

DAVID AND MARTY HAMAMOTO

WATER MILL

Shakkei is a Japanese word which, translated literally, means “borrowed scenery”—when a gardener includes in his or her design a visual echo of the surrounding landscape to create a subliminal sense of connection. The goal is to integrate the garden into that landscape’s context, and to provide a sense of harmony and spaciousness, an illusion that the design extends as far as one can see. The technique is first described in a nine-hundred-year-old Japanese design manual, *The Secret Book of Gardens*. The landscape Chris LaGuardia designed for the Water Mill beach house of David and Marty Hamamoto and their two children is a clever realization of *shakkei*. It’s far more than that, however. LaGuardia has used the views in ways his Japanese predecessors never imagined: He restored and subtly enhanced the most immediate views, those of the dunes on the property itself. Working closely with town planning officials,



LEFT: In the Japanese tradition of *shakkei*, architect Fred Stelle and landscape architect Chris LaGuardia raised the front terrace elevations fourteen feet, maximizing the views of Moon Bay. The beach road lies undetected behind the native screen plantings.

FOLLOWING PAGES, LEFT: Deft changes in grading and simple plantings of unclipped bayberry, the groundcover liriope, and pine accentuate even the smallest architectural details, such as this downspout and catch basin.

FOLLOWING PAGES, RIGHT: Recycling through the gravel of the enclosed bamboo garden outside the gym, the square fountain’s water reflects Water Mill’s renowned beachside light.







LaGuardia (in collaboration with Stelle Architects) raised the house fourteen feet on its existing footprint to expand the views of ocean and Mecox Bay. A swimming pool was installed on a massive stone-faced pedestal for the same purpose. Elevating the house and pool could have made these structures obtrusive, but LaGuardia turned a potential problem into an opportunity. The elevation of the house's ocean-side wall allowed a second-story deck to be set at the same level as the crest of the sheltering dunes; and in a particularly inspired example of borrowing, LaGuardia made the garden surface below undulate in a dune-like topography, planting it with native beach grasses, beach plums (*Prunus maritima*), and bayberries (*Myrica pensylvanica*). He turned the side of the pool pedestal that confronts the visitor in the house's entryway garden into a waterfall, a six-foot-high curtain of water that masks not only the pool's edge and the architectural mass of the house but also, with its splashing, the sound of passing traffic.

The built elements of this garden were treated in a very spare, abstract style. This is another nod to the Japanese aesthetic of simplicity as well as a response to the ascetic beauty of the coastal setting. The surface of the pool, barely contained by a dark, unadorned coping, furnishes a plain but bold rectangle that mirrors the sky, echoes the bay, and even suggests the famous meditation garden of the Ryoan-ji temple in Kyoto, Japan. The massive, clean-lined forms of the garden elements—the steps and landings of meticulously cut limestone, and the stone-veneered walls—also serve as a counterbalance to the monolithic house. Large rectangular stone planters anchor the pool and terraces, and separate the various spaces. All this geometry might be oppressive in another setting, but poised against the vast coastal plain and horizons, assertive shapes are essential.

Another subtle but effective technique that LaGuardia borrowed from the Japanese was to base the garden on the same module as the floor plan of the house. Both are organized on a 1.5 meter grid, which fosters a sense of connectedness between the two spaces, blurring the distinction between indoors and out.

Like the architecture, the planting of this garden is simple and spare, sometimes clipped to enhance the lines of the architecture, and sometimes left natural to soften the lines of the house and hardscape. The ascent to the front door is set amid a grove of native bayberries underplanted with liriopse; the pool is screened by more bayberries, though these are carefully trimmed. Perimeter plantings of evergreen pines and bayberries (which, though not truly evergreen, hold their leaves through most of the winter) screen out a busy beach road and divert the eye back to the bay views that are the front garden's most powerful feature.

Though LaGuardia's use of views is the garden's central theme, he didn't neglect the residents' need for privacy and domesticity. Adjacent to the west side of the house is a hedge-enclosed space that serves as a secret garden to be viewed from the exercise room. Floored with gravel and punctuated with bamboo, this is a place apart; yet like the garden as a whole, it is subtly related to what lies outside its borders. In an echo of the garden and the swimming pool, the enclosure centers on a rectilinear elevated body of water, in this case a black granite fountain that sluices water over its sides to be absorbed into the gravel below. Even the most ardent beach-lover needs a place for introspection.

PREVIOUS PAGES: Dunes were restored and planted with native vegetation, providing protection from wind and surf. The sculpture is by Bernar Venet.

BELOW: Greeting the visitor, the waterfall (created from the infinity-edged pool overflow) masks the sounds of passing vehicles.



