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HOMIE

An antique juggling act.
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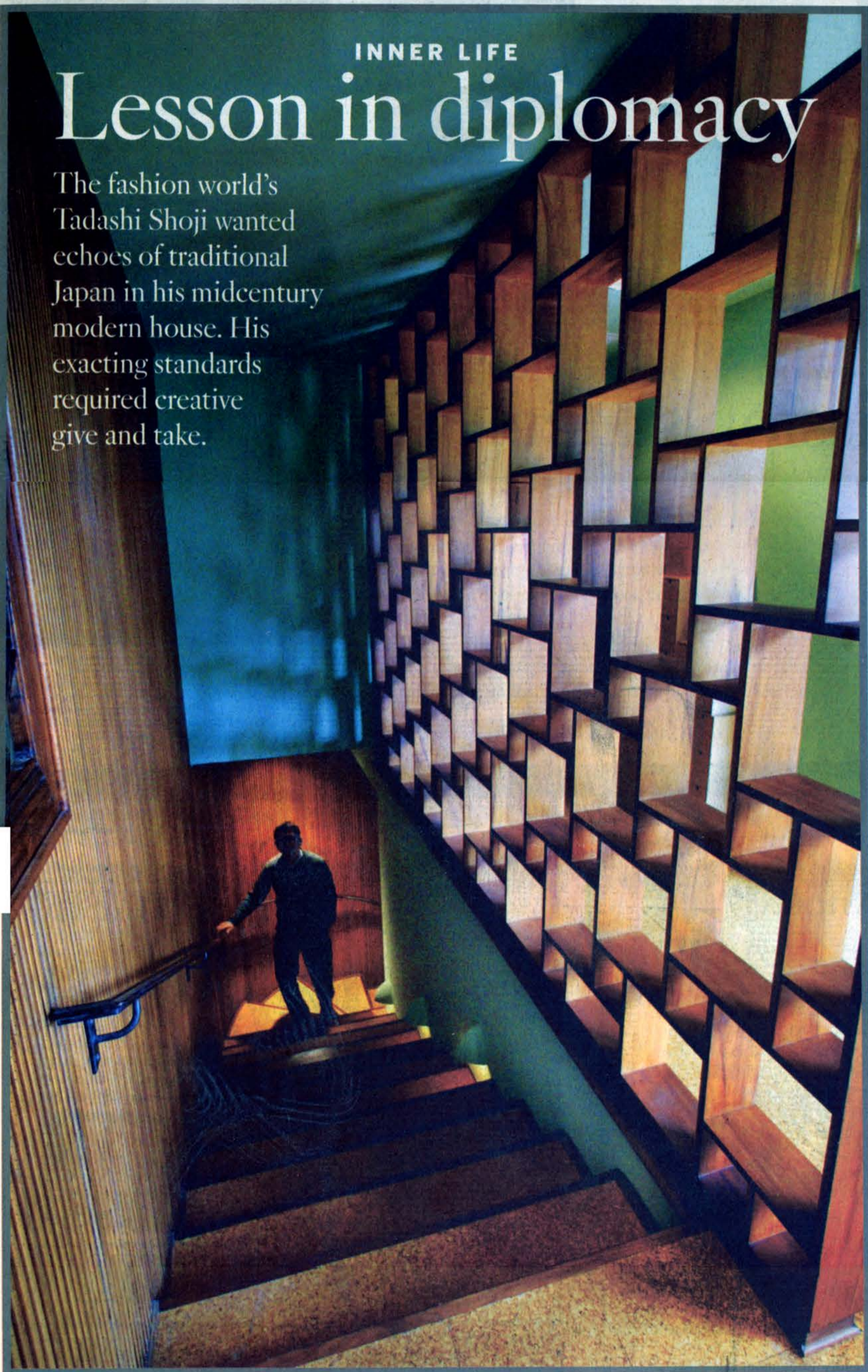
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INNER LIFE

Lesson in diplomacy

The fashion world's Tadashi Shoji wanted echoes of traditional Japan in his midcentury modern house. His exacting standards required creative give and take.



Photographs by KEN HIVELEY Los Angeles Times

PRISM: In Tadashi Shoji's home, the warm hues of redwood and cork are complemented by walls painted in eye-popping colors.

By JANET EASTMAN
Times Staff Writer

FASHION designer Tadashi Shoji outfits beauty queens, and he knows what he likes when he sees it. He has sketched thousands of sexy gowns on paper, then fussed with the gossamer fabric until the folds were flattering, flirtatious. But during a yearlong remodel of his house in the Pasadena hills, he found that some designs aren't so easy to alter.

Although he had approved the remodeling plans and the sample boards with their tiny swatches, he asked for costly post-construction tweaks. At one point, he had made three dozen requests. To help him test-drive some of the architectural elements before they were cast in metal or mahogany, his construction team built full-scale mock-ups. This way, Shoji could open cabinet doors, slide his hand along porch railings, see the way a crescent banquette would fit in the kitchen nook — and still make changes.

Sometimes the three-dimensional fakes were made of plywood or other inexpensive materials. In the [See Shoji, Page F10]



NEW IN TOWN 'Fame' — the building

To live at the Archstone apartments in Studio City, it seems you almost have to be a Hollywood up-and-comer.

By ALEXANDRIA ABRAMIAN-MOTT
Special to The Times

IN the hallways, by the pool and in the clubroom — which looks more like a W hotel suite, with suede sofa cushions, geometric-patterned rugs and green apples arranged so perfectly they look like props — the atmosphere at the Archstone Studio City apartments isn't much different from reality TV, where genetically blessed twentysomethings hang out in Queer Eye'd interiors. And no matter whom you talk to, almost every resident has a connection to Hollywood, however tangential.

"Everyone here has something going on," says Dennis Desantis, a self-proclaimed "liaison" to the adult entertainment industry, as he lies by the pool tanning the "Hustler" tattoo on his chest. "If you can afford to live here, you're obviously doing something right."

Within weeks of moving from Ohio to the upscale building, Kent State University theater major Alisa Ledyard was able to tell friends back home, via her faithfully updated website, "There's probably a lot of future famous people living very [See Archstone, Page F4]



KEN HIVELEY Los Angeles Times

ON THE CUSP: Tenant Bijon Brandon, 19, an R&B singer, says he may be close to a record deal.

DESIGN DISPATCH

Message from Paris: Lighten up

By KRISTIN HOHENADEL
Special to The Times

DESIGN junkies hoping to get a fix on next season's chicest trends in home furnishings and accessories have made the 10th biannual Maison et Objet the unmissable design rendezvous in Paris.

This week, more than 65,000 international exhibitors, design editors, buyers, journalists and other design professionals congregated at the unscentic Parc d'Expositions in Villepinte, an hour outside the capital near Charles de Gaulle Airport.

Trends that have emerged in the last few years — the blurring of fashion and home design; the mixing of styles, periods and influences; and the studied *art de vivre* that requires the thoughtful designing of every last corner of the house — were in evidence. And in every price range, the show offered serious design with a light heart.

A Philippe [See Paris, Page F9]



Photographs by KEN HIVELY Los Angeles Times

NATURAL SETTING: Shoji sometimes holds meetings for his fashion business in the dining room, in which neutral materials focus attention on the lavish garden outside.

INNER LIFE

Japanese, yet still American



[Shoji, from Page F1] backyard, clusters of green helium balloons stood in for shrubs near the waterfall. Other times, the team used the authentic materials so Shoji could see the texture and finishes. The guesswork was gone. And so were some of the original ideas.

One model made of steel and wood cladding added \$3,500 to the budget but prevented a \$40,000 staircase from being installed in the living room. When Shoji saw the original design in its life-size form, he thought the vertical tension rods made the stairway look busy — “like a jail cell” — and he worried that it would block the wall of glass behind it, says Curt Alexander, the project’s general contractor. A simpler concept, with a single steel spine that holds floating treads, took its place.

Other mock-ups also led to change. The shelves in the hallway were widened in the final stage. The shutters in the master bedroom were reduced from four to three. An alcove in a guest room was moved a few feet. Shoji, who during construction lived in a spare room of the house with his Siamese cat, Misha, once climbed onto the roof to approve several feet of the copper gutter system.

“This is a client who is really observant, really involved,” says Alexander, who likened Shoji’s changes to “tailoring the suit” while preserving the architect’s overall design. The finishing touches are being made right now.

This is truly Shoji’s home. The two-story house, built in 1954, blends the woody warmth of ancient Japanese architecture with the clean-cut steel and glass of a midcentury modern while including another element that makes Shoji feel at home: eye-popping color familiar to a fashion showroom.

The walls are painted indigo, celadon and crimson. The kitchen banquette is upholstered in reddish-brown leather. The flooring is cola-colored cork, polished slate or sand travertine. These were Shoji’s calls. “He makes his living as a designer,” says Alexander, “so when he told me what colors he wanted, I didn’t question it. I just asked, ‘Where would you like it?’”

When Shoji first drove by the house four years ago, before it was for sale, he stopped and wondered who lived there. It was so, well, intriguingly Asian, so different from his contemporary home nearby, as sleek and spare as one of the models who wears his evening gowns.

The sloping frontyard was filled with camellias, azaleas and other classic Japanese garden plants. Masonry and redwood walls had rhythmic cutouts of traditional crisscross patterns. A pagoda-like canopy followed the steps from the front to the back.

The emotional tug of the Asian styling of the house surprised the man, now

57, who tried to close the door on his heritage when he left his family home in Japan three decades ago. The future fashion designer had traveled from Sendai, the humble industrial town of his birth, to jittery L.A. Within a few years he was dressing American institutions, including Miss U.S.A.s, Vanna White and Pasadena Rose queens. Assimilation, he thought, was part of the price of success.

“For a long time I forgot my roots, my ‘Japanness,’” says Shoji, dressed head to toe in artistic black. “I now feel comfortable with it. Getting back to my roots was a part of getting older and of wanting to create a haven where I could relax and entertain. But I still have other sides as well.” (They include a \$25-million-a-year business selling gowns to Neiman-Marcus and Saks shoppers, among others, and making form-flattering numbers for such luminaries as Queen Latifah and Condoleezza Rice.)

The house’s dominant Asian elements make it unique, says Todd Erlandson, the Santa Monica architect

who oversaw the renovation and Modernist addition, “especially in the time of the Case Study Houses.” Case Study Houses were experimental, streamlined dwellings designed from 1945 to ’62 in Los Angeles by Charles Eames and other prominent architects. During the height of the Modernist era, there was little room for homages to the past.

Shoji’s house, however, incorporates the modern ideas of its time and Japanese sensibilities, says Erlandson. “The original house was painted sage green, a favorite color of many early Modernist architects for its relationship to the natural California environment. The house also utilizes quite a bit of concrete and masonry. It’s not delicate.”

Its long horizontal frame is joined in a way so the house can safely sway when the ground beneath it does. Its compact entry opens into a sweeping living room with space-saving built-in cabinets. Overhanging eaves and wide doors and windows invite inside soft morning and afternoon light, moody shadows and

cool breezes. The garden, too, seems to be a part of the interior.

Surprising to some, these hallmarks of contemporary homes, as interpreted by Frank Lloyd Wright, the Greene brothers, R.M. Schindler and other progressive architects, are based on centuries-old Japanese designs. By the 17th century, Japan had nailed down a practical system of using minimal well-placed wood posts to support buildings that had uniform dimensions and plenty of cherished empty space.

“Traditional Japanese houses have soothing, light-filled places that were inspiring then and [are] inspiring now,” says Karen Tanaka, design editor of *Inspired House* magazine. “They make very efficient use of space in a clutter-free manner.”

Shoji’s property takes its Asian influence a step further than most contemporary homes. In addition to the fluid floor plan, which meanders easily from room to room, and the abundance of openings to the outside, there are Japa-

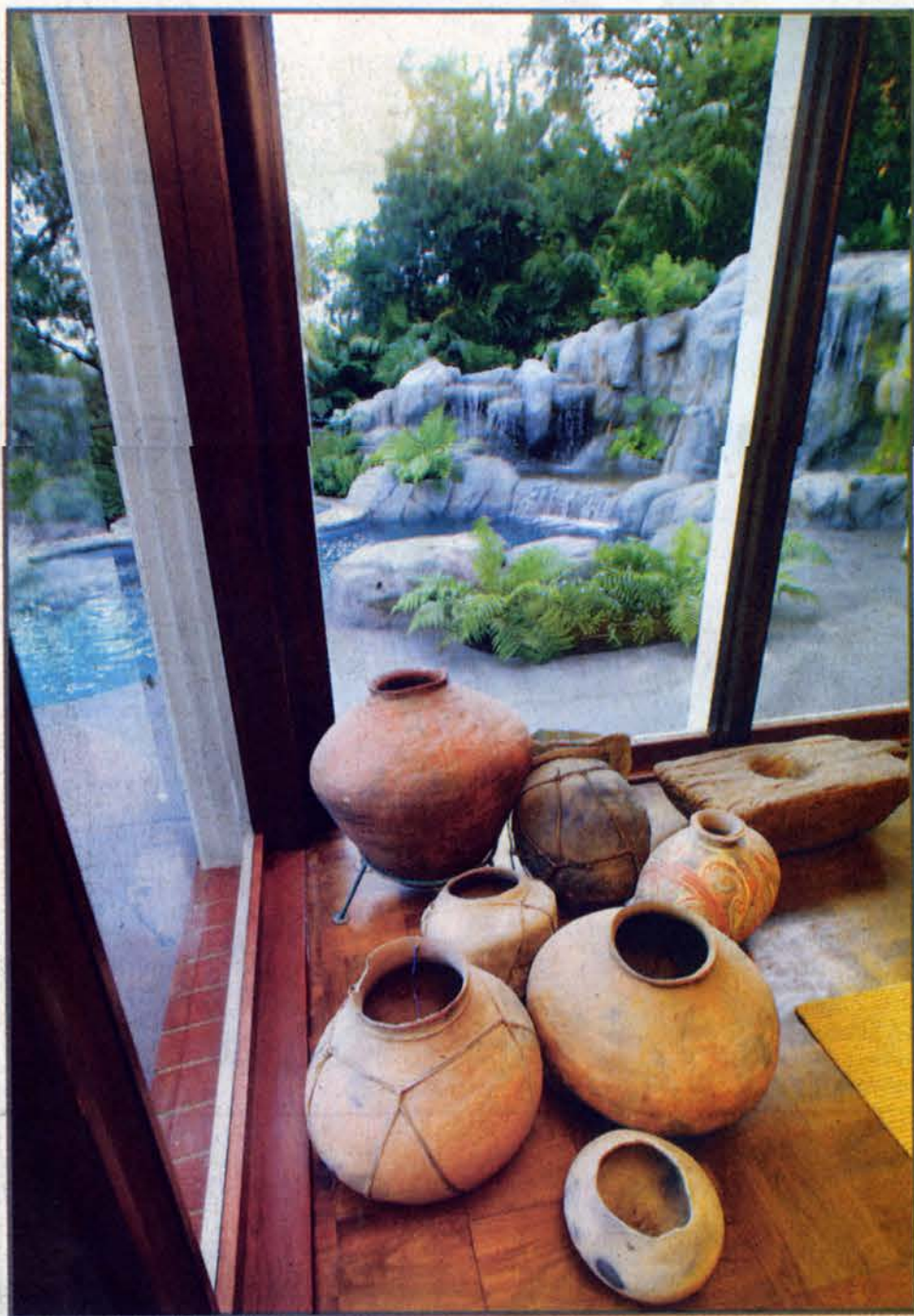
nese motifs and sensibilities throughout. It’s as if original architect Harry Simms Bent, who later designed public buildings in Honolulu, wanted to leave giant clues that Japanese elements were integral to his very modern design.

The house is a mix of rustic and refined materials, another characteristic of Japanese design. In the entry is a mahogany shoji, a movable partition with diaphanous rice-paper panels. The walls are curved and covered with fluted vertical strips of redwood. A good-luck symbol is embedded in the living room’s plaster ceiling.

Japanese architecture’s aesthetic of simplicity and restraint, says Erlandson, “allows Tadashi’s eclectic collection of art and furniture to be the focus.” The architect and his team knew their job was to make the rooms as uncomplicated, breezy and essential as one of the intentionally bare little black dresses with a Tadashi label inside. They seamlessly doubled the size of the house, adding 4,500 square feet including a master



EXTRA STEP: Shoji averted a costly mistake by spending \$3,500 on a life-size stairway model. The compromise, above, has simpler lines.



EARTHEN: The dining room showcases a collection of pottery.



MEDITATIVE: A detail of a statue on the fireplace mantel, left, reflects Shoji's desire to honor his heritage. "For a long time I forgot my roots, my 'Japanness,'" he says. "I now feel comfortable with it. Getting back to my roots was a part of getting older."



HOT CURVE: The breakfast nook has a sumptuous leather banquette.

suite, guest quarters and wraparound terraces.

The expanded TV room is one example of Shoji's appreciation of global design. The walls are painted a deep red. Dangling from the ceiling are a dozen pendant lights with blown-glass shades in luminous royal blue, peach, green, orange and red. Chinese wooden window grilles are carved into a series of locking triangles. The sofa, ottomans and tables are from Shoji's world travels. Delicate Venetian mirrors hang on the wall.

Still, about 80% of the house remained the same. "Tadashi agrees with the philosophy that if it works, we keep it," says Alexander, who has gutted so many houses — including a Wallace Neff — during his 20-year career that he feels guilty.

The 1950s green tea-colored Formica in the kitchen was avant garde for its time, but it seemed likely that it would be torn out when the room was expanded. But it's still there, recut to fit the new counter. "Everyone smiles when they see Formica," says Shoji, laying his hands on

the jet-age vestige.

Outside, ferns now nestle in the tiered 10-foot-tall waterfall sculpture where helium balloons once "grew." A shiny green dion tree survived the cut when a parade of plants was brought to the site for consideration. And a deck, now crafted from sturdy *ipe* wood, once had its dimensions temporarily outlined with string.

The garden is an intimate sanctuary where Shoji can unwind among fragrant plumeria, ginger and jasmine flowers and the sound of falling water. It has enough poolside deck space to host a few hundred guests. Standing on the high-rise bridge that connects to the top of the waterfall, Shoji jokes that it could be used as a dramatic fashion runway.

"The garden is more flamboyant than a tranquil Zen garden," says Lisa Gimmy, the Culver City landscape architect who designed it. "It's geared to Tadashi's enjoyment and sensual stimuli. He likes to have parties but also appreciates quiet times. He knew what he wanted."

That is, once he saw it in 3-D.

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