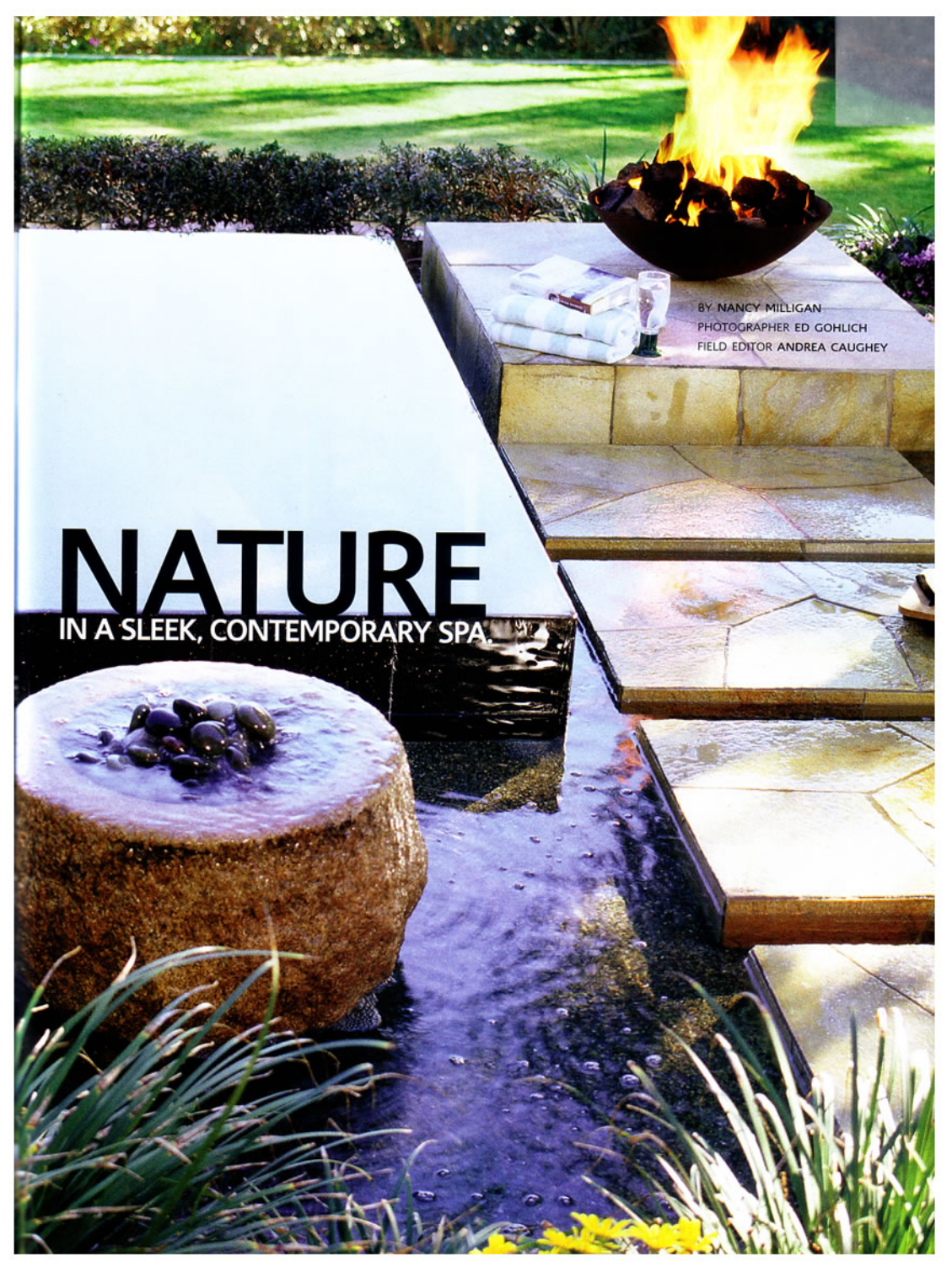




# ELEMENTS OF

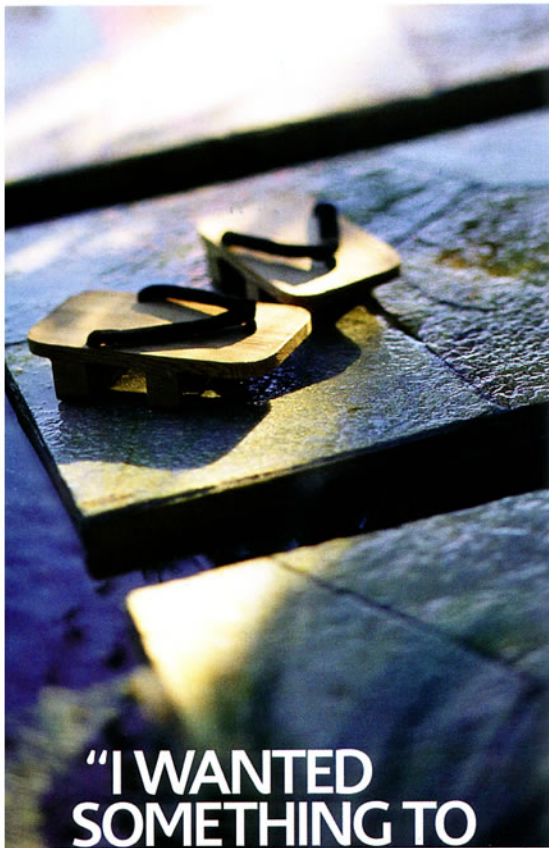
WATER, FIRE, EARTH, AND SKY COME TOGETHER



BY NANCY MILLIGAN  
PHOTOGRAPHER ED GOHLICH  
FIELD EDITOR ANDREA CAUGHEY

# NATURE

IN A SLEEK, CONTEMPORARY SPA



## "I WANTED SOMETHING TO MARVEL AT,"

Howard Toner says

of his plans to install a hot tub. Although the Rancho Santa Fe, California, homeowner had no preconceived notions about design, he knew he wanted something out of the ordinary, something other than the bland appearance typical of so many hot tubs.

To help realize his visions, Howard hired pool and spa designer Skip Phillips, noted for his unusual aquatic creations. The two settled on a spa location that would provide views from the house and easy access to the nearby deck and patio. There, Phillips created an exquisite visual centerpiece unlike any other water feature.

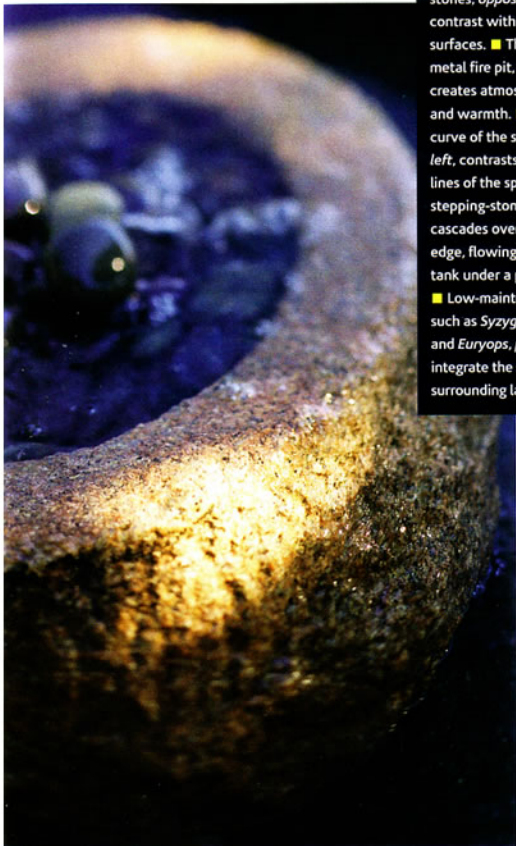
The focus is a stunning, in-ground 9x9-foot spa, its exterior surface adorned in sleek black granite. Water gently flows over the spa's "vanishing edge" perimeter,



spilling serenely into a surrounding reflecting pool.

An expert in "water in transit" designs, Phillips says that a big drop in elevation isn't necessary to accommodate a vanishing edge. But such an arrangement does require some additional engineering to deal with the water. The trick is to seamlessly wrap the necessary functionality in an attractive package. Taking his cue from the clean lines of the spa, Phillips fleshed out an elegant Asian-style design with geometric lines and elemental materials.

"Skip's concept was to include all the basic elements: fire, water, sky, and earth," Howard says. In a design of complementary contrasts, Phillips combined the



■ Light-color stepping-stones, *opposite left*, contrast with dark hot tub surfaces. ■ The hammered-metal fire pit, *opposite right*, creates atmosphere, light, and warmth. ■ The rounded curve of the stone fountain, *left*, contrasts with the crisp lines of the spa and stepping-stones. ■ Water cascades over the spa's edge, flowing to a surge tank under a pedestal, *right*. ■ Low-maintenance plants such as *Syzygium*, lilyturf, and *Euryops*, pages 96–97, integrate the spa into the surrounding landscape.



The stone fountain adds the soothing sound of flowing water, enhancing the serene environment even when the spa isn't operating.

soothing sounds of water with the comforts of fire and light, flavoring them with ancient ambience. An antique Chinese mortar stone forms the bowl of a fountain, with a quiet bubbler spilling water over cobblestones. The fire pit consists of a hand-hammered metal bowl from India, an integrated gas fire ring, and lava rocks.

When the jets are quiet, the spa assumes a tranquil, mirrorlike surface. "The goal was to enhance the reflective qualities of the water," says Phillips, who heightened

the effect by lining the spa and the shallow reflecting pool in black. The resulting reflection of the sky often gives the illusion of a wide open space. By contrast, light-color quartzite stepping-stones offer a more down-to-earth vignette,

appearing to float on the pool surface. "It feels like you are walking across water to get to the spa," he says.

Howard finds himself soaking up the spa's warmth four or five times a week, although he needn't enter the water to enjoy it. "It's gorgeous during the daytime, reflecting the sky and trees." And, he adds, at night, with the lights set on dark blue and the fire glowing warmly, it becomes a delightful scene of enchantment. □

**FOR RESOURCES, SEE PAGE 114.**