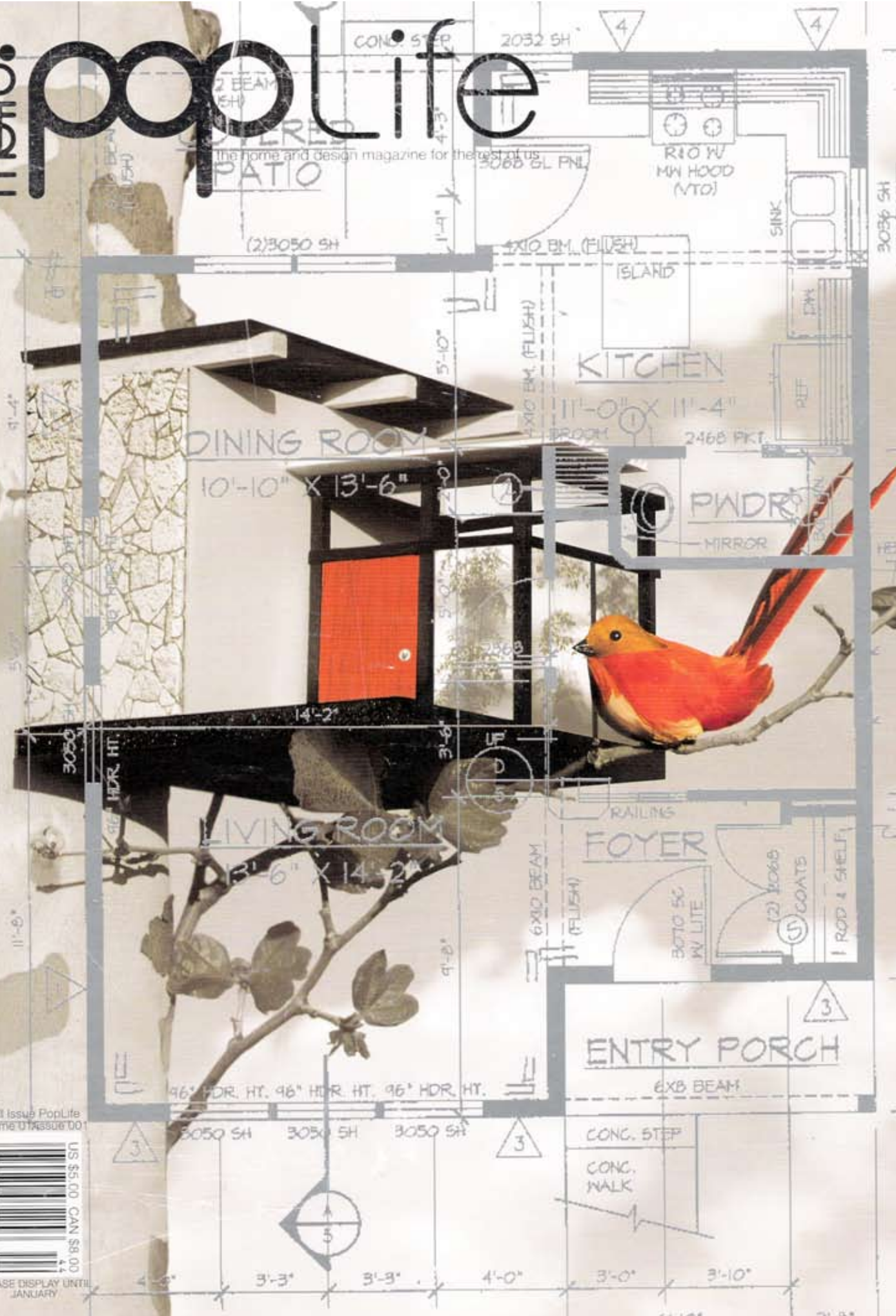


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"It's important how the garden ties the house to the earth."

Orange Street Studio

photos/ye rin mak
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Meet the verdure visionaries at Orange Street Studio. These Los Angeles landscape architects are undertaking more than your typical perennial fair. "We're interested in lines and materials that transform," says Orange Street's founder, Michael Schneider. "No lawns. No flowers."

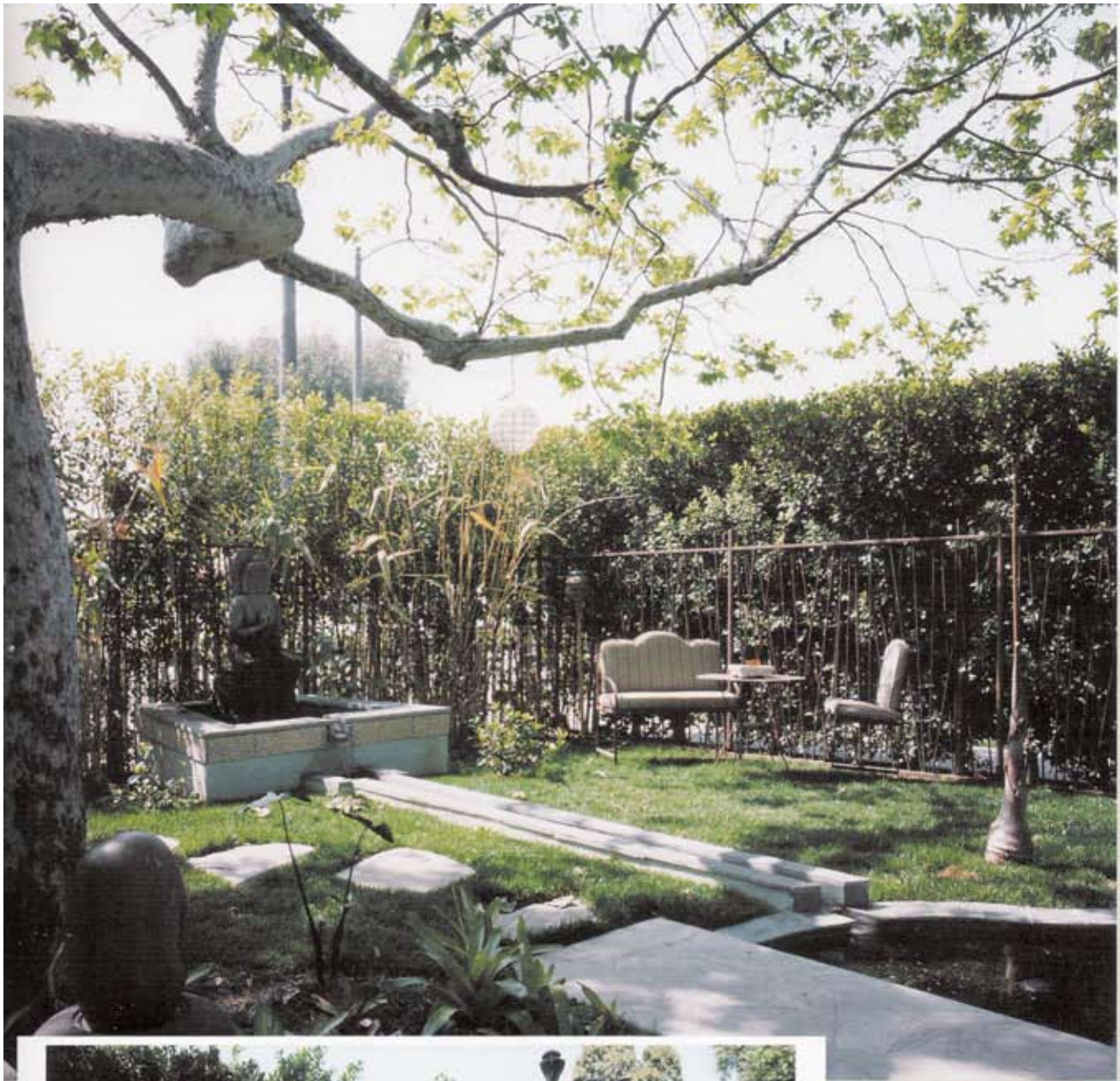
In fact, it is the prerogative of OSS to create a landscape that is not only visual, but voluptuous. By incorporating elements such as light and shade, water, texture, scent and the variation of the seasons, they succeed in creating a captivating outdoor experience that is more than simply pleasant to look at.

"We love learning about materials," Schneider says. Stone, rock, concrete, steel, glass and plastic are among the elements OSS juxtaposes with native Southern Californian shrubs, cascading vines and interesting sculptural plants. The result is a harmonious and engaging unity of the worlds of man and nature.

OSS's affinity for material elements is particularly notable at their Orlando Avenue project, where the walkways and shade structures are as intricately planned as the vegetation. The entryway consists of a rustic metal-and-wood gate set in the center of a towering hedge. Inside, the hedge creates a remarkably private space, despite being sandwiched between the chaos of Melrose Avenue and Santa Monica Boulevard. There is an immediate sense of serenity and isolation that seems to eliminate even the noise pollution of passing cars and planes.

Water plays an integral part in the Orlando Avenue landscape, and each element is part of a constant flow toward the house. "It suggests prosperity and good health flowing towards you," Schneider says. In the back, the water flows from the raised spa, off the infinity edge of the swimming pool, and recurs at the back patio in a bubbling fountain. In the front, a stream of water cascades down a flat wall sculpture and pours into a shallow pool lined with green marbles. Within the pool, large rectangular concrete slabs create the appearance of a floating walkway leading to the front door. The slabs are imprinted with bamboo leaves prior to drying and tie the texture of the foliage into the groundplane.

The plants at the Orlando Avenue project are lush and abundant, creating an illusion of tropical overgrowth that is notable within the home's context. Large trees tower over the rear of the property, providing a deep sense of privacy as bamboo groves create rooms where aging metal tables and chairs are tucked away. "I'm really into not revealing everything at once," says Schneider. "I want some sort of build-up with a sense of mystery and surprise."



Beck Garden at Orlando Avenue



Entry Gate at Orlando Avenue



Orange Street's founder, Michael Schneider



Despite appearing abandoned to the inevitable overthrow of nature, the space is ultimately meant for living, and the necessities for entertainment are gracefully incorporated into the scene. A spa and dining area are shaded by woven bamboo structures akin to the trees themselves and each piece of furniture matches the palette and textures of the plants. Sculptures tucked into unexpected places, tea lights set gently upon stones and tables and netted glass globes hanging from recessed tree branches tie the seemingly incongruous worlds of man's control and nature's abandon into a single, harmonious landscape.

In contrast, the modern structure of OSS's Ensley Avenue project seems to assert control and organization in every aspect of its style. Vertical lines of horsetail, rectangular planters and teak benches flatter the geometric front of the house. Painted in shades of sand and umber, the house is further complimented by desert plants such as blue Senecio (similar to ice plant) and aloe trees that are native to South Africa.



Inner Entry Court at Ensley Avenue

"It's important how the garden ties the house to the earth," Schneider says. The use of earthy colors and a melding of interior and exterior spaces do just that. This house makes ample use of glass walls and several of the rooms seem to flow outdoors into the gardens. An interior courtyard is home to a single tobacco tree, which provides immense light to the interior of the house and adds a simple, understated elegance. Sections of the kitchen walls are also constructed of glass and look out over a long, thin pool that replaced the original driveway along the side of the house. The flooring of the back patio consists of blocks of Sierra gold sandstone, which serves a dual purpose of emulating a beach-like scene and continuing the desert-colored palette of the house.

Similarly, OSS's Pacific Palisades project makes use of a modern aesthetic. "I think I prefer to do minimalist designs," Schneider says. "Minimalism means that every aspect of the project that is important is still there; it's just distilled down to its essentials." Correspondingly, each element of the Pacific Palisades project was clearly selected to be functional, beautiful and complimentary.

Rather than a desert palette, this ocean view property embraces the green, blue and silver shades of the sea. The pale aquamarine house is preceded by a slope of wispy trees and grasses that undulate in the wind. A fountain located just outside of the front door contributes the audible sound of water. The back of the property focuses on the pool and spa and features functional concrete seatwalls along the perimeter. On one edge, the wall widens into a bench replete with a carefully positioned headrest. Along another, the seatwall leads up into another slope of reed-like, soft-waving grasses. Above the pool, a bed of dymondia acts as a spongy alternative to grass. "We planted the dymondia as a visually interesting plant, but also as an area where you could place a towel and lay down."



Pacific Palisades Project

"It's really all in the details," Schneider says, and his painstaking attention to specifics is evident in each of his designs. Always interested in the many levels of landscape architecture's purpose, OSS creates spaces ripe with natural beauty and the functionality to complement the inevitably hectic lives of the people who use and appreciate them.

Orange Street Studio is located off of Sunset Boulevard at 1506 Gardner Street in Los Angeles, and can be contacted by phone at (323) 874-3378 or via the Internet at <http://www.orangestreetstudio.com>



Outer Entry Court at Ensky Avenue