

Variables of Green

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By Phyllis Van Doren

The cloudiness of jade, the dreamy paleness of celadon, the heartbreaking delicacy of newborn leaf, the forboding darkness of pine -the color green stirs many emotions. Strolling the gardens of Dr. Michael Stotsky's Mission Hills home I am overcome with pleasure enjoying sunlight that scatters gold through stands of bamboo, sensuous pillows of mondo grass cradling stone paths and the emerald lawn that sweeps to the edge of the vine-filled canyon.

I was told the circa 1909 Craftsman style shingled house was originally built for Charles and Elizabeth Kelly by M.M Lewis and Company. Whether it was the owner's attraction for Japan or typical Craftsman period interest in Japanese details, the roof and eaves reflect the Orient. It was the first house built on the street and had uninterrupted views of Mission Valley at that time.

Stotsky, who grew up in Mission Hills, bought the home in 1988 from the estate of the late Will Hippen, Jr., who also had a great love for Japanese culture. He was Honorary Consul General of Japan from 1975 until his death. When Stotsky purchased the half-acre estate, the exterior was dark brown, hidden by overgrown shrubbery. The interior was dark wood with traditional Craftsman wainscoting and ceiling beams.

Over the last six years Stotsky has added to the gardens and restored and enhanced the exterior of the house, and he has plans to do more. The interior has been remodeled into a lighter but more formal style suitable to his taste for 18th century English furniture. Classical architectural mouldings and other details like a Greek key motif floor inlay and new leaded-glass windows around the front door were added with the help of designer William Iddings. "We tore off the 5-foot-high wainscoting and gave the rooms a very traditional look," he says, "Architectural details are one of my pet pleasures."

The home's exterior has been painted in muted shades of gray-green chosen by Jim Gibson of Gibson & Gibson Antique Lighting, who also designed metal and glass lanterns as exterior lighting for the home. As Stotsky says, "I didn't want the color of the house to distract from the landscape." **Takendo Arii**, who was trained in Japan, designed a new Japanese garden for the front and side of the property that is in harmony with existing architecture and landscape features. Arii says, "I tried to match his house like you match different parts of you dress. I respect his taste and make it not only individual to him, but I have to think about his neighbors too."

A new hedge of shrubby yew (*Podocarpus nagi*) which grows in a dense upright form will provide privacy for the garden. Arii has created a wider, more balanced and appropriate approach to the house with a horizontal stained concrete walkway inset with a 'cats paw' pattern of pebbles. This is softened with a contrasting interplanting of mondo grass (*ophiopogon japonicus*). Arii added a rock wall as an accent to the building. The small front garden includes a dry stream bed that provides drainage during the rainy season to eliminate erosion. A traditional bamboo pipe slowly drips water into a Stone basin (*Tsu-ku-ba-i*) and very gradually wets the stones of the stream bed during dry weather. Stepping stones in this tranquil garden space lead around the side to a pond of goldfish and water plants. A particularly good pond material Arii recommends is the yellow-striped grass *Acorus gramineus variegatus*.

Primarily green in midsummer, several deciduous trees mark the seasons in the garden, including white blooming ornamental pears near the street, a spectacular purple magnolia (*Magnolia lilliflora 'Nigra'*) next to the house and Arii's favorite, the Chinese flame tree (*Koelreuteria*), whose seed pods are like tiny Japanese lanterns. Azalea and camellia bushes add seasonal color as well. "This is actually a low-maintenance garden which only needs trimming once a year in the winter," Arii says

