing hybrid tea and floribunda varieties provides flowers for indoor bouquets. Fruit trees occupy another section of the garden. Mark Ukra enjoys harvesting succulent nectarines, peaches and plums.

The goal for the landscape was to provide privacy for outdoor entertaining and perfect nooks for quiet relaxation and contemplation. It was achieved.

"We live hectic, busy lives," Julie says. "Our home is our sanctuary. It's a very warm and calming environment."

Mark agrees, adding "we feel like we're in the country instead of the city. We don't see our neighbors or hear street noises. Instead, we hear the sound of birds." ☼