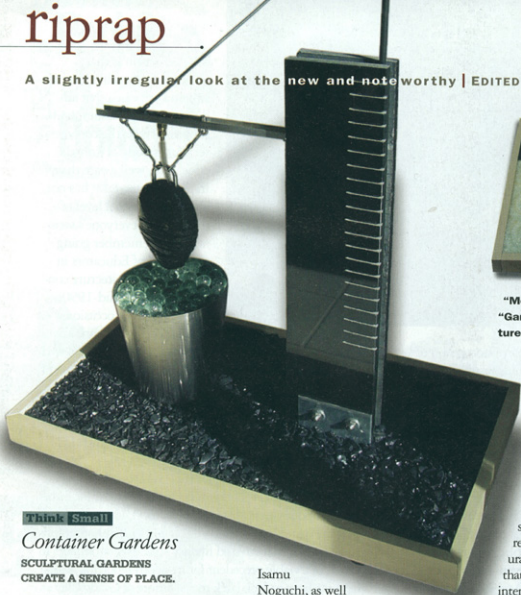


# riprap

A slightly irregular look at the new and noteworthy | EDITED BY HEATHER HAMMATT, ASLA



"Mobile Fountain," left, and "Garden in a Box," right, capture an abstraction of nature.

## Think Small

### Container Gardens

SCULPTURAL GARDENS  
CREATE A SENSE OF PLACE.

**T**he innate need to commune with nature can be fulfilled by surrogate nature or man's rendition of nature," says Samuel Kim, ASLA, a design principal with SQA, Inc., in Los Angeles. Kim finds a creative outlet in designing and constructing small-scale art objects that capture a sense of place. With his extracurricular expressions, extensions of ideas originally developed in his 1983 thesis project at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo titled "The Place of Contemplation," Kim finds a midcareer hobby that reinvigorates his creative thought process.

Kim's thesis evolved a design vocabulary for Southern California, influenced by the modern vernacular of Mexican designer Louis Barragan and the abstract nature of sculptor and environmental designer

Isamu Noguchi, as well as the paradise-like, contained environments of Islamic, Moorish, and Persian garden traditions and the abstract, natural style of Chinese and Japanese gardens. His garden-like sculptures continue that dialogue.

"My intent is that they are sculpture in their own right, not just temporary models," says Kim. The pieces have inherent value as art. According to Kim, sculpting allows him to get intimate with materials and their limitations, hands-on knowledge that he can then use in the design process.

The driving force in these sculptural exercises is bringing landscape to the interior. One piece titled "Garden in a Box" evolves from the minimalist Zen garden ideas found at *Ryuanji* in Japan. Swirling patterns of tiny glass pebbles are uplifted

juxtaposed with the smooth, reflective surface of polished black granite, creating an abstract image of nature. By exploring interconnectedness in nature—how one element, such as a piece of rock, can express all of nature—the sculpture engages the mind. The recreation of a contained, pristine, natural setting creates "symbolic nature" that can be displayed in the midst of an intense human habitat or environment, provoking an emotional response.

Another piece titled "Mobile Fountain" ties in to the current trend of garden knick-knacks, the "mini water garden," taking it one step further into a design element. The sculpture makes use of the *feng shui* idea of water as a dynamic substance that shapes the landscape. Water flows over a grooved rock, flowing and ebbing into a basin of glass marbles.

By defining a place where nature is not separate from culture but an integral part of it, Kim explores how to illustrate abstract thoughts of the natural world within everyday environments. Sculpting provides Kim with a medium for creative expression that ties into his professional pursuits. "Landscape architecture is not just for the outside, especially in urban environments," says Kim.

Have an idea for Riprap?

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