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A CLASSIC ESTATE SHINES AGAIN

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GLAMOROUS HOME THEATER
CUTTING-EDGE EUROPEAN TILE
Down a Garden Path

A Grande Dame Deserves a Grand Garden

By Joret 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.
“It doesn’t look like a brand-new landscape,” Truszkowski 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 Juan Belloke. “Juan 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.”

Truszkowski 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.

Truszkowski also sought out older materials, including antique Mexican tiles. Reclaimed French paverstone pavers, between 100 and 200 years old, set off the exterior of the new pool and channel rill, and give a nexus 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 waterfall is a monochromatic, handmade specifically for the Cunardis. The statuary throughout the garden came from the couple’s personal collection.

When it came to the greenery, Truszkowski complemented the...
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 pavilions. 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 crape myrtle. The crape myrtle 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."

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 crape myrtles. "Different areas can be used for picnics or reading," Behnke says. "They should be able to enjoy it as an estate." Framed artwork fixtures were inspired by a Wallace Neff home. Michael Taylor furniture.