

GARDEN DESIGN

AUGUST 1992

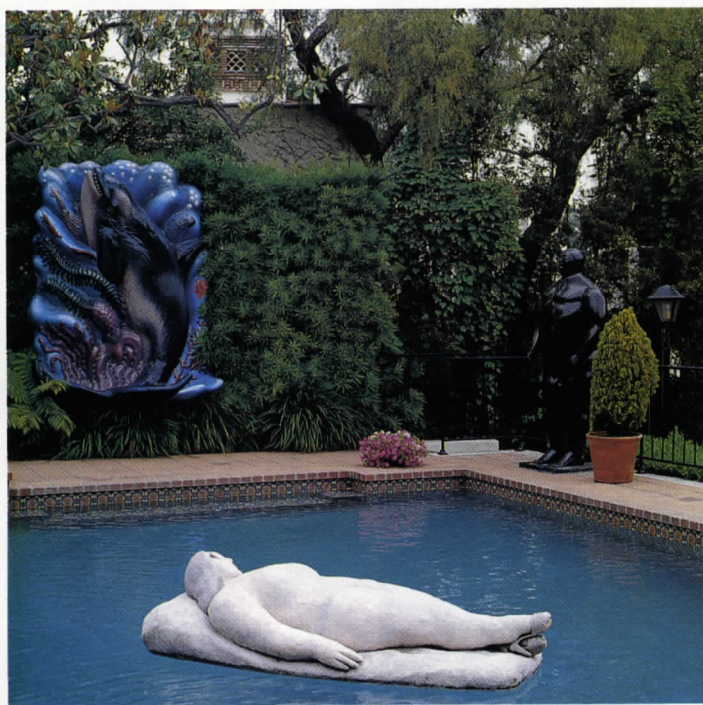
US \$4.00 / CANADA \$5.00





SECRETS &

BY MARCIA TANNER / PHOTOS BY JAY VENEZIA



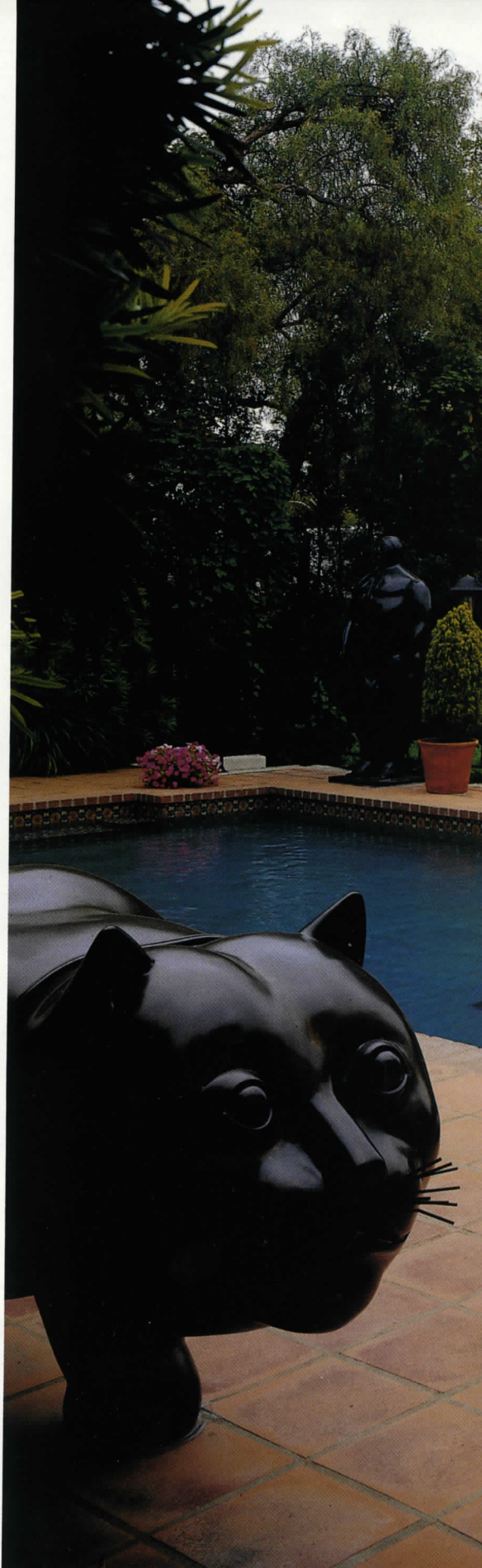
OPPOSITE: BOLD SCULPTURE, COLORFUL PLANTINGS, AND FORMAL BOXWOOD HEDGES SEPARATE THE TERRACE FROM THE LOWER GARDEN. ABOVE: GOBEL'S *FLOATING POOL FIGURE*.

SURPRISES

BELOW: WEARY BRONZE COMMUTERS CONTEMPLATE DIRECTIONS IN GEORGE SEGAL'S *RUSH HOUR*. RIGHT: MASSIVE SCULPTURES BY SEGAL, BOTERO, AND GOBEL ARE CAST AS GUARDIAN SPIRITS OF THE PATIO POOL.



A Surrealist vision shapes the sculpture garden of Los Angeles businessman, philanthropist, and art collector Frederick R. Weisman. The large, white-patinaed, bronze forearm and tilted mailbox of Frank Heming's "Mail Box Hand," sprouting from the sidewalk on this quiet Holmby Hills street, offer the first clue that all who enter here are about to abandon the everyday world. Once through the gates, that intuition is confirmed.





BELOW: SEGAL'S MELANCHOLY PLASTER LADY, *WOMAN WITH SUNGLASSES ON BENCH*, GAZES BLEAKLY ACROSS THE CHARMING IF ANACHRONISTIC POOL AND PATIO. OPPOSITE: A BACK VIEW OF THE MEDITERRANEAN VILLA WITH VIOLA FREY'S *RESTING MAN* SPRAWLED ON LAWN. MULLICAN'S CRYPTIC *UNTITLED* IS MOUNTED ON THE WALL.

leaves and huge, fragrant, lantern-like yellow flowers. Beneath it, by the front door, a brilliant mosaic-tile *Composition Abstraite* by Fernand Léger and Marisol's affectionately mocking bronze *Portrait of Picasso* look very much at home.

Jacaranda and magnolia trees, palms, oleanders, ferns, camellias, azaleas, and calla lilies are foundation plants. The subtropicals define Southern California's spin on the Mediterranean garden. In the rear, a bed of hybrid tea roses was moved from a lower terrace to make way for *Skygate*, DeWain Valentine's monumental bronze and glass abstraction; the bushes now flourish on an upper level.

Exuberantly disregarding period style, the gardener provides seasonal bursts of color with annual bedding plants like impatiens and gloxinia. A theatrical curtain of tall eucalyptus trees, spanning the width of the property at the foot of the hill, screens the house and garden from the city below. In the distance, instead of Florence, which you expect to see, the towers of Century City shimmer in the smog.

Progressing through the sculpture-filled "rooms" behind the house, you notice that each evokes a mood, like a chapter in a narrative. You're impelled along the paths to "read" each grouping; glimpses of what lies ahead draw you forward, the way a cliff-hanger teases you to turn the pages.

What is the story of the crowd around the pool, for instance? Botero's tall, voluptuous bronze *Adam and Eve* guard the patio like garden spirits, flanking George Segal's forlorn white plaster *Woman with Sunglasses On Bench*, who gazes at Renate Gobel's plump bikini-clad *Floating Pool Figure*. On the opposite bank, Botero's hefty bronze *Cat* stalks the unwary beings sheltered in the adjoining pillared portal: a bronze *Reclining Figure on Pedestal* by Henry Moore and the innocent, if mechanistic, *Jack and Jill* by Tom Otterness.

Which may explain why Alice Lees' kinetic neon *Caryatids Descending* have jumped off their pedestals.

If there's allegory here, its mystery deepens as you continue. Why is Barry Flanagan's athletic bronze hare, on *Hare Bell with Portland Stone Pier*, confined to a pillared porch when it seems

to want to leap blithely across a grassy field? Why do the bronze commuters of George Segal's *Rush Hour* look so glum in this lush Eden, unless Alexander Calder's black-painted metal stable, *Three Discs, One Missing*, is blocking their view? Is Viola Frey's glazed ceramic *Resting Man* sprawling on the grass to meditate the meaning of Matt Mullican's elegant and cryptic stained and etched glass "sign," *Untitled*, mounted on the wall above his head?

This is a garden full of secrets and surprises. Perhaps most surprising is how vividly it demonstrates that a garden cannot be a neutral setting for works of art. Gardens are mythic spaces; human-made forms placed within them provoke speculations about art and nature, and about human relationships with nature and each other. This garden's sculptural inhabitants are mostly human or animal; even the abstractions are animated by a lively anthropomorphic quality. And like the rest of Weisman's personal collection, his garden reveals a man who loves art for its eloquence and its capacity to delight.

"All my activities in art and business are an attempt to bring the world closer together," he has said. "I don't think there's anything that communicates better than art. It's quicker than language and clearer than philosophy."

■ Small-group tours of the Weisman house, garden, and Foundation collections can be arranged by writing to the Frederick R. Weisman Foundation, 275 North Carolwood Drive, Los Angeles, California 90077, or by calling (310) 277-5321.

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