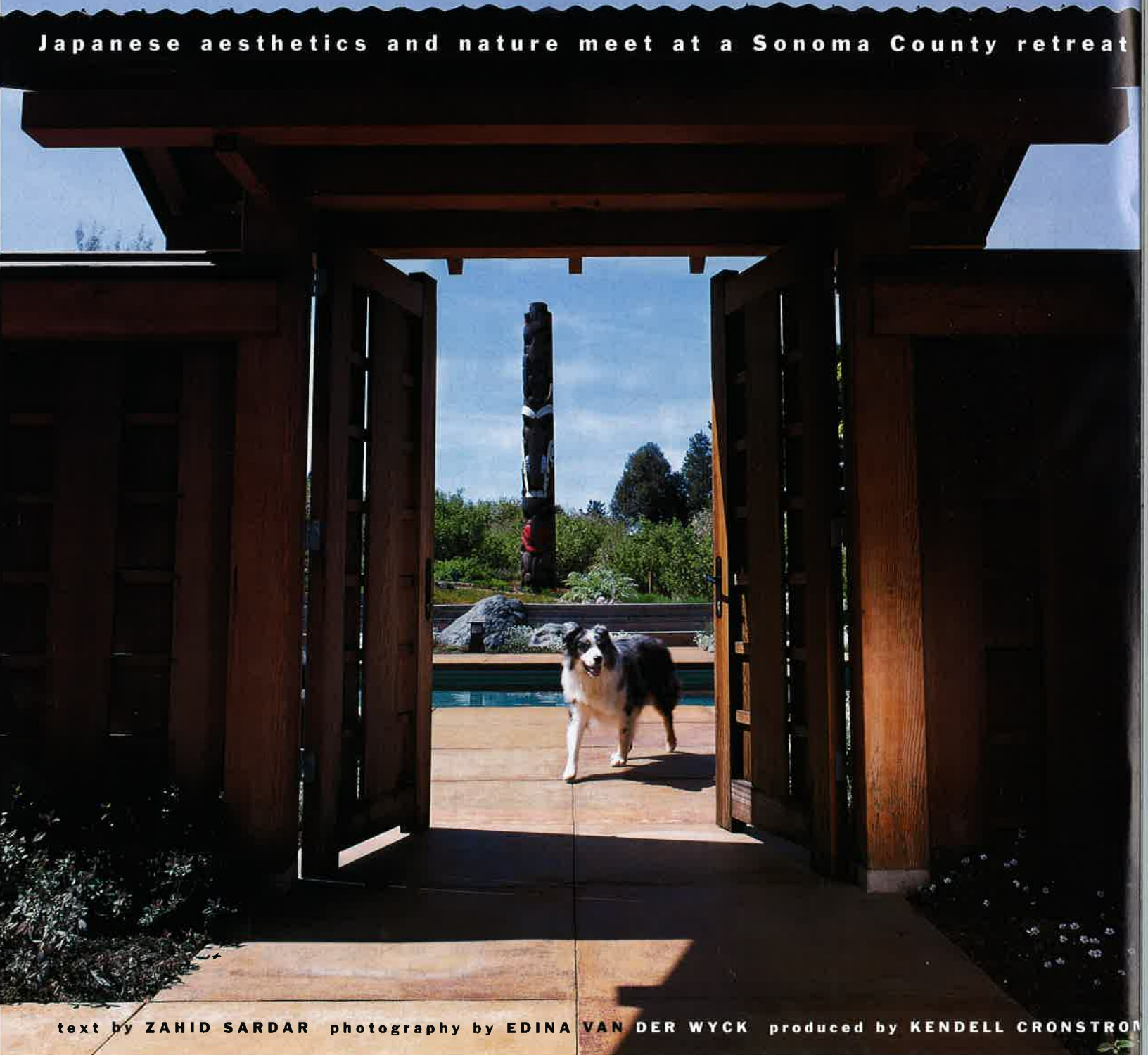
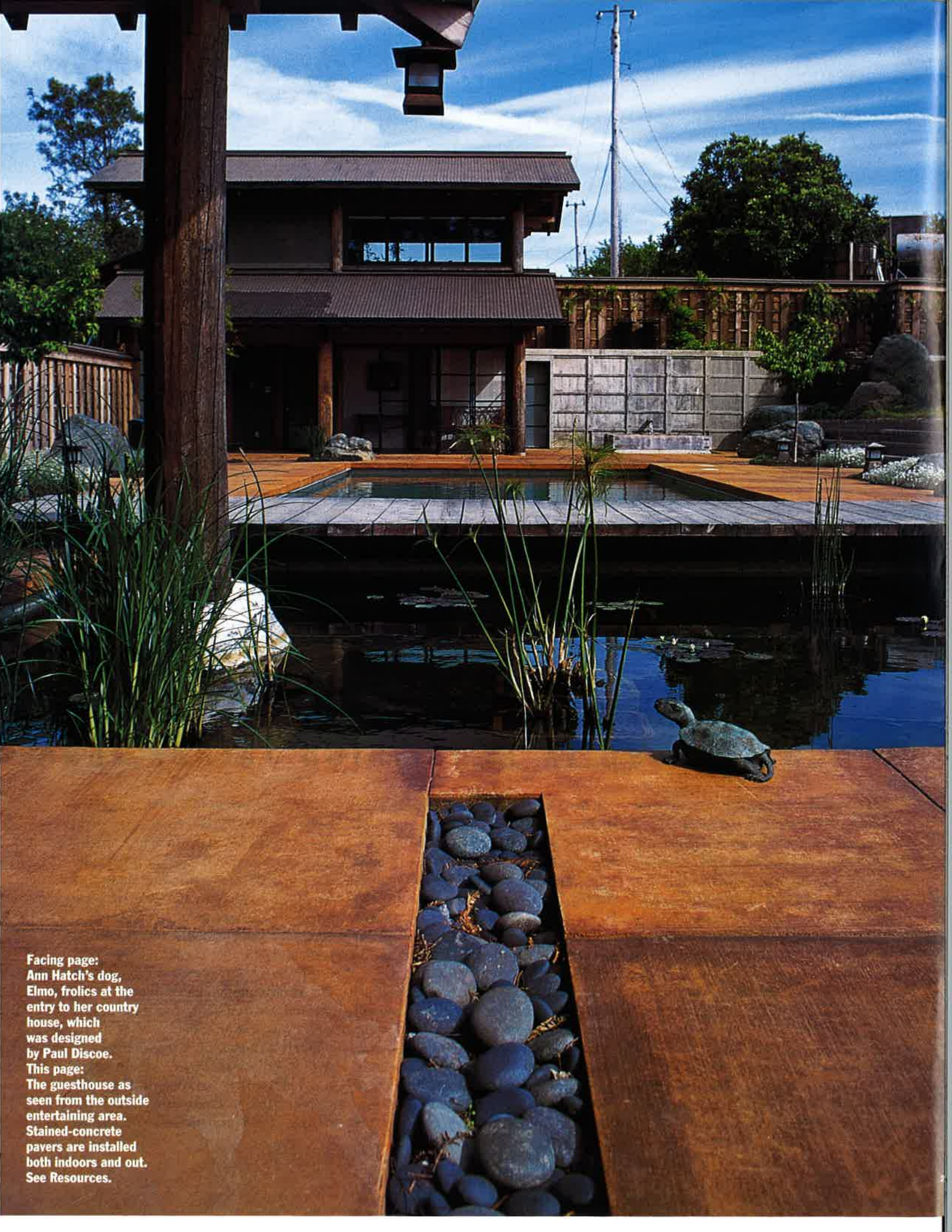


z e n p a l a c e

Japanese aesthetics and nature meet at a Sonoma County retreat



text by ZAHID SARDAR photography by EDINA VAN DER WYCK produced by KENDELL CRONSTRON



Facing page:
Ann Hatch's dog,
Elmo, frolics at the
entry to her country
house, which
was designed
by Paul Discoe.
This page:
The guesthouse as
seen from the outside
entertaining area.
Stained-concrete
pavers are installed
both indoors and out.
See Resources.



“Such a house is assembled rather than

Pinned a string on a map and looked for places within an hour’s radius of San Francisco,” says Ann Hatch, remembering the unorthodox method she used to find her hilly 30-acre Sebastopol ranch, which includes 27 acres of apple orchards and redwood forest. At one time this pocket of Sonoma County was “planted in grapes, but during Prohibition they put in cherry and apple trees”—making it famous for Gravenstein, Jonathan, Rome, and Golden Delicious apples, but little else. Although a few wineries dot the landscape, “it’s a quiet place. In Sebastopol there’s no slap and dash, like in Napa. Until last year there wasn’t even a movie theater.”

In this “wilderness” Hatch established a dwelling, a 12-foot-square “tree house” of glass, old barn wood, and found timbers that a friend built as a joke. “I lived in it off and on from 1972,” she says. “It felt like being part of the redwoods.” But by the late ’80s, Hatch had grown out of the tree house, and decided to replace it with a larger structure that retained its pioneer spirit.

She asked Paul Discoe, an ordained Buddhist priest and master carpenter trained in Japanese temple joinery (he is the visionary designer behind Oracle tycoon Larry Ellison’s still-unfinished Japanese compound south of San Francisco), to build it. His Far Eastern aesthetic is immediately apparent at the

entry to the property, where a wooden fence—woven rather than constructed—shields what appears to be a single-story ranch house. But on the other side, stairs lead down to a stunning enclave of structures inspired by Japanese temples: a 640-square-foot guest pavilion and a two-story gabled house, which flank a pool and a water garden. Their axial arrangement corresponds to the grid of the surrounding orchards, where evenly planted rows of trees are interspersed with Provencal lavender.

“Such a house is assembled rather than built,” says Discoe, who incorporated old-growth redwood and logs salvaged from a dead forest into the design, as well as hand-milled madrona



Boulders from the Yuba River in Northern California line the area between the guesthouse and the main house; plantings include water lilies, irises, and snow-in-summer.
Bottom: Hatch with Elmo; beyond them is a metal-framed fireplace.



built”

Clockwise from near right: A hand-hammered copper vase from de Vera on a demilune table by Tom Ruth. Shoji-style accordion doors open up the dining area to the outdoors; the California walnut table was custom-made by Ruth. Hatch inherited the rug in the sitting room from her grandmother. The cast-glass front door was made by John Lewis. See Resources.



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and Douglas-fir posts provided by Hatch's lumber-industry family ("I really wanted to have wood that we actually grew," she says). Shigeru Namba, a classically trained Japanese rock master, arranged 75 tons of boulders in the garden area; they look like stylized outcroppings among landscaper Ron Herman's thoughtful plantings. With so much wood making up the buildings' architecture, Hatch risked creating an overblown log cabin, but the compound is nothing less than an elegant hybrid of Japanese aesthetics and an open-air

West Coast sensibility.

To make the transition to the *plein air* seamless, Discoe devised steel-and-glass accordion doors that open the living and dining areas to the elements; three-foot-square cement pavers poured in situ both inside the house and around it literally extend usable spaces in many directions. Even the pool serves more than one function: a narrow bridge across one end divides it from an ornamental water garden containing fish and lily pads.

Punctuating the tranquil setting of or-

chards and wood and water is a totem pole by Jim Hart, a Native American and former resident artist of Capp Street Project, a San Francisco arts program founded and sponsored by Hatch (she is a lifelong arts patron whose great-grandfather founded the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis). But Hatch cautions that she doesn't "particularly want an art park here—it becomes demanding when you have strong art. Besides, art is all around you in various ways." She points to the apple trees and the lavender. "This is a sanctuary." ★