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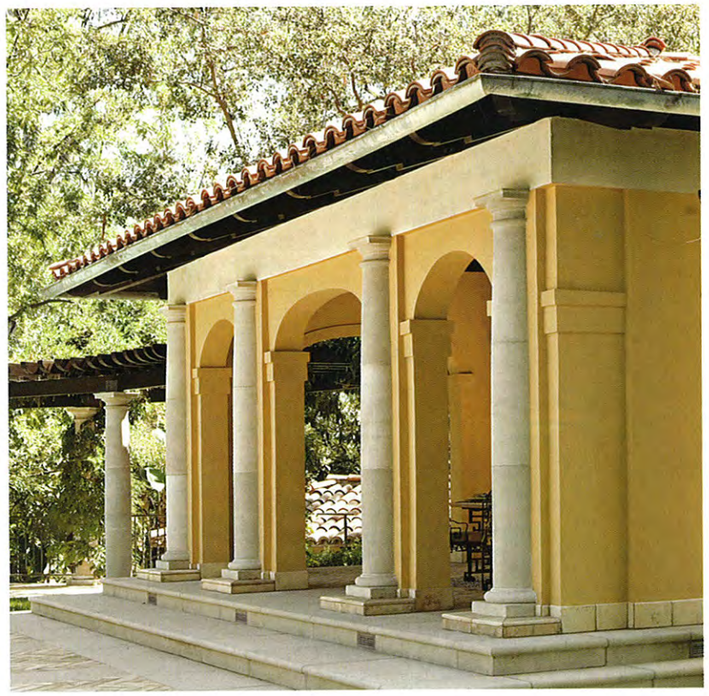
Down a Garden Path

A GRANDE DAME DESERVES A GRAND GARDEN

BY JOBETH MCDANIEL + PHOTOGRAPHY BY KARYN MILLET

The 100-year-old tall specimen pines stayed, serving as an upper-story canopy. But nearly everything else surrounding the home of Tom and Erika Girardi (see *Robb Report Luxury Home*, Jan./Feb. 2007) was demolished, excavated, moved or refinished.

It might sound unusual to call this a historic garden re-creation, but that was the mission of landscape architect Robert Truskowski—to restore the grounds to their former grandeur and stay true to the vision of the creators, the renowned Olmsted brothers.



A gracious Pasadena estate with a pedigreed history—architecture by Myron Hunt and gardens by the Olmsted Brothers—was brought back to life by landscape architect Robert Truskowski. Previous pages: A series of rills flows down from the main house toward the pool. These pages: Truskowski tore out the existing grounds and re-created a romantic expansive setting. Existing 100-year-old specimen pine trees were kept as the top canopy and supplemented with five unusual deciduous magnolias imported from New Zealand.

"It doesn't look like a brand-new landscape," Truskowski says. "It looks like a garden that has been there a considerable length of time." He studied other 1920s-era designs of Myron Hunt, the home's original architect, as well as the Olmsteds, and he worked closely with interior designer Joan Behnke. "Joan has a tremendous vision for this house," he says. "It was important to me that when you are inside looking out at the garden, it is all integrated, an extension of what's happening in the house."

Truskowski tore out the existing poolhouse and pool and moved them to a different location. Later, he discovered that the Olmsteds' original plans had called for a pond and reflecting pool in the spot he had chosen. Then he added a rill and a series of cascades spilling down the hill for a long axial vista.

Truskowski also sought out older materials, including antique Mexican tiles. Reclaimed French *parefeuille* pavers, between 100 and 200 years old, set off the exterior of the new pool and channel rill, and give a patina to the new motor court. The interiors of the pool, spa, fountain and rill shimmer with Bisazza glass tiles. The pool's unusual palm design at the waterline is a micromosaic, handmade specifically for the Girardis. The statuary throughout the gardens came from the couple's personal collection.

When it came to the greenery, Truskowski complemented the

Joan Behnke, who worked on the home's interiors, collaborated with Truskowski on the gardens, too. Opposite: For the gazebo at the bottom of the garden, she selected an early-20th-century chinoiserie iron dining table and chairs. Above: "The gardens were designed to evoke the feeling of the great estates in Montecito," says Behnke. "We wanted to bring back that romantic era." All of the antique statuary came from the owners' collection.

Italianate architecture of the house with Mediterranean plantings. Two towering Phoenix *canariensis* palms, 20,000 pounds each, are a striking presence in the motor court.

Formal terraces and more naturalistic slopes were planted with hard-to-find species. "Clients who own these estates will collect and introduce rare and unusual species to their gardens," he says. Japanese wisteria climb the trellis flanking both sides of the outdoor pavilion. More than 100 camellias, including a rare Japanese peacock camellia, dot the two-acre grounds. Satsuki and Kurume azaleas bloom in shady areas, as do five deciduous magnolia trees (Chrysanthemum and Pinkie) from New Zealand.

Outside the kitchen, a hand-forged Santa Maria barbecue features an antique 1900s California oil rig wheel that lowers or raises food from the fire. Just beyond this terrace sits a grove of citrus and stone fruits, and a 50-year-old twisted cereus (*Cereus peruvianus* 'Monstrosus'). The cereus opens its enormous white blooms only at night, a perfect focal point for those enjoying the fall and winter evenings outdoors. "The garden takes on a nice character year-round," Truskowski notes, "but at dusk, with the sun setting in the night sky, it is really magical."

Robert Truskowski, 949.494.6650, www.truskowski.com

The Italianate architecture gave Truskowski the ideal backdrop for Mediterranean plantings, such as towering palm trees; he also added a rare collection of Japanese Satsuki and Kurume azaleas, over 100 camellias and yellow *clivia miniatura*. "Different areas can be used for picnics or reading," Behnke says. "They should be able to enjoy it as an estate." Ironwork light fixtures were inspired by a Wallace Neff home. Michael Taylor furniture.