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PLUS
Outdoor
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Stone-edged spring ephemeral beds and a dense stand of white spine birches define one edge of the property.



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the North S
wooded rav
sculpted lan

collaborating with the
open to their family room
? Our first goal was to
was to create a space that
while using the existing
side and low walls to sit
taining. With that in mind,
among the trees and
but a few years later
an adjacent project—
Douglas—the owner
open up his dining area
and create an outdoor
complementary to the
On the design
landscape firm in
into the building with

A SEPARATE PEACE

At a North Shore home, traditional Japanese garden elements offer contemplative counterpoint to a wooded ravine

ask garden texture the
project's entrance of
that feature spaces in
stone part of the landscape
main purpose. These
right at the center, porch
and a rocky stream. In
been understood, and
trees that are color and
texture and soil.

by Dennis Rodkin
photography by
Linda Oyama Bryan

The knobby trunk of a tall pine plays off the New York bluestone boulder that stands in for the island of a traditional rock garden. From this corner, the garden opens to an expansive view.

For one couple, the trip from the North Shore's deep, wooded ravines to the sculpted landscapes of Japan

entails simply walking the few steps from their dining room to their family room.

When they bought their house in 1997, its orientation was entirely toward the ravine out back. The house spread wide along the ravine's top, with walls of windows on that side and few views in other directions. The sight of the ravine, with deer, foxes, and other wildlife wandering among the trees and undergrowth, was splendid.

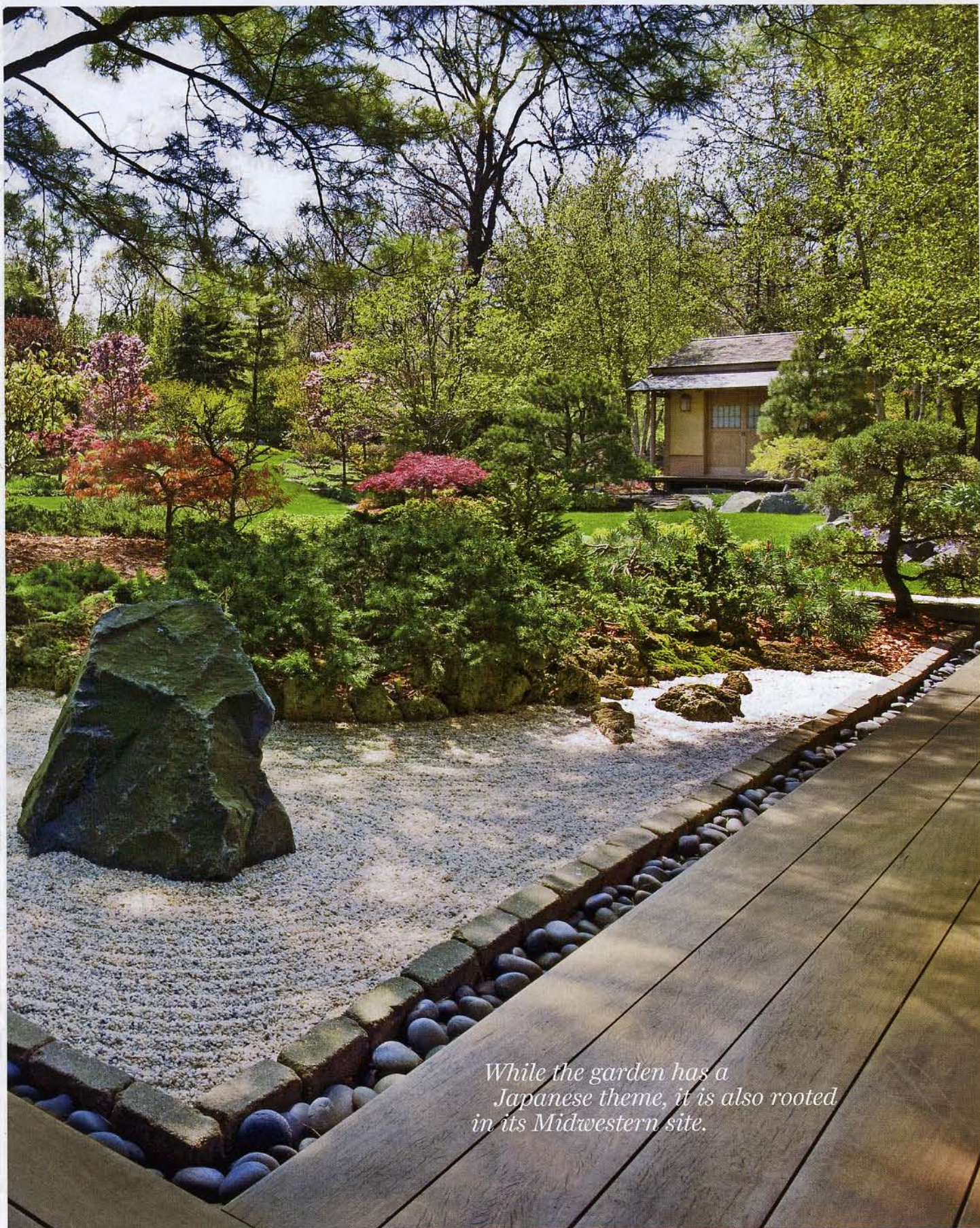
But a few years later, when they got the chance to buy an adjacent property—closer to the road, with less ravine frontage—the couple spotted an opportunity. They would open up big, almost blank exterior walls with windows and create an expansive Japanese-styled garden, a studied counterpoint to the ungroomed look of the ravine.

Combining the design expertise of Scott Martin of the landscape firm Van Zelst with their own extensive research into the traditional aesthetic of Japanese gardens, the couple created a remarkable landscape on their two-acre site. The husband designed and created his own Japanese-style rake for combing wavelike patterns in gravel, and he does the pruning that gives the trees their classically articulated look. The wife has researched, tracked down, and installed appropriate plant varieties, and spreads a mountain of fresh mulch over the garden beds in spring. Her understanding is deep; the area that contains delicate and ephemeral spring plants, she notes, is "off-limits to everyone but me. I know what's here—where you can step and where you can't."

While the garden has a Japanese theme, it's also rooted in its Midwestern site. Some of the stones that lie in the rock garden outside the family room were found on the property, remnants of what renowned landscape architect Jens Jensen created in the early 20th century, when the site was part of the lakefront estate of lumber baron Hermann Paepcke. Those stones are visible in the photo at right as the craggy, porous rocks that suggest small islands and a rocky seacoast. In the distance, where a second house once stood, are large gardens of perennials and trees that are either native to or common in the Chicago climate and soil.

Getting to those gardens takes a bit of travel time. Meanwhile, Japan is right here outside the windows.





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An inviting destination within the garden, the teahouse was designed and built by Len Cullum of the firm Shokunin Do. What might appear to be a contemporary minimalist sculpture (opposite) is in fact an Indonesian well cover from the late 19th century. It stands beyond banks of begonias, astilbes, and white spire birches.





A perennial garden offering months of color includes (bottom to top) pink and yellow daylilies, astilbes, sedums, blue hyssop, and pink Queen of the Prairie.



DETAILS

Above, from left The crazy-quilt arrangement of stones in the entry courtyard notifies visitors that the garden they're about to step into will have an irregular but carefully ordered look.

A welcoming teahouse made with western red cedar offers simple shelter. A tall pine, a holdover from the garden's previous incarnation as another home's overgrown backyard, now holds court above younger evergreens and Japanese maples. **Right** Traditional details show up in many places on the property; they include shoji screens in the house, framing Japanese maples, and a gently arched footbridge over a dry streambed.

Below A stone-edged pond and dense layers of foliage create a tranquil tableau. A cedar gateway marks the transition from the highly structured garden to the unstructured natural landscape of the ravine beyond. It provides a fixed, sturdy focal point amid an ever-changing view of greenery.

