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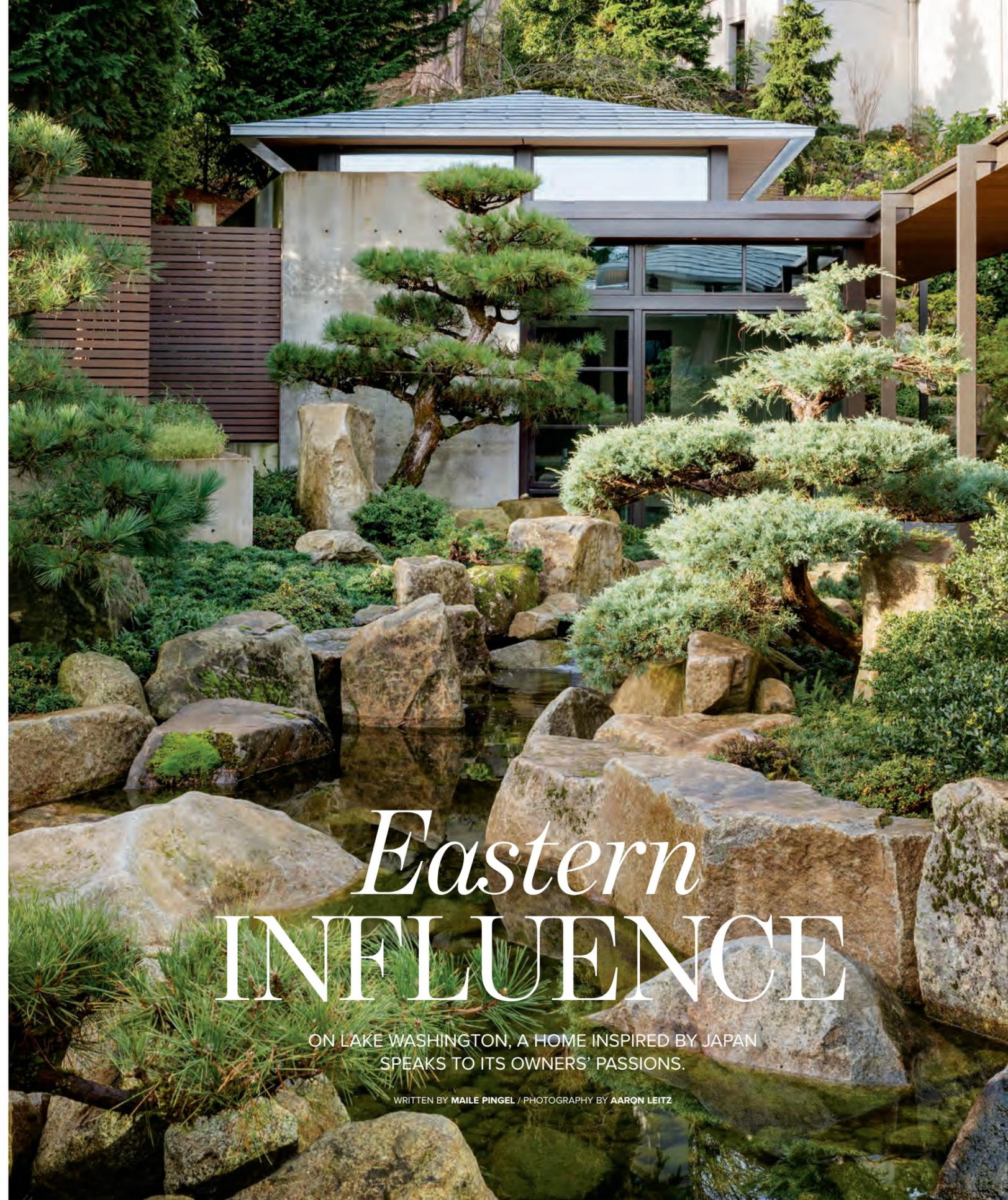
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DOUG PAYNE, MERCER BUILDERS LLC  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE /  
RICHARD HARTLAGE,  
LAND MORPHOLOGY



# *Eastern* INFLUENCE

ON LAKE WASHINGTON, A HOME INSPIRED BY JAPAN  
SPEAKS TO ITS OWNERS' PASSIONS.

WRITTEN BY MAILE PINGEL / PHOTOGRAPHY BY AARON LEITZ

The entrance to a Seattle home by architect Stuart Silk flows directly into the living area. Designers Melinda Sechrist and Louanne Low chose understated furnishings. Jiun Ho armchairs in Sandra Jordan wool join a Liaigre coffee table from Susan Mills Showroom. The rug is from Driscoll Robbins Fine Carpets. The artwork above the fireplace is by Morris Graves. Classic Foundry cast the custom bronze door pulls.

**W**e wanted the house to be put into the garden, not the other way around,” Spencer Frazer says of the distinct vision he relayed to architect Stuart Silk during their initial meeting. That was just one of Spencer’s requirements for his future home on a wooded lot overlooking Lake Washington. It also needed to be, he says, “a showcase for my bonsai and specimen trees. It had to have a Japanese-1950s flavor, transparent but still homey, and be one story, without steps. And it had to have an entrance sequence that was transformational from the moment one came through the outer gate.” In short, Spencer, who shares the residence with his wife, explained, “It had to be a spiritual haven.” Undaunted, Silk accepted the challenge, noting, “We wanted this home to capture the essence of traditional Japanese buildings without mimicking familiar imagery or details. It’s a reinterpretation through the lens of a modern Pacific Northwest sensibility.”

To fulfill Spencer’s many wishes, Silk, joined by former associates John Adams and Karen Chiu, says he “conceived the home as a collection of one-story pavilions with the garden at its center.” By flattening the sloping site, the architects were able to place all of the structures on a single elevation and connect them via a single covered path. “The walkway runs most of the length of the property, knitting the pavilions together,” Silk says. Three linked structures containing the primary living spaces occupy the lakefront end of the site, while the fourth building, with Spencer’s studio, a gym and a guest suite, is positioned near the street. Hipped roofs clad in zinc shingles evoke the feel of old roofs.



Ligne Roset stools face the island, which is encased in Calacatta Gold marble from Marmo e Granito. The stone is also on the backsplash and conceals shelving. A trio of Zaneen pendants is from Lighting Supply. Northwest Building Tech and Mercer Painting executed the kitchen cabinetry. The Miele ovens and Wolf cooktop are from Albert Lee; the sinks are Blanco, and the faucets are by Waterstone. Schumacher mohair covers the sofa in the adjacent family room.



Maximizing daylight, Silk raised each roof on thin steel posts to allow a continuous band of clerestory windows. “They seem to defy gravity,” he says. General contractor Doug Payne, the principal/project manager, agrees: “You wonder how in the world those are supported.” Payne, who worked with general contractor Thom Schultz, still marvels at the level of detail he and his team achieved to integrate the structural elements of the home with the aesthetic desired by the architect and client. “Not all of those details are readily apparent,” he says, “but as you spend time in the home, you begin to realize how well everything was thought out.”

The extraordinary collaboration continued inside the abode, with attention paid to the function of each space. The couple entertains frequently, so cedar plank ceilings were installed to absorb sound. A media unit in the family room incorporates Spencer’s desk, giving him a view and plenty of drawer space. And the minimalist kitchen belies the amount of storage it contains. Hidden within the walls,

there are even zig-zag tunnels that allow the couple’s rescue cats to roam covertly. Supporting Silk’s rhythmic, craft-centric lead, designers Melinda Sechrist and Louanne Low, along with their associates Pooja Jain and Juan Moreira, brought in several touches of warmth to reflect the wife’s taste. “We wanted to create spaces that felt cocoon-like,” says Sechrist. For softness, they chose alpaca fabrics for the living room. For color, they pulled hues from the clients’ artwork, including a deep blue from a painting for the dining room chairs and a rust tone that also references a maple tree for the family room sofa. In the master bedroom, they added a cozy reading nook by the fireplace.

Private spaces for the couple also figured into the scheme for the house. The wife received a quiet office at the end of the bedroom pavilion where she could work on crafts. “She wanted the space to have a simple feel,” says Low. Spencer got an art studio with good lighting and immediacy to the garden. “Nothing’s more important in designing a garden house than to have excellent visibility from within,” he says.

“Stuart wrapped the house around the site, which gave us the opportunities to create a series of views,” says landscape architect Richard Hartlage, who worked closely with project manager Adrian Coerver on the design. Early on, Hartlage and the owners engaged Nussbaum Group to detail and construct the water feature and landscape.



Part of the main pavilion, the dining room features a LUMA Design Workshop table from Trammell-Gagné and Ligne Roset chairs in a vibrant blue Nobilis fabric from Kelly Forslund. The rock crystal Pagani Studio chandelier is from Holly Hunt in West Hollywood, California. On the wall is a painting by Ilya Zomb.

“THIS HOME CAPTURES THE ESSENCE OF JAPANESE BUILDINGS THROUGH THE LENS OF A PACIFIC NORTHWEST SENSIBILITY.”

-STUART SILK



**Opposite:** “We wanted it to feel like a temple,” says Low of the powder room. An onyx slab from Meta Marble & Granite makes a glowing backdrop for one of the homeowners’ Buddhas. The custom counter, fabricated by Decorative Metal Arts, holds a Watermark faucet from Chown Hardware. Onyx tile from Statements is on the backsplash; the Maya Romanoff wallcovering is from Trammell-Gagné. The porcelain tile flooring is from Pental Surfaces.

**Below:** In the master bedroom, a work by Yvonne Twining Humber hangs against Jim Thompson silk from Trammell-Gagné. The custom bed from Garofalo Woodworks is topped with a Frette duvet. The floor lamp, armchair and ottoman are from Terris Draheim.



In the studio, as throughout the home, floor-to-ceiling windows frame the view as if they were paintings. “It’s the realization of my vision in a different medium,” he notes.

For the garden, Silk and Spencer turned to landscape architect Richard Hartlage. Together, they ultimately decided on a plan featuring two garden “rooms” that are united by a stream flowing from the top of the property to a pond—symbolic of a journey from mountain to sea. “Form, scale and texture are all important in Japanese gardens,” says Hartlage, who worked with project manager Adrian Coerver. “We started with Spencer’s bonsai and then additional trees to complement them, as well as azaleas, mondo grass and ferns. The garden is seen from multiple areas, so there’s an important tree at each sight line.” Spencer, who has worked on some of his trees for decades, explains his fascination

with the art: “Japanese gardens are a study in patience and long thinking. It’s intellectually interesting,” adding, “Sometimes things call you, and you have to allow them into your life.” The rear terrace, visible from the front garden, also showcases one of Spencer’s bonsai, which needed to be craned into position over the house. Along the shoreline below, Hartlage returned the landscape to native grasses.

“Like the weather, the house is ever-changing, constantly absorbing and emitting light, mood and reflection. It envelops you,” says Spencer. “In the end, this artist got to live in one of his paintings.” So, while the project took five years to complete, it was worth every considered decision. “I’m sorry the home is finished,” says Silk. “We fit together perfectly. I learned from Spencer, and he learned from me. It was one of the most important partnerships of my career.” ■



A walkway leads from the front door to the property's entrance and art studio/guest pavilion. "The relationship between garden and structures weaves a complex interplay in a dance that enhances both," says the architect. "The result is a living experience filled with surprise and delight."