

New Men's News

Kaneji Domoto, Creator of Dream Gardens of Water and Stone

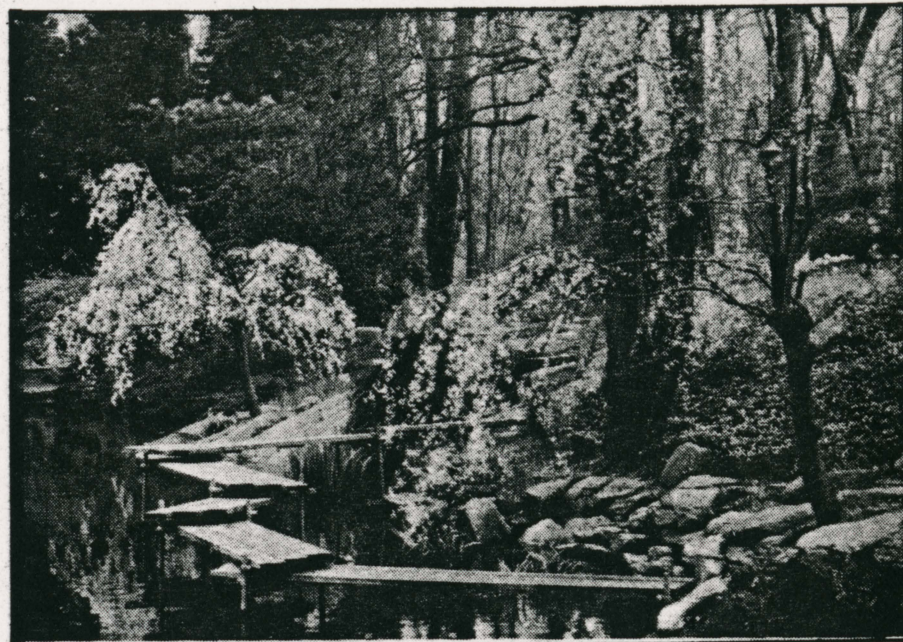
Photos by Anne-Marie Leone.

Some Westchester families have long enjoyed free-form swimming pools, rock outcroppings, waterfalls and flowering gardens that rival mad King Ludwig's grotto. These are the creations of New Rochelle resident Kaneji Domoto, 75, one of the country's most celebrated and imaginative landscape architects.

Born in California, Domoto acquired his knowledge of shrubs, trees and plants from his father, a pioneer nurseryman who established the business in Oakland before the turn of the century and developed it into one of the largest in the West. Domoto studied landscaping at the University of California at Berkeley and apprenticed with Katsuo Saito, Japanese architect at the San Francisco and New York world fairs in 1938 and 1939.

While in New York, Domoto realized a boyhood dream: he was accepted into Frank Lloyd Wright's home and apprenticeship school, Taliesin, in Wisconsin and Arizona. He studied with the master for a year before returning home to California.

World War II and Executive Order #9066 interrupted Domoto's career. The U.S. government evacuated him and his family to the Granada Relocation Center in Colorado, where they were interned for almost three years. Afterwards, Domoto settled in New



Catwalk on the lake.

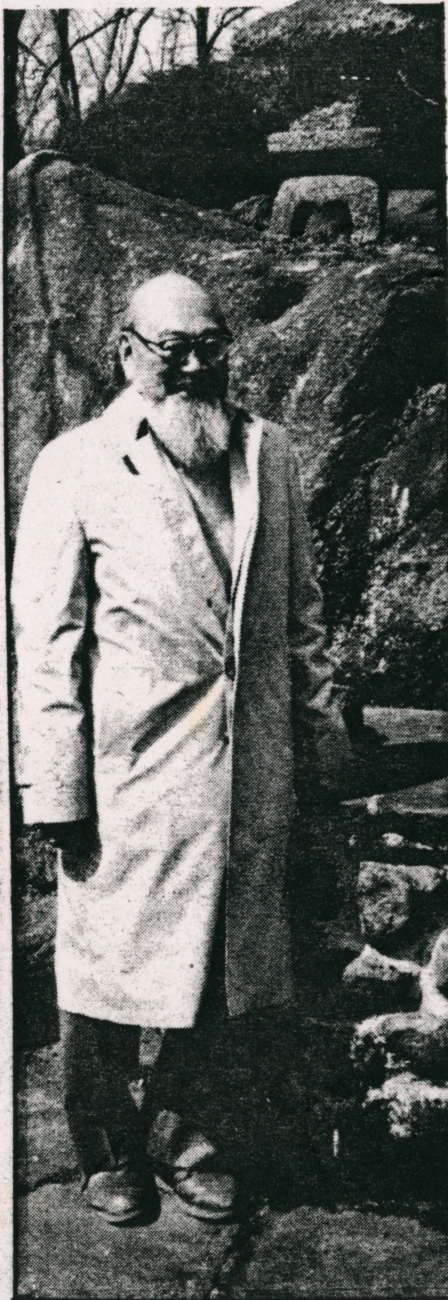
Rochelle and joined area architectural firms.

In the late 1940s, he worked on Wright's largest cooperative, Usonia Homes in Pleasantville. He designed and supervised the construction of five of the houses and created harmonious landscapes. "I like to believe there is logic, reason and serenity in them," he says. He has since built 27 other residences.

Domoto has become recognized most of all for his landscape designs, however. His credits include more than 20 commercial projects nation-wide. Locally, he originated landscaping for the Neptune Building in New Rochelle and Schulman Realty Group's 777 Westchester Avenue, formerly the

AMF Building. He also created the abstract curves that line Schulman's early corporate parks along Westchester Avenue. His protege of 25 years, Edmund DeLaurentis, completed the design work for Schulman.

Domoto's gardens also grace Manhattanville College, Albert Einstein Medical College, the University of California at Berkeley and Dartmouth College. His work appears in eight parks, museums and animal habitats, including the seal pools at Mystic Aquarium, the penguin pen at the New York Aquarium, the Japanese Gardens at the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens, and Jackson Park in Chicago. His designs for James Frankel, owner of the Caribbean la Samana Hotel on St. Martin, are nearing completion.



An author and lecturer on the art of bonsai and the Japanese garden, Domoto has appeared before garden clubs, nurseries and festivals throughout the U.S. and taught at the New York Institute of Technology on Long Island.

Now semi-retired, Domoto has become increasingly involved in the Japanese redress movement, an effort to reimburse 120,000 Japanese Americans for their incarceration in this country during World War II. As a result of pressure from congressmen, public figures, Nikkei organizations and others, Congress established in 1980 the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians to hear testimony, review directives and make recommendations. The Civil Liberties Act of 1987, now awaiting the President's signature, encompasses the Commission's recommendations.

On May 14, the public will have an opportunity for the first time to view six of Domoto's gardens in Harrison, Scarsdale and Mamaroneck. The landscape tour will benefit the New York Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League. Proceeds will go to the Japanese redress movement.

Each private garden displays Domoto's technique of placing stone in natural configurations. Sweeping expanses of gravel echo the contours of the landscapes. Large areas of ground cover form abstract designs. Waterfalls cascade into swimming pools that rhyme with their surroundings.

"Stones...there is music when you place them along running water," Domoto says. "Stones, when wet, become 'live' with a sparkle and a song. Stones are an integral part of the grandeur of a mountain, my greatest love."



The view from the back porch of the Durst home looks to the pool across reflecting-pond lake.



The egret to the right of the Japanese-garden statuary is real.

At the home of Dr. Saul Cohen on Kennilworth Avenue in Harrison, massive evergreens serve as a backdrop for a sculptured waterfall and swimming pool. Along Palma Drive in Harrison, the home of Dr. Larry Paredes features two waterfalls--one to catch the morning sun, the other to capture the sunset--that empty into a swimming pool.

At first glance, it appears as if a lake reflects Royal Durst's garden on Griffin Avenue in Scarsdale. Actually, it is one of Domoto's free-form swimming pools. A stream meanders through a great collection of bonsai on the property. Harold Lynton's residence on Fenimore Road in Harrison proves that a house retains tranquility when built atop a stream. In fact, Domoto's swimming pool and terrace seem to be what floats here.

Domoto enhanced the view of Long Island Sound from two Mamaroneck residences. At the Kenneth Wellner house, a sea of large pebbles with islands of greenery replaces the lawn as the Sound meets a natural wall of stone. Trimmed pine trees frame the water view of the Sound from the Phillip Struass home on Constable Drive, and a waterfall freshens a garden of pebbles, stones and plants. For these designs, Domoto received the American Institute of Landscape Architects Design Recognition Award.

"I love stone in its natural state above all other materials," Domoto says. "I love to make waterfall gardens, streams and lakes that look natural, stone sculpture gardens." To join the May 14 tour of Domoto's stone-and-water gardens, send a check made out to N.Y. Chapter JACL in the amount of \$25 per ticket to Dr. Sumi Koide,

Doobs Ferry, or call 592-9374 for further information.