

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF DESIGN

APRIL 2007

Immersed in the ISLANDS

ON A HAWAIIAN SHORE, ASIAN INFLUENCES GUIDE
A DESIGN THAT'S SUITED TO ITS SITE

Immersed in the ISLANDS

ON A HAWAIIAN SHORE, ASIAN INFLUENCES GUIDE
A DESIGN THAT'S SUITED TO ITS SITE



Architecture by
Olson Sundberg Kundig Allen
Interior Design by Anne Gunderson
Landscape Architecture by
David Y. Tamura, ASLA
Text by Therese Bissell
Photography by Erhard Pfeiffer

Before the foundation is poured in any significant architectural endeavor, a mating dance occurs. The architect and prospective client each tantalize and seduce—the latter with an irresistible site or program, the design professional with a portfolio of past successes and the potential for exceeding them. As in all good unions, early mutual expressions of purpose create a matrix for communication that carries both parties well past the courtship phase.

In anticipation of their contemporary retreat on the northwestern edge (known as the gold coast) of the island of Hawaii, a California couple sent architect Jim Olson a voluminous package of design motifs that had particular resonance with them. He found himself reviewing “seemingly hundreds” of images: architectural iconography from Luis Barragán’s reflecting pools to Frank Lloyd Wright’s seminal horizontal Robie House to the multipart Jim Thompson House in Bangkok; and photos, as well, of their collections of antiquities and modern art. “It was a stunning means of introduction,” Olson recalls. “And my response wasn’t just mildly favorable: that it was nice we had similar visual tastes. I *really* liked the same types of things they did.” He also liked the idea of experiencing, firsthand and for the first time, something of the predominant Asian theme in the raw collage he’d been presented.

The couple had for decades traveled throughout Southeast Asia, becoming studious collectors of centuries-old cultural artifacts, including Burmese, Khmer and Thai pieces. Shortly after Olson, a principal of Seattle-based Olson

Architect Jim Olson was chosen by a couple seeking a retreat for their seaside property on Hawaii’s Kohala Coast. The nature-embracing contemporary expression he created for them, 10,000 square feet in all, draws from concepts rooted in traditional Asian design. **OPPOSITE:** In the entrance hall, the Pacific is a constant focal point. The Christian Liaigre tribal bench is from Holly Hunt. **ABOVE RIGHT AND RIGHT:** At the front of the house, a raised reflecting pool sets the tone.





With the boundaries between the living and dining areas only minimally defined, the space is more conducive to entertaining—all amid wide-angle views of the horizon. Anne Gunderson, of Gunderson Design, handled the interiors. Sofa, open-back chairs and low table, Holly Hunt. Sofa and armchair fabric, Sahco Hesslein. Sofa pillow fabric, Great



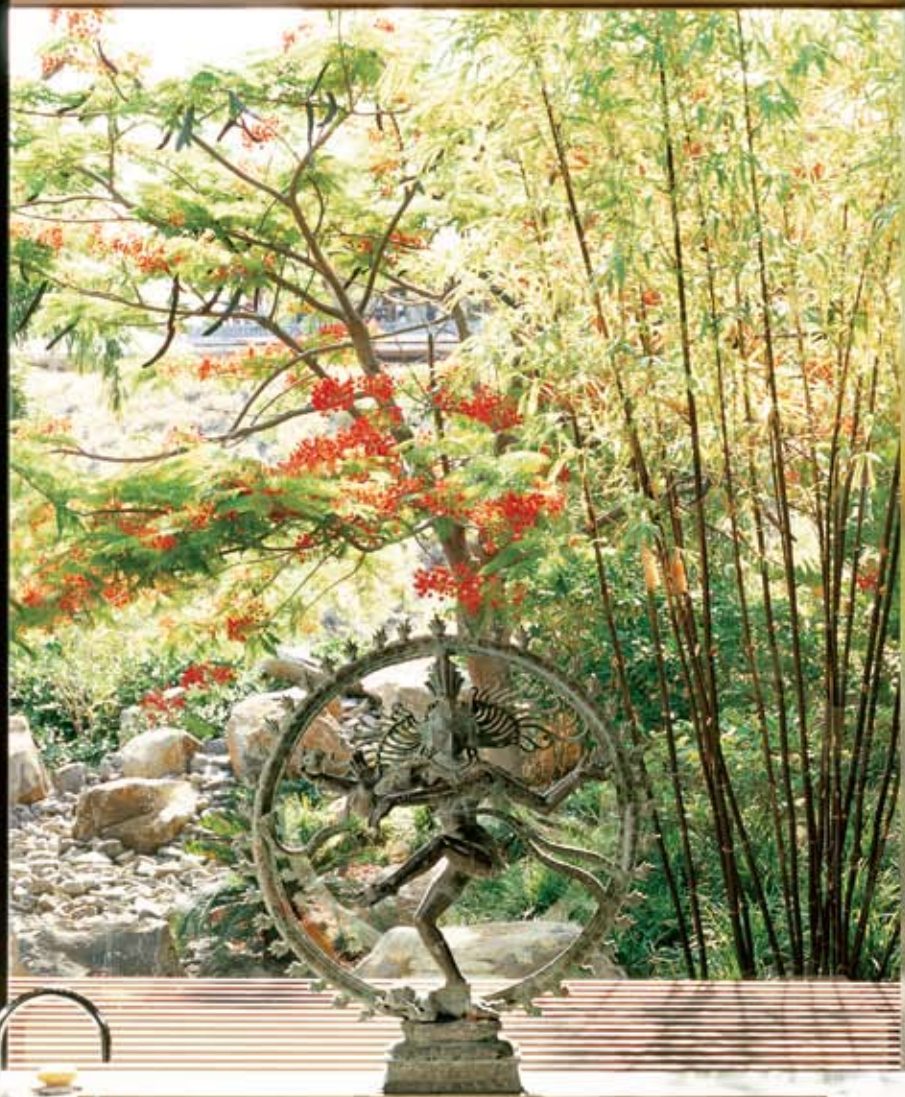


COURTESY OLSON SUNDBERG KUNDIG ALLEN ARCHITECTS

Sundberg Kundig Allen Architects, made the initial pro forma trip to Hawaii to survey their rugged oceanfront property, he decided to go to Bali, to immerse himself in the distinct ethnicity that would inspire the house's design. As process, it was basic research. It was also a gesture that at once affirmed his commitment to the project and the nascent architect-client relationship.

Keeping with an Asian and Pacific islands model of traditional structure—and the vacation needs of a family (including two grown children) for individual zones—the house is made up of three “pods”: two private wings with a central, open living area composed of various seating arrangements and an elevated dining enclosure. “In plan,” Olson says, “it’s much like the Balinese temples that I saw: compounds, little clusters of buildings.” There is another shared characteristic. Responding to both the stark topography and the tropical climate of Hawaii’s Kohala Coast, the residence sits on a lava-stone plinth that allows each wing the benefit of cooling trade winds.

The couple had for decades traveled throughout Southeast Asia, becoming studious collectors of centuries-old cultural artifacts.



ABOVE: The design of the master suite, which is situated in a separate wing, takes full advantage of the site's natural assets. With deep roof overhangs—the soffits of which are richly surfaced in teak—protecting the wide expanses of glass, spectacular vistas can be had from a shaded vantage point. **BELOW:** The plan illustrates how the functions are dispersed into multiple wings along the beachfront. **OPPOSITE:** Sliding shutters





Broad teak-veneered soffits (the owners found a Chinese source for milled antique teak, which was also used for the steel-beamed ceiling of the living area) act as a sun shield and create a serenely horizontal two-tier roof with prominent clerestory windows. The windows and the large sliding (“dissolving”) glass doors bring in a wash of light that tempers the deep-colored walls and dark limestone floors while showcasing the delicate intricacy of the Asian artworks and the quietly complementary furnishings. The

on the ocean side as a pond overlooking the infinity pool. In Hawaiian teaching, energy courses from the mountain to the sea: the path of lava flow and rainwater. Separating the free-standing, angled master suite from the main building is Olson’s “conceptual river” of native rocks, set atop the existing lava stone and traversed by a wood bridge—his gift, if not to the gods, to the landscape.

There is a Buddhist saying, “One master on the path has

“In plan,” Olson says,
“it’s much like the Balinese
temples that I saw.”

materials palette—blackened steel, concrete, copper, teak—was site-specific: “Salt spray from the breakers would have eaten the house alive if we hadn’t built with elements that could take abuse,” notes the architect.

Jim Olson’s architecture invariably acknowledges the surrounding nature, with strong visual axes. A raised reflecting pool along the palm-lined entrance walkway appears to extend through the house to the horizon. It ends instead at the entrance gallery, which lies on cross axis to another, north-south, gallery, and resumes

no need to introduce himself to another. They recognize each other instantly.” The active, intellectually driven collaboration between architect and clients that resulted in one of Hawaii’s most highly refined new residences would seem to confirm the age-old maxim. “In certain respects,” the husband observes, “Jim is very Japanese. He seldom says no, but he has a subtle—almost imperceptible—way of guiding and directing toward what he believes to be right aesthetically. It was a natural fit from the start.”□