

Gardens are oases of calm when Zen principles are applied

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Christine Robancho (center) of Chula Vista, son Everett Bagaporo, 5, explored the Little Laguna Meadow area of the Cleveland National

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By Christie Ritter

STAFF WRITER

CARLSBAD- Robert and Luella Henley's three-quarter-acre yard in Santa Clarita guzzled two precious commodities: water and time.

So when they moved to Carlsbad last summer, they wanted their much-smaller new yard to be hassle free.

They hired landscape designer Kohei Owatari of Waterscape Technologies, based in Bonsall, to transform their plot. Owatari's specialty is Asian design, which blends natural elements such as rock and water features.

The result is a minimalist design incorporating mostly low maintenance plants, stone walkways instead of grass and granite lanterns, inspired by those used as votive lights in ancient Shinto shrines.

The focal point of the patio is a Japanese-style recirculating fountain, where water flows through a bamboo pipe into a granite bowl.

"It's like a big burden has been lifted off our shoulders," Luella said of her scaled-down new yard.

In their previous garden, the Henleys not only consumed vast amounts of water but waged a constant battle with whiteflies, gophers and weeds. Now, the recently retired couple has reached a happy truce with Mother Nature. They can relax on their patio, listening to

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EDUARDO CONTRERAS / Union-Tribune photo

Minimal fuss: Stogywalls ana pathways make up

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In their previous garden, the Henleys not only consumed vast amounts of water but waged a constant battle with whitetlies, gophers and weeds. Now, the recently retired couple has reached a happy truce with Mother Nature. They can relax on their patio, listening to the soft trickle of water, while their neighbors are busy mowing lawns and whacking weeds. Their plants are watered by an automatic sprinkler system.

"There's nothing in this yard that prevents us from leaving if we want to leave," said Henley.

Their new home and garden, in Carlsbad's upscale new community of Aviara, is far from barren-looking. Bamboo lends an Asian feel, while gardenias, azaleas and camellias inject a shot of color here and there. Dozens of *Armeria will* one day form a green carpet in the front yard.

It's just *a bit* different from the tropical jungles some of their neighbors are planting.

The Henleys gave Owatari free reign to be creative on the project. They contacted him after seeing his work featured in *Architectural Digest* magazine, so they had faith in his

abilities, they said.

Before coming to the United States in 1981, Owatari learned Japanese landscape design and techniques while working for a company that maintained one of the Japanese royal family's gardens in a suburb of Tokyo, he said.

In his own landscape creations, he uses natural elements, which reflect the Zen principle of *schizen*, meaning naturalness and the absence of pretense. "I use a lot of water and plants; it's all integrated in nature," Owatari said. "Even when I use a wall, I use natural stone to do that."

Another principle of Zen, *kanso*, which means simplicity, is reflected in Owatari's work as well. Less is more in his gardens, which don't have "too many things in one place; it's a tranquil way to present a garden."

In the Henleys' front yard, Owatari defined the house from the street by building a low wall made of river-washed cobblestones in natural, warm tones to contrast with the Mediterranean-style sand-colored house.

The front yard is dominated by a wide, stone pathway made from red mountain flagstone and granite pavers that leads from the sidewalk to the front door. Lanterns light the way at night. Dwarf mondo grass, planted between the pavers, will

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EDUARDO CONTRERAS / Union-Tribune photos

to nature

Minimal fuss: Stone walls and pathways make up most of the front yard at the home of Robert and Luella Henley in Carlsbad's Aviara development. They asked landscape designer Kohei Owatari to create a garden that would almost take care of itself. At left is a hand-carved granite post lantern that illuminates