



# EASTERN INFLUENCE

A California couple replaces their front lawn with no-mow ground covers and a serene Asian-style garden.

BY DOUG HALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY ED GOHLICH PRODUCED BY ANDREA CAUGHEY

Jeremy and Gina Rossen replaced a traditional turf lawn with an evergreen blanket of myoporum, which holds the slope and doesn't need to be mowed. Clumps of New Zealand flax crown the crest of the hill.

**T**he lackluster expanse of lawn and Algerian ivy, sloping down to a busy street, did nothing to complement Gina and Jeremy Rossen's ranch home. The Santa Barbara, California, couple dreamed of replacing the stark front yard with a low-maintenance garden that would serve as a restful refuge. About to become the parents of twins, they knew they were too busy to take on a do-it-yourself project, so they hired designer Margie Grace to plan and install the new landscape.

Gina asked Grace to give the new plantings a suggestion of Asian styling. "I was hoping for a Zen appeal," Gina says. "I want to feel a sense of tranquility when I come home." Although not intended to duplicate an Asian garden—it lacks the typical enclosed setting, for one thing—the Rossens' finished landscape evokes the spirit of Eastern style through its plants and materials. For example:

**FOLIAGE AND FORM** Plant shapes, such as sculptural trees that convey an impression of age, are more important in Asian garden design than flowers. The Rossens were fortunate to have several gnarled old olive trees and Japanese black pines on their property. The pines have been carefully sculpted in a technique known as "cloud pruning," which exposes the trunks and creates cloudlike silhouettes. Other plants, such as the Medusa-like 'Myersii' asparagus ferns, were selected for their singular shapes.

**INTIMATE SCALE** In China and Japan, gardens represent idealized miniature versions of the natural world. Now that the sprawling all-American lawn is gone, Gina and Jeremy's front yard invites up-close inspection of its carefully composed plant-and-stone vignettes and water features. >> on 124



Emerald-green Korean grass (*Zoysia tenuissima*) is a practical stand-in for moss in arid Santa Barbara. Left unmowed, the grass rises in bubbly contours. Occasional trimming keeps it from mounding up and over the stepping stones (right).




**SUBTLETY** Asian gardens show restraint rather than profusion. The Rossens' garden includes a limited number of plant species; some, like the spiky New Zealand flaxes along the front walk, are repeated or placed in groups.

**TRADITIONAL MATERIALS** Stone, water, and bamboo all have places in Asian gardens. In a style that emphasizes symbolism, boulders stand in for mountains; basins of water or raked gravel represent seas. The Rossens' garden includes stone in a variety of forms: boulders that jut from the slope like a natural outcrop, expanses of river pebbles, and stone in the walkways and steps.

For Gina, the new landscape unfolded according to the principles of feng shui, the Chinese art of positioning objects to achieve harmony in one's surroundings and in life. "I'm very into the feng shui appeal of having good balance and good energy around my home," she says. "In feng shui you never want to have straight paths. Curves keep the energy moving." Indeed, all paths in the Rossens' yard follow the hillside's gentle undulations.

The element of their landscape that people most often comment on is the unmowed Korean grass lawn. "It's very low-maintenance and provides a lush look to the landscape," Gina says. The Rossens' twin sons, Asher and Zachary, born in July 2005, appreciate the moss-like carpet for another reason: "Kids love playing on it because it's so soft."

The landscape is designed for minimal maintenance. Fortunately for Jeremy, that doesn't mean maintenance-free. "My husband enjoys gardening but he doesn't have enough time for more than a half hour to an hour a week," Gina says. "He trims the bamboos and does little things that make him feel that he's involved in the garden. Myself, I don't garden," she adds. "I just like the way it looks." >> on 126



A sidewalk between the driveway and front door, once straight as an arrow, now curves gently. A basin of still water reflects the sky.



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### Asian objects

Structures, such as these antique gates from China, underscore the Asian spirit of the garden. The gates in a podocarpus hedge lead to a backyard patio.

### A quiet spot

To make a spot for quiet contemplation, landscape designer Margie Grace placed a stone bench halfway up the hill.

### Moving water

A trickle of water makes a quiet splash in a stone cistern from Bali. Moving water, symbolizing the passage of time, is often seen in Asian gardens.

### Abundant stone

Stone appears in a variety of forms in the Rossens' landscape. Here, stone slabs form the risers of an outdoor staircase, topped with gravel on the treads.

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### Horsetail

Horsetail (*Equisetum hyemale*, left) displays jointed stems that resemble bamboo. Its quirky appeal comes at a price: Horsetail spreads so aggressively that it is best left confined to a pot.

### Kangaroo paws

An Australian native, Kangaroo paws (*Anigozanthos* 'Red Cross', above) is not usually seen in Asian gardens. But this variety has a russet color that fits with the Rossens' tight color palette of green, chartreuse, and oxblood red. "Red symbolizes good luck, good fortune in the Chinese culture," Gina says.

### Asparagus fern

Asian gardens often highlight the beauty or form of individual plants—such as this 'Myersii' asparagus fern (below)—by isolating them in open space, unencroached upon by other plants. Low ground covers or raked gravel are the foil against which the sculptural plants are displayed. 🍃

