

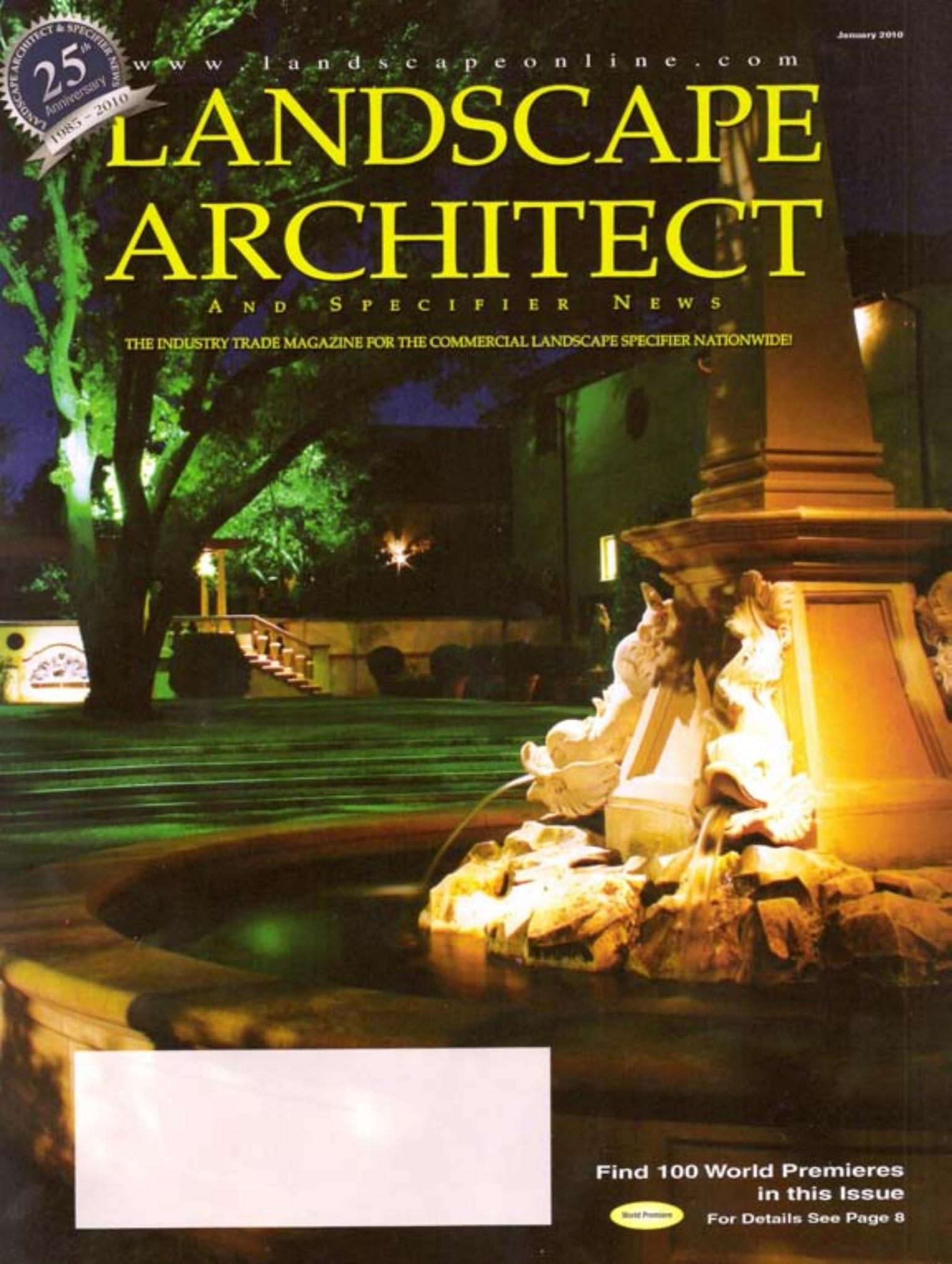


www.landscapeonline.com

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

AND SPECIFIER NEWS

THE INDUSTRY TRADE MAGAZINE FOR THE COMMERCIAL LANDSCAPE SPECIFIER NATIONWIDE!



**Find 100 World Premieres
in this Issue**



For Details See Page 8

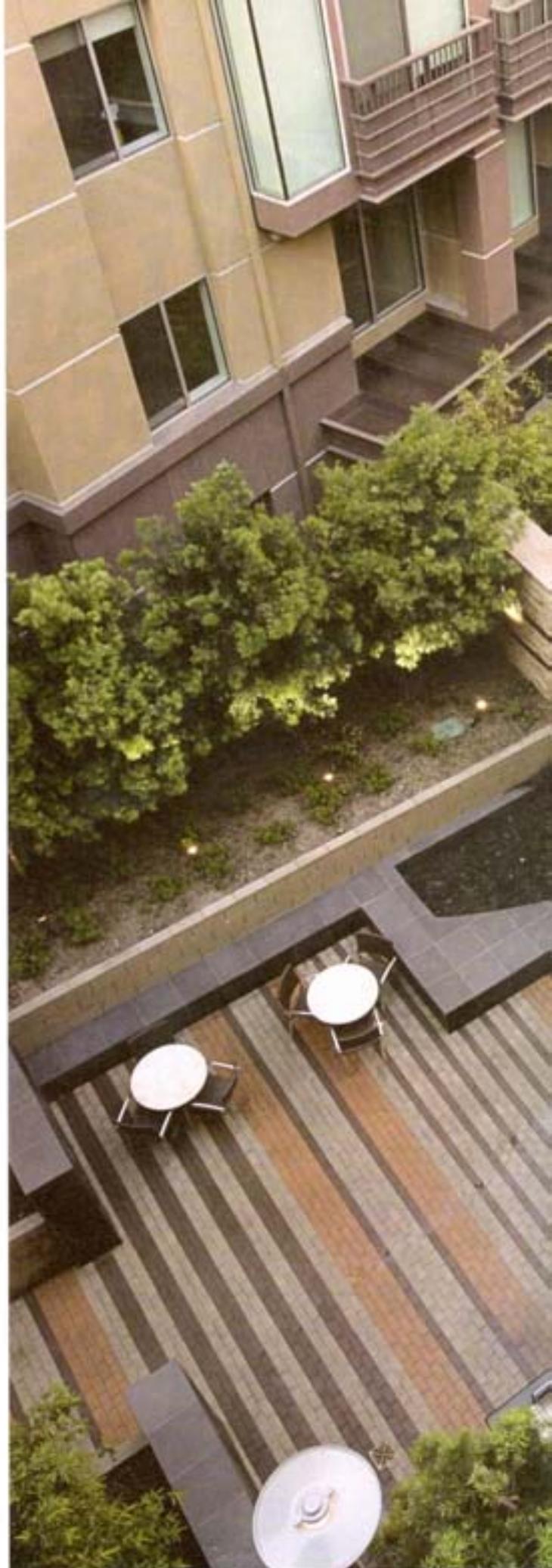
INTERTWINING OUTDOOR ROOMS AND A VIEW

By Leslie McGuire, managing editor

The reason the Mura Condominium project was especially challenging and inspiring may be the context of where it was, its proximity to little Tokyo and the industrial character of the neighborhood. I really did try to bring in all of those influences. This was one of the rare projects where you work at the ideas and the concepts and go through the normal frustrations, and all of a sudden, there was this "Aha!" moment when all the pieces and components came together and flowed out onto the paper."

Rob Pressman, ASLA, (Harvard Graduate School of Design, 1974) Principal of TGP, Inc., continues, "It was one of those moments where I could see the plan suddenly come together. It was quite wonderful and quite rare. You strive for that on each project, of course. Regardless of size or type, you know there is an answer. It's like an archaeological dig. You know something is down there so you keep carving away. I design using tracing paper and you can see what you did under what you're working on, which gives you this composite of layers. Sometimes they come together and sometimes not, but in this particular case I remember seeing the spaces and forms and they all came together."

Rob Pressman, ASLA, (Harvard Graduate School of Design, 1974) and Principal of TGP, Inc., explains, "The largest of the three podium-level courtyards in the Mura Condominium Project design in downtown Los Angeles, comprises three outdoor rooms: a large foyer with benches; the adjacent dining room/kitchen is separated from the foyer by a double-sided fountain which is fitted out with barbecue grills, granite countertop, tables and chairs; as well as a living room with a comfortable furnishings around a fireplace." PHOTOS COURTESY OF GREG EPSTEIN PHOTOGRAPHY







In describing the concept, Pressman says, "As can be seen in the site plan, the sense of space and distance has been greatly enhanced by taking this relatively small area and filling it with all aspects of the environment—creating a kind of miniature world experience."

Adding Rooms to a Village

Mura, which means "little village" in Japanese, is a 190-unit luxury condominium project in downtown Los Angeles, adjacent to Little Tokyo. The "industrial" context of the project inspired a design palette that included steel bridges, beams and railings, as well as Japanese design elements such as bamboo, stone fountains and walls. The three on-structure courtyards are lushly planted with palm trees, with one courtyard designed as a "living room" with fireplace and BBQ's and another with a pool and spa. The zig-zagging pattern of the walkways, with their off-center "devil's bridge" design, and broken glass patterns is highly reminiscent of Japanese and Chinese garden design.

"I took the concept to the developer and met with them to see if they were responsive to this design," says Pressman. "They were very supportive and felt it was right-on as an approach. With their encouragement, the client, much to my surprise, approved it. The best part of this design was that they built it as

it was designed. The project manager liked the design so much, he protected the budget as it went through the value phases and every piece was built as originally designed. This was in 2007, the beginning of the 'demise.' If it were being done today, the courtyard wouldn't have ended up looking like this."

Maintaining Neighborhood Character

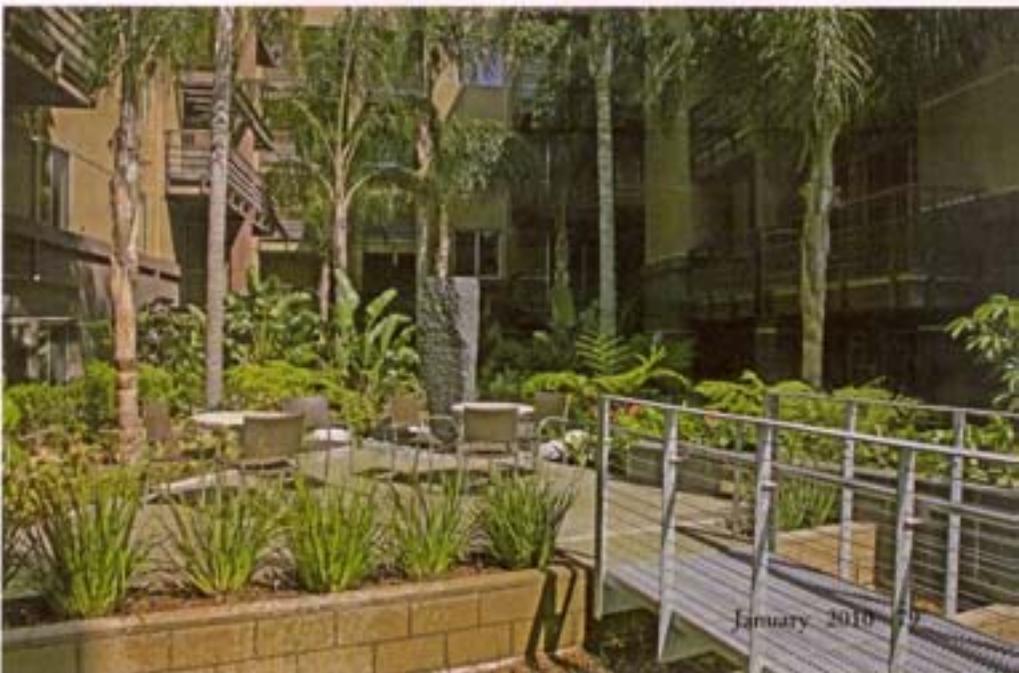
In keeping with the industrial character of the neighborhood, Pressman points out, "A screen around the fireplace recalls industrial grates. The beams holding the "grate" are 'I' beams and the posts as 'T's.' Black slate tiles create the facing on the fountain as well as the bands on the walls and a seat wall that runs along the base of the planter. That seat wall was part of a requirement by the fire department to allow the firemen to step into the planters if needed. Because it was right up against the unit, the firemen needed access to the bedroom windows. Rather than make the planters lower, we added the seat

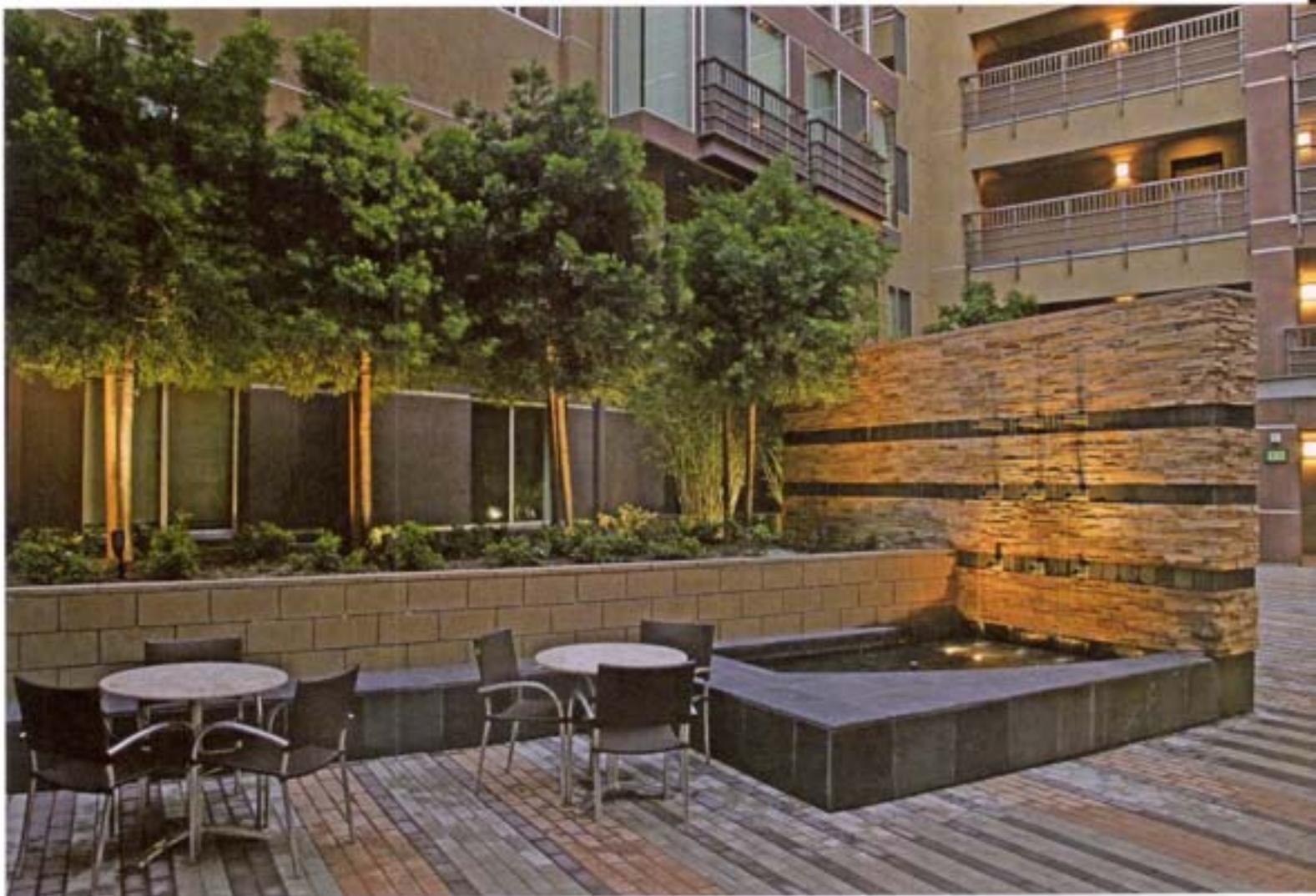


Top: "Both entries to the pool area are framed by black, slate-clad, battered walls that frame the view of the downtown L.A. skyline," states Pressman. "A massive galvanized steel trellis cantilevers above the pool deck and extends over the promenade, creating an interesting focal point. The steel trellis visually dominates the pool and spa deck, which receives full sun all day."

Middle: "We had wanted the spa on an upper level which would allow people to see the city lights view," Pressman recalls. "But that meant we would have to then add a handicap ramp and put it over the driveway access to the garage below, creating a height problem. Pools and spas are usually set over the driveway access. But this worked out nicely."

Bottom: The two upper seating areas are connected to sitting nodes at the promenade level by contemporary steel bridges. The intention behind the choice of plantings was inspired by the difficulty in using drought tolerant varieties because of the shade limitations. Pressman remembers, "With four and five story units, the plants are in shade most of the day. Most drought tolerant plants are not shade tolerant."





Above: Bands of black slate tiles fitted with stainless steel spouts accent both sides of an architectural-stone veneered wall. The water features provide pleasant ambient background sound for both the living room and the dining room. Slate-covered fountain basins at seat height provide additional sitting opportunities for the two-sided fountain. Landscape lighting for the fountain walls and trees adds drama to the night-time landscape.



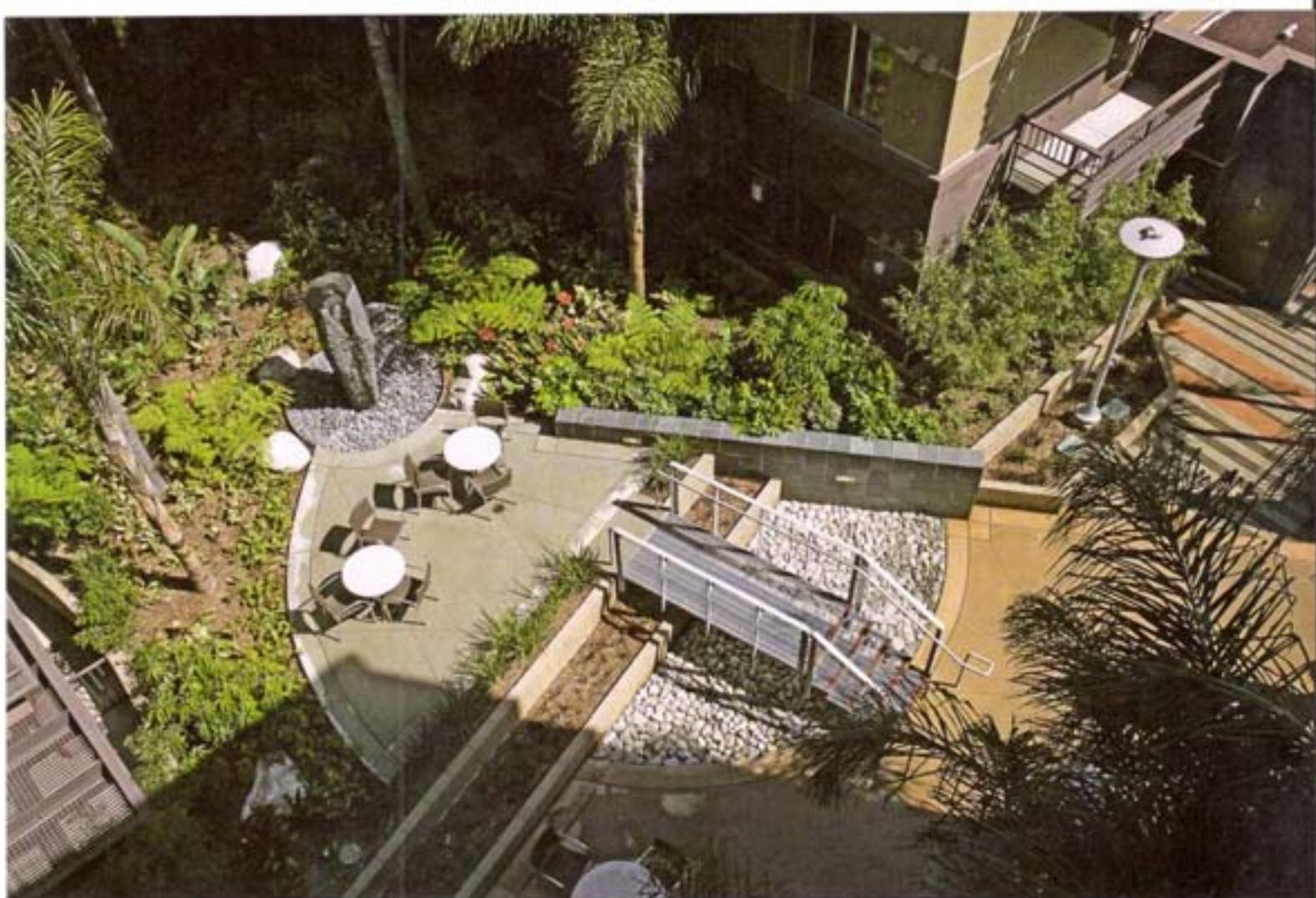
Middle: The architectural-stone veneered fireplace is the focal point of the comfortably furnished living room, which is floored with wood-textured, recycled-plastic decking. Galvanized steel I-beams and posts support metal gratings that create a semi-transparent, contemporary backdrop to the outdoor room.



Bottom: "The barbecues are located on the corridor side of the kitchen," explains Pressman. "The black granite base of the adjoining wall ties into the black granite fountain base in the next 'room.' A compact way of creating a sense of increased space for this relatively small area was by breaking it up into rooms, using walls and screens as the dividers. This was an efficient way to include all the amenities requested by the developer, and mirrors the way interior space is handled."

wall. The requirement worked out to our advantage. Rather than being a limitation, it became an opportunity."

"The bridge crosses over a 'mote' to a seating area," says Pressman. "The area then terraces down and creates a way of pulling pedestrians along by injecting an impassible surface. This pushes them away from the stone fountain and brings them back to the beginning of the bridge, which is on axis with the stone fountain. This produces a controlled sequence of movements."



Above: "The bridge crosses over a 'moat', which, in turn, justifies the existence of the bridge and adds texture and another material to those lower areas," Pressman explains. "The area terraces down and creates a way of pulling pedestrians along."

Right: In an explanation of the unique paving pattern, Pressman recalls, "We used concrete interlocking pavers of terracotta, light grey and dark grey in a repeating pattern. Although it is not immediately apparent, the pattern changes are in large segments of repeating patterns. By developing the pattern over a larger area, it doesn't appear to be as regular as it actually is."

Connectivity With a Sense of Space

"The façade of the building behind the fountain in the dining room was woven into the design as a divider wall," Pressman points out. "The black slate wall points directly at the fountain, which is the terminus of the cobble area as well as creating a way to emphasize the radial quality of the space emanating from the fountain."

"The barbecues are located on the corridor side of the kitchen. The base of that wall mirrors and ties into the fountain base in the next 'room.' A compact way of creating a sense of space was by breaking the area up into rooms, using walls and screens as dividers. This is actually a very efficient way to include all the amenities, which mirrors the way it's done with an interior space. By not being able to perceive the whole space at once, it looks bigger," Pressman says. "By placing the 'rooms' on the diagonal, and not squaring them to the buildings, you can set up a dynamic quality and energy that animates the space even further. In addition, the curve of the wall fountain, and the curved base of the stone fountain, the semi-circular raised patio





"The actual function of the trellis is as a shade structure, but it also provides a visual cue that breaks up the linearity, while introducing and reinforcing the industrial theme of raw metal, a quality that connects to the grates and the I-beams." Pressman adds, "Bathers in the spa can enjoy the dramatic night view of the downtown skyline through the glass slot window in the parapet wall."

area and the curve on the pool become a judicious use of curves to balance the linear quality of the walkways."

In an explanation of the unique paving pattern, Pressman recalls, "We used concrete interlocking pavers of terracotta, light grey and dark grey in a repeating pattern. Although it is not immediately apparent, the pattern changes are in large segments of repeating patterns. By developing the pattern over a larger area, it doesn't appear to be as regular as it actually is. This also creates a sense of perspective while enhancing the sense of distance. I muted the natural tones of stone and steel by adding a little punch in the paving. The surrounding buildings themselves are monochromatic and it needed something a little more vibrant to give it some warmth and life, thereby enriching the space."

Pressman explains, "There are entries on both sides of the trellis coming into the pool area from either direction. We added a "window" so people could see the views of the city, which creates a unique element that was not in the originally envisioning. That was directed by necessity."

"The intention behind the choice of plantings was inspired by the difficulty in using drought tolerant varieties because of the shade limitations," Pressman remembers. "Our choice was geared toward the specific microclimates of being on the podium than driven by drought tolerance. It became more an aesthetic choice within the palette that was available with those kinds of climatic conditions."

This site specific approach to the design of each of TGP's projects is the hallmark of the firm, an approach that ensures a distinctive result by responding to a project's individual challenges and characteristics – the context, the topography, the history and the budget. But most important, Rob Pressman's globally inspired comprehension of all the different

"This was one of the rare projects where you work at the ideas and the concepts

and go thru the normal frustrations, and all of a sudden, there was this "Aha! moment."

influences which must be intertwined not only within the site itself but for the humans who will be using it, make designs such as this one truly inspired.

influences which must be intertwined not only within the site itself but for the humans who will be using it, make designs such as this one truly inspired.