

House & Garden

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SPECIAL ISSUE

decorating and Art

*how to make them
work in harmony*

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for your
collection



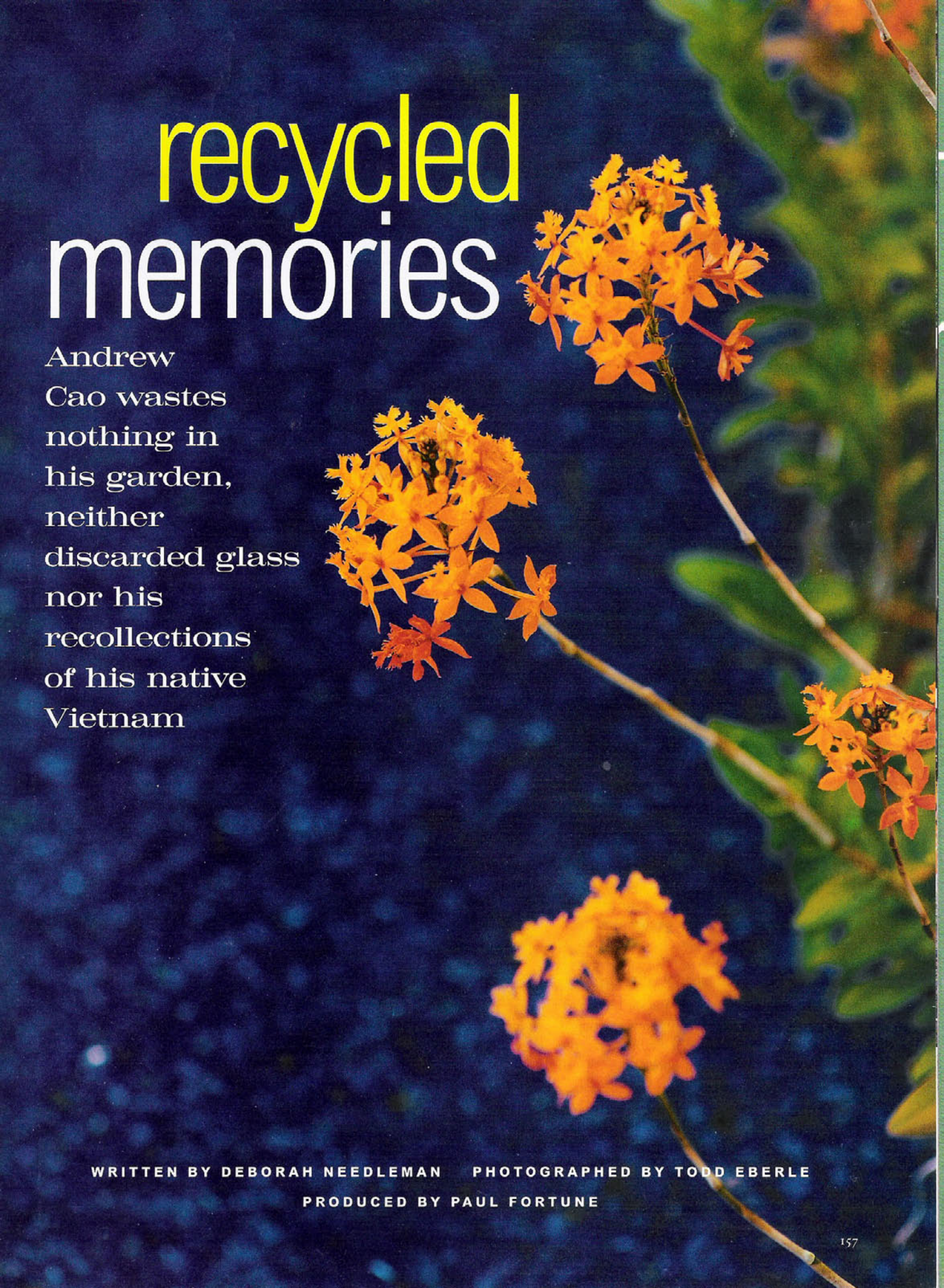
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recycled memories



Andrew
Cao wastes
nothing in
his garden,
neither
discarded glass
nor his
recollections
of his native
Vietnam

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PRODUCED BY PAUL FORTUNE



IN A 1,500-SQUARE-FOOT BACKYARD PLOT, Andrew Cao has created a mysterious, jewel-like retreat using recycled bits of glass, this page. EPIDENDRUM ORCHIDS, opposite page, pop out against a mulch of cobalt-blue glass.

aFTER GETTING A DEGREE in landscape architecture in 1994, Andrew Cao wrote a letter to every firm in Los Angeles, looking for work. No one was interested. This setback gave him the freedom to develop his own vision. Like many great designers, Cao became his own ideal client.

From the outset, Cao knew that he wanted to draw on his memories of Vietnam's landscape for the design of his garden. He was 10 years old at the end of the war, when his family moved from a lovely seaside village in central Vietnam to his grandparents' rice farm in the south. He recalls farm life as idyllic, and his memory of the billowing rice fields is still vivid. "When you grow rice, the whole field is like a green carpet," he says. "We grew jasmine rice, and every time the wind blew, the whole field smelled of jasmine."

Cao knew he wanted to evoke his childhood memories in his Los Angeles garden, but he wasn't exactly sure how to do this. It was the unforgettable image of the salt farms, where salt is raked into cone-shaped piles in water, that led him to wonder about recycled glass as an artistic medium. Since the salt appears translucent—glistening in daylight, glowing in moonlight, and casting reflections across the pond—Cao realized that only glass could convey this luminosity.

He went door to door investigating glass-recycling plants. Fortunately, one plant manager, who had been in Vietnam during the war, was intrigued by Cao and took pity on him. He has allowed Cao to pick through enormous piles of bottles and shards, taking what he wants.

The layout of the garden that Cao and his companion, Stephen Jerrom, have made in the Echo Park section of Los Angeles is based on the topography of Cao's homeland. Since Vietnam lacks a single iconic image, like the Eiffel Tower or the Great Wall, Cao fastened on Highway 1 as his country's unifying symbol. This 1,200-mile road joins the flat farmlands of the south to the central coastline and the terraced paddies of the north.

The garden miniaturizes scenes along this route. Gold and green piles of glass on a base of black glass represent harvested rice set out to dry on the highway. Fine-leaved Mexican feather grass in blue glass depicts the flooded rice paddies. The colors change throughout the day as the glass reflects the shifting light. At night, the garden glows as if lit from underneath. At all times it radiates tranquillity.

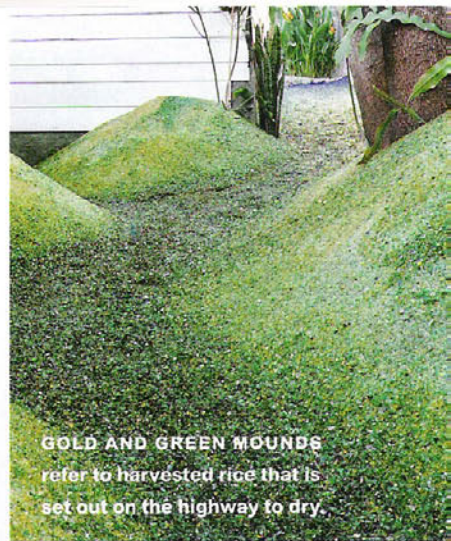
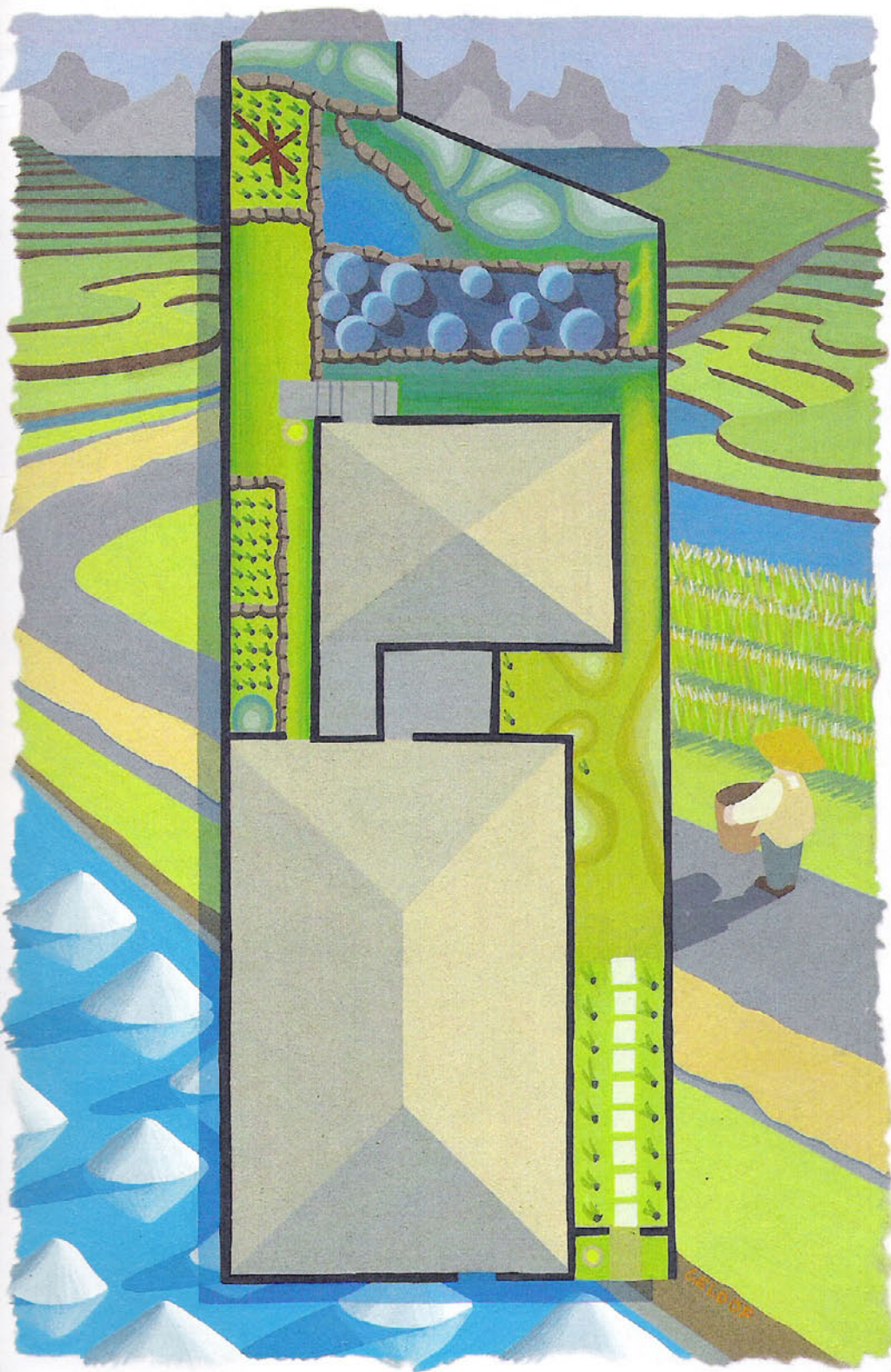
The garden has been a laboratory for Cao. He is now at work on several new projects, including fountains, tiles, furniture, and installations, each involving recycled glass. It is no longer true that no one wants to hire Andrew Cao; the commissions are rolling in.



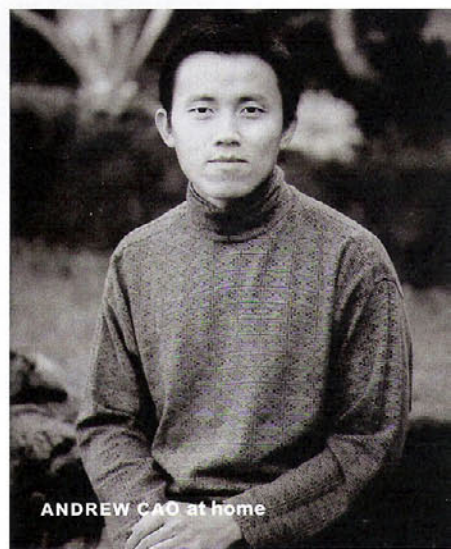
THE FLOODED RICE PADDIES are depicted with Mexican feather grass growing out of cobalt glass.



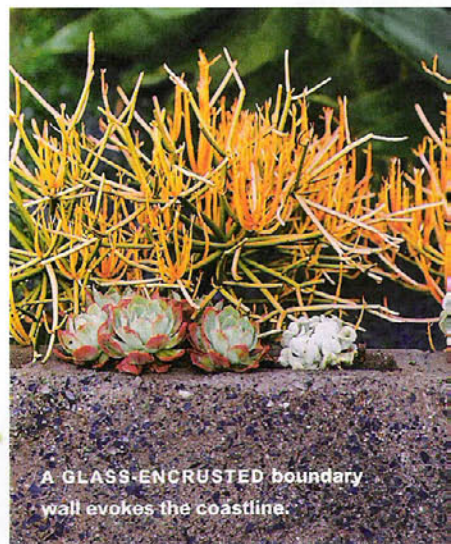
THE RUSTED SCULPTURE alludes to the armaments that still lie about the countryside.



GOLD AND GREEN MOUNDS refer to harvested rice that is set out on the highway to dry.



ANDREW CAO at home



A GLASS-ENCRUSTED boundary wall evokes the coastline.

landscape as ART

Both the ecology of the materials used in this garden and its unusual, *allegorical* layout are innovations that serve the garden's true nature as a work of art. Most Western visitors are unaware that, from the front gate to the back wall, they are seeing Cao's interpretation of scenes from southern Vietnam up through the

north. While Southeast Asians recognize these *iconic images*, the experience of being in a glistening oasis and treading on gems powerfully transcends all literal references. Ultimately, it is Cao's artistry and his painterly use of glass that give the place its profound sense of mystery, weightlessness, and silence.



THE SERENELY BEAUTIFUL crystalline white glass was inspired by Cao's memory of the way salt is raked into cones in ponds for harvesting.

