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# AMERICANStyle

JUNE 2006

## TOP 25 CITIES FOR ART

### ARTS FOCUS

Reading into Glass

### ARTS TOUR

Blissfully Lost in  
Blue Hill, Maine

### SHOW PREVIEW

Edward Hopper  
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## Gardens & Art

When Jack Lenor Larsen  
teams up with  
Mother Nature,  
anything can happen

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# The LongHouse that Jack Built



On 16 sweeping acres in East Hampton, N.Y., textile designer Jack Lenor Larsen blends gardens and art to create an ever-shifting show of beauty

BY LEE LAWRENCE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROGER FOLEY

LongHouse Reserve combines ancient Japanese simplicity with the newness of contemporary art. "Fly's Eye Dome," a fiberglass piece designed by R. Buckminster Fuller and produced by John Kuitik, basks in the sun on the lawn.

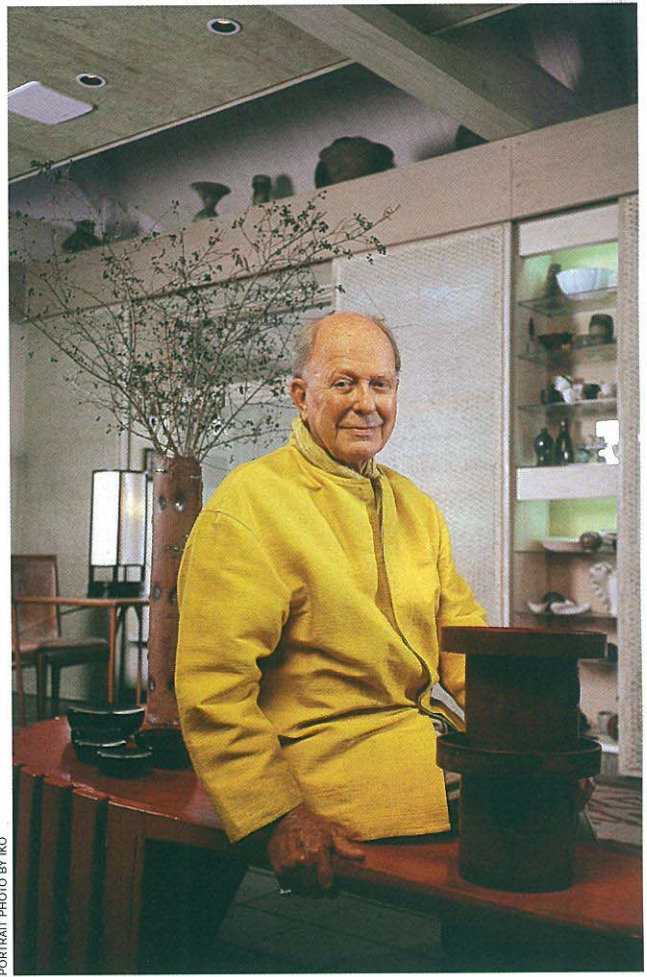


## For more than 50 years Jack Lenor Larsen has infused the world

with sensual textiles, earning him a string of awards and accolades like “the dean of modern fabric design.” He has also taught design and weaving, curated exhibitions, and written or co-authored 10 books, with one more on its way. And, every summer since 1991, Larsen invites the public to visit LongHouse Reserve, his East Hampton, N.Y., home, whose stated mission is “to exemplify living with art in all its forms.” But the more you listen to Larsen, the more

you realize that LongHouse also exemplifies his own deep reflections about life.

LongHouse’s exterior, reminiscent of the 7th-century Japanese Shinto shrine of Ise, invites you to approach it with a reverential sense of discovery. From the gate, you wend your way through rounded dunes of sand made all the more strikingly white by Dale Chihuly’s reeds of cobalt-blue glass that rise along them like sentinels. Ahead, a bridge leads to the house, which, like the



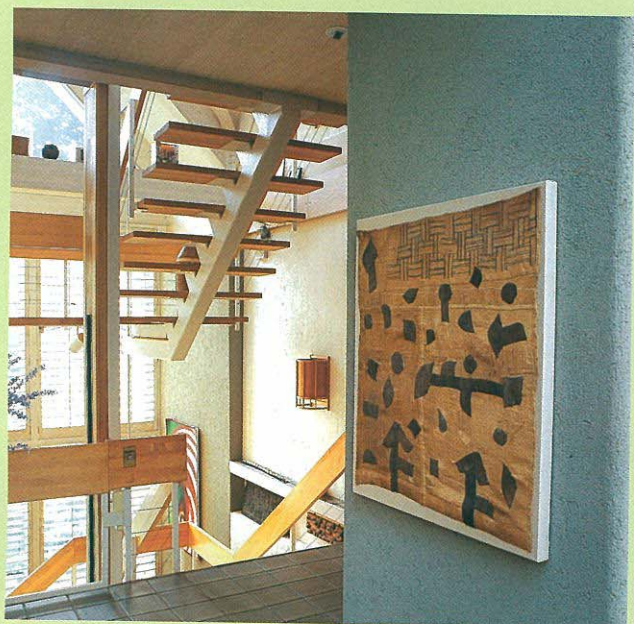
PORTRAIT PHOTO BY IKO



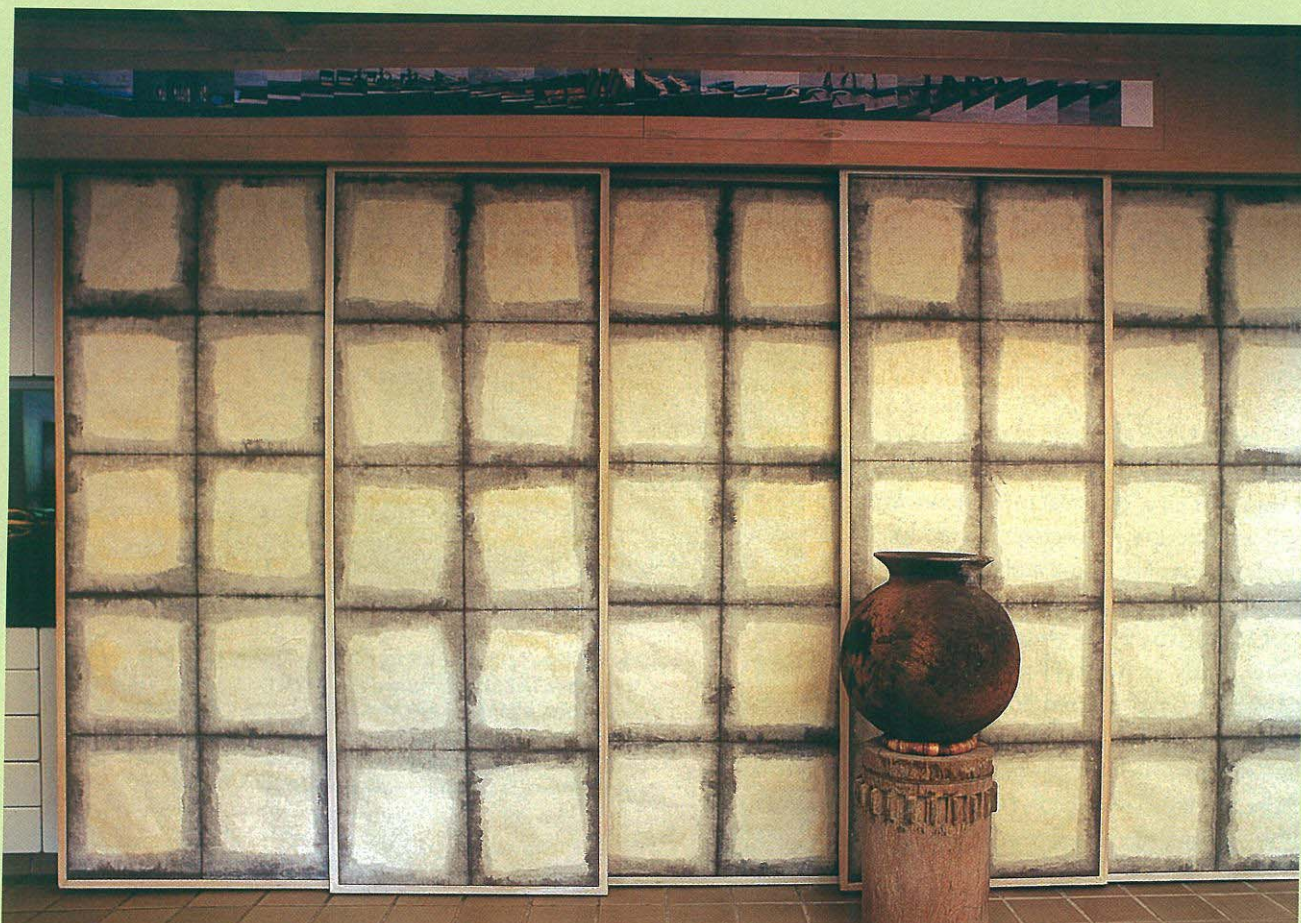
Ise temples, is raised on columns and sports a high-pitched roof with exposed beams. Open and airy, the structure allows nature and architecture to intersect, so the lines of the house at once frame and become part of the surrounding landscape.

Outside, in fields where potatoes once grew, a lily pond faces south, a lap pool points west, red-painted posts draw the eye to a Toshiko Takaezu vessel, and hemlock hedges enclose twin rows of bronzes by Peter Voulkos. Elsewhere, tall, wispy grasses play against the roughness of stone carv-

**"When they told me how much it was going to cost to haul away the subsoil from digging out the basement, I said, 'We're going to have sand dunes,'" says Jack Lenor Larsen, top. Today, 27 of Dale Chihuly's "Cobalt Reeds" sprout from the dunes, left, and Toshiko Takaezu's "The Gateway Bell" stands amid the grasses. By the lap pool, above, is Grace Knowlton's "Untitled (Sphere I)."**



An open staircase leads to the upper floors of Larsen's 13,000-square-foot, four-level home. A sliding screen, below, covered with paper handmade by Larsen in Japan, separates the dining room and kitchen. In the conservatory, right, Pat Hickman's "Tuning" and Costantino Nivola's concrete-cast mask hang on the wall, and Dawn MacNutt's woven willow sculptures stand on the ground.



# "I see no reason you can't have both beauty and comfort."

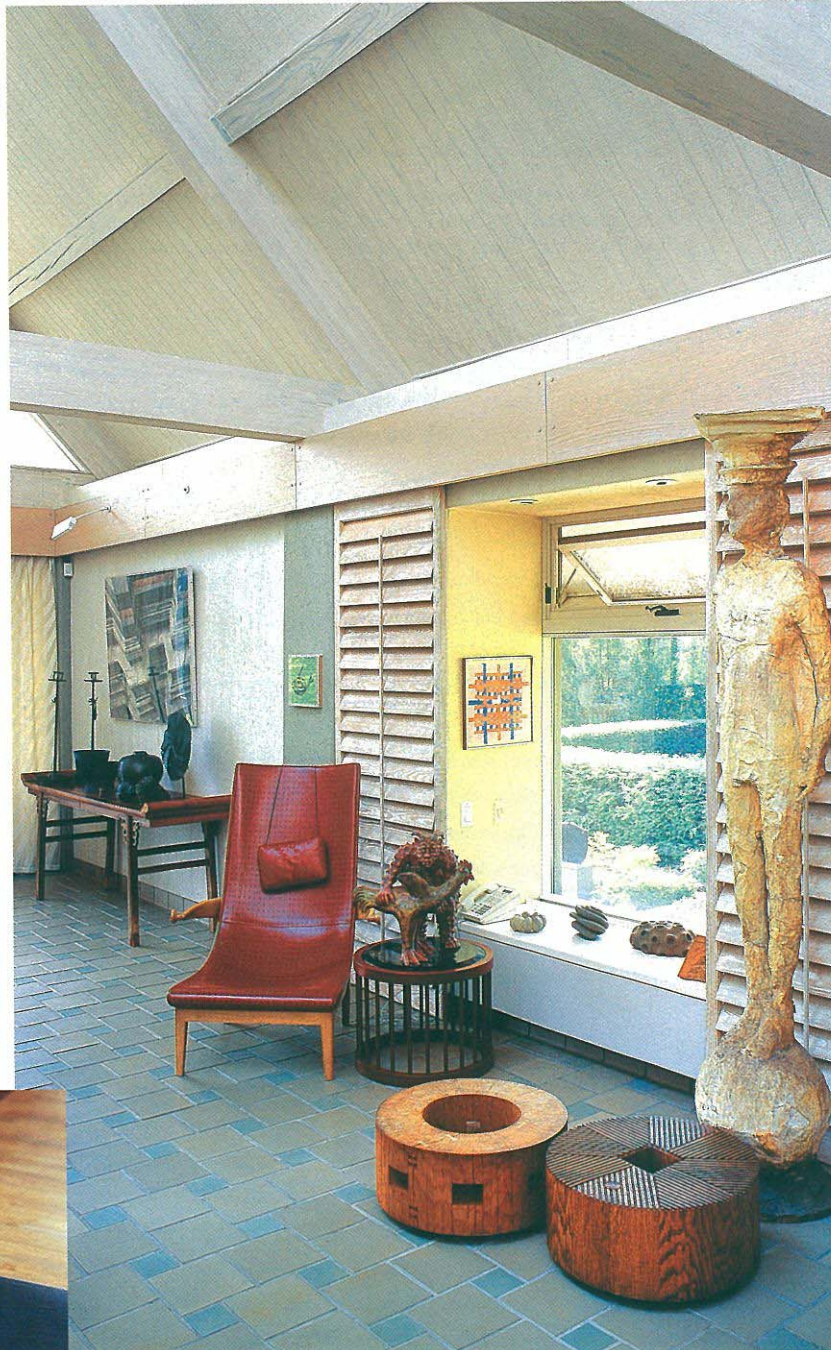
—Jack Lenor Larsen

ings, Louise Nevelson's sculptural puzzle in black rises amid greenery, and the rounded forms of Ming vessels almost drip chocolate-brown glaze onto slate.

Inside, Larsen and architect Charles Forberg created four levels with 13,000 square feet of living and exhibition space. Yet nothing about the interior is pretentious or grand. Discrete seating areas break up the living room, and in the dining room a sliding screen closes off—or opens up to—a well-stocked kitchen.

At LongHouse, you won't find pristine rooms in which you cannot sit. "I quarrel with most furniture makers today," says Larsen. "They think that if it is not functional, then it must be art." Larsen has the second-largest collection of furniture by the late Wharton Esherick. "It is durable, comfortable and lightweight," he says, "as well as beautiful, with good use of joinery. I see no reason you can't have both beauty and comfort. Trees function very well, and they are also beautiful."

Here and elsewhere, panels of Larsen's fabrics mask and protect built-in shelving, while straw mixed into the stucco gives walls a tactile warmth. Throughout, baskets perch on rafters, and Esherick's finely crafted furniture interacts with rough-hewn



In Larsen's home, art is showcased in a comfortable, livable setting. "2 Tables," by Japanese artist Jokan, stands in front of a papier-maché column by Dan Graham. On the table is "Devil with Rooster" by South African artist Josephine Ghesa. Larsen brought the three spheres, at left, back from a trip to South America.



The gardens' landscapes change with the seasons, and outdoor sculptures are frequently repositioned. Two that stay put: Yoko Ono's "Play It by Trust" and Claus Bury's "Bridge" (in the background).

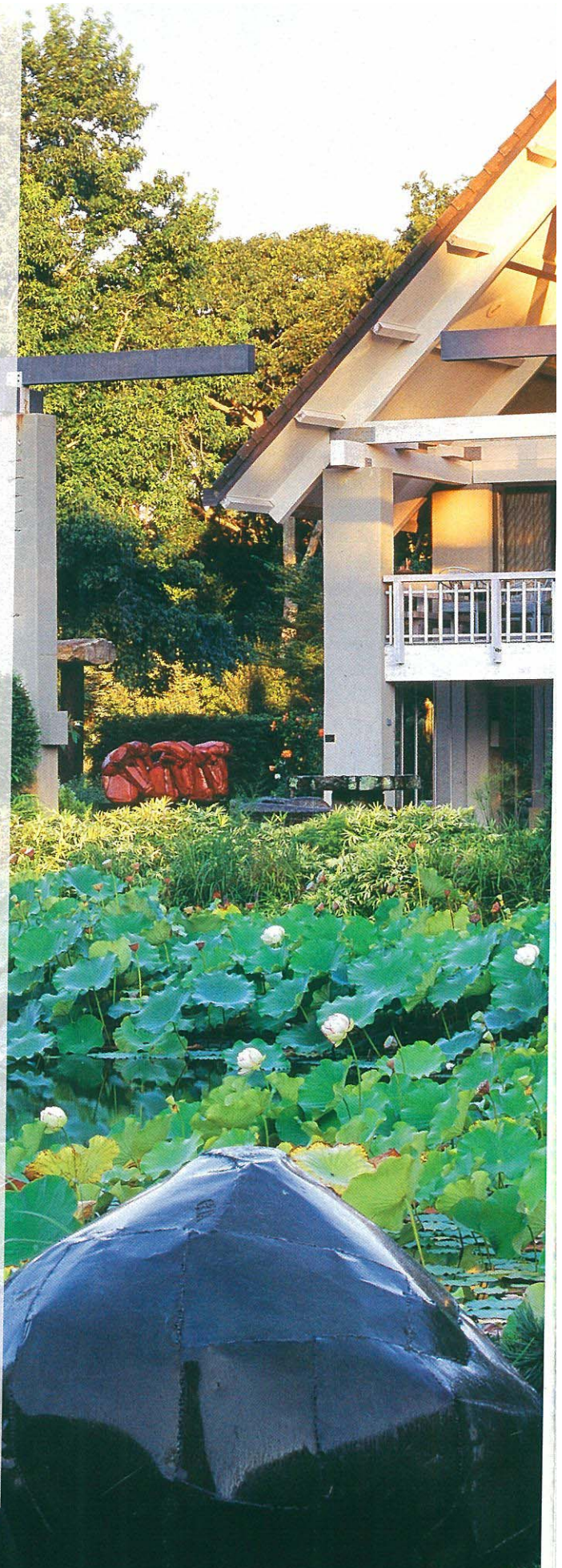
## Garden Reflections

"I think I used to have a notion that older people *always* knew more—and they often do not. We are in just as big a danger of losing reality as we are of gaining it," says Jack Lenor Larsen, who has gained much of his wisdom from gardening. It is on his knees, with trowel and pruning shears in hand, that he has cultivated a humility that comes from realizing that, when all is said and done, you don't control the show. But you can help choreograph it, as Larsen does at LongHouse Reserve, working with both nature and art to create a powerful, ever-shifting show of beauty.

Yoko Ono's concrete chessboard, "Play It by Trust," Roy Lichtenstein's "House II" and Claus Bury's "Bridge" may stay put, but most of the other 60 or so outdoor sculptures are prone to migration. From one visit to the next, you cannot be sure where you might encounter Toshiko Takaezu ceramics or Dennis Oppenheim's "Tar Roses." And every season redecorates the gardens. In April and May, more than 200 varieties of daffodils burst into bloom as ornamental grasses grow taller and fuller. By July and August, lotuses in the ponds open their hearts to the sky and European hornbeam are in full leaf.

Like Larsen's textiles, the gardens perpetually display a sensual mix of texture and line, from the languid sweep of weeping Blue Atlas cedars to the bristle of conifers and bamboo or the delicacy of yellow marigolds and the riot of red azaleas. Early on, Larsen learned from fellow Seattle artist Mark Tobey that if you place objects against a contrasting backdrop, you will focus on the outline rather than on the work as a whole. "I am more and more sensitive to that," says Larsen, and the gardens attest to this. The red azaleas, for example, grow amid red posts, which create the optical illusion of a long colonnade culminating in a Takaezu vessel. Similarly, green Chihuly glass sculptures rise amid grasses and stalagmite-like stone pieces by Jim Owen converse with stalwart bamboo shoots.

From late April until mid-September, you can wander the gardens on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 2 to 5 p.m. Make sure to check for forthcoming exhibitions and performances (631-329-3568, [www.longhouse.org](http://www.longhouse.org)). —L.L.







farm ladders, African stools, pewter mugs and centuries-old ceramic pots.

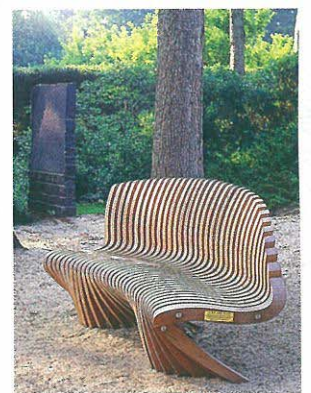
This interplay of textures is typical of Larsen, whose fabrics often mine the tension between flat and pile, opaque and transparent, rough and slick, just as his interior decorating shows a predilection for “mixing the mundane and the sophisticated. I think rooms in which everything is expensive or overly refined are one-dimensional,” he says. “A wonderfully luxurious material will look better against straw.” And vice versa: “It goes both ways.”

**E**xcept for a window seat cover in Larsen’s sparkling 1970 Magnum fabric (inspired by Indian embroidered fabrics that use mirror pieces), the textiles at LongHouse are mostly textured tans and off-whites, imbuing the space with the quiet calm of Japanese tatami-matted, shoji-screened rooms. Japan, Larsen’s favorite country to visit, was the site of a defining experience for him.

It occurred in the early 1980s. Larsen had reluctantly agreed to participate in a

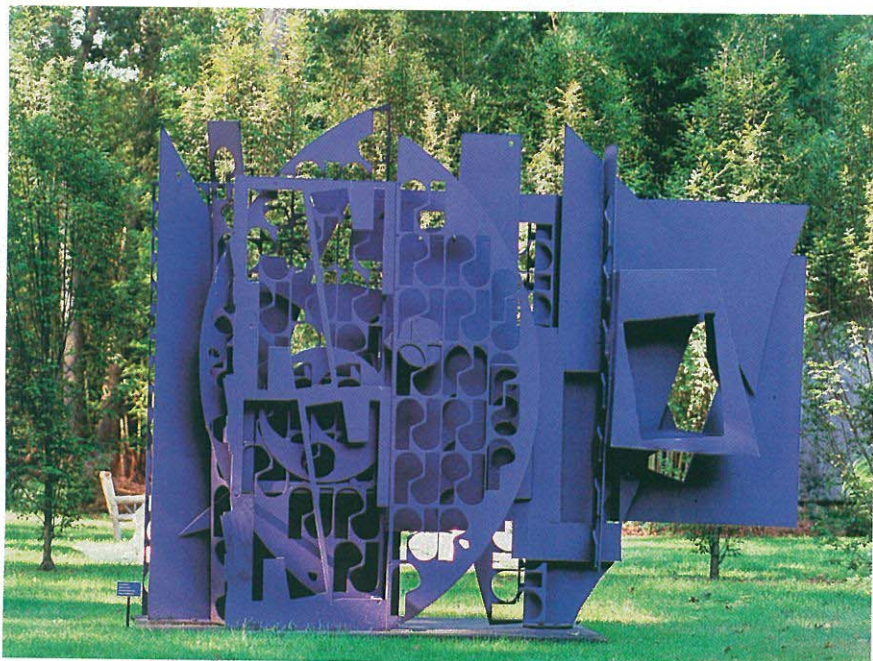
tea ceremony with a venerable master and found himself entering ever deeper into the fullness of the moment. “I am totally visual,” says Larsen, “but that was another dimension. It was quite amazing that we spent perhaps three hours looking at objects intensely.” At one point, the master set out five almost identical black lacquered boxes and asked Larsen which was the most precious. In a powerful instant, one box “towered over the others, radiating with an inner light.” This was when, as Larsen puts it, he learned not just to see, “but to perceive, to understand.”

While a Japanese aesthetic dominates parts of LongHouse, Larsen by no means limits himself to a single influence, in art or in life. “The other thing that was about as moving,” he says, referring to the tea ceremony, “was in the first version of *Cabaret* in the Lotte Lenya role. The young man is negotiating for a room, and she says, ‘Well, it’s ten marks,’ and he says, ‘I only have five.’ She says, ‘So what? My husband wanted me fat and I was thin, and now I’m fat and he’s



Those looking to rest a spell have artful options at LongHouse: a “Spirit Song” bench, above, by Diamond Teak’s Barbara and Robert Tiffany, or a pinewood bench, top, by Robert Wilson. Toshiko Takaezu’s “Circino Gyrus” stands in front of the pinewood bench; her “Three Graces” are behind it.

## "A lot of things we think



not around. So what?" Larsen pauses. "A lot of things we think are important aren't so important."

**L**ongHouse is full of hints about what Larsen today deems important. Early Chihuly works appear on windowsills and throughout the gardens, a testimony to Larsen's predilection for "making connections. I keep seeing Cs," he says, curling index finger and thumb. "Just close it a little more and it becomes a circle."

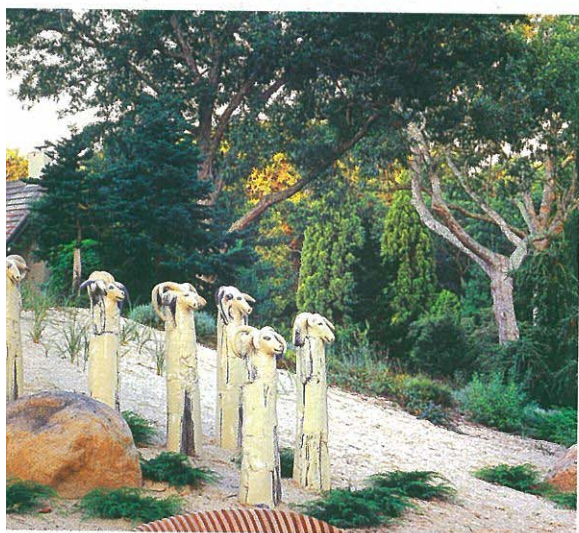
One of his greatest successes was putting his young friend Dale in touch with friends at the Weyerhaeuser company, a connection that brought forth the Pilchuck Glass School and helped make Larsen's native Seattle a national glass capital.

Similarly, a large rock honoring landscape architect Peter Hornbeck calls to mind, among other contributions, Larsen's establishment of the American Craft Council's Gold Medal. Larsen believes it is important to recognize older people for their past contributions, much like the Japanese Shinto believe in giving thanks to those who came before.

You won't hear the sound of looms here—a sound Larsen loves because, as he explains, "if only one thing goes wrong, pretty soon you have a problem and the whole thing unravels, so that makes being in rhythm all the more satisfying." But you will experience the rhythm of the seasons and touch upon a truth Larsen holds dear.

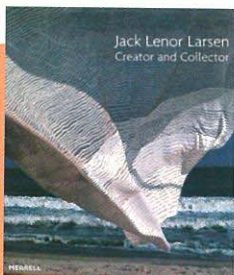
"I've learned recently that on every scale, from microorganisms up, there are systems and functions, that everything is a system." Greens give way to russets, traditional batiks give rise to contemporary designs, and a man marries art and nature to create an experience that will outlive us all. ●

**LEE LAWRENCE** also wrote *Palette* about painter Liz Gribin and the Arts Focus on glass in this issue of *AMERICANSTYLE*. She lives in Washington, D.C.



On the north end of LongHouse's croquet lawn, Willem de Kooning's "Reclining Figure," right, is positioned by Blue Atlas cedars. "Frozen Laces-Four," above, is by Louise Nevelson; "Dream of Africa (Small Totems)," left, is by Shin Sang Ho.

Selected textiles, sculptures and craft from Jack Lenor Larsen's collection are on view in the traveling exhibition and book *Jack Lenor Larsen: Creator and Collector*. The next stop for the exhibition is the Sonoma Valley Museum of Art, Sonoma, Calif., from June 24 to Aug. 20. To get a feel for the variety and inventiveness of Larsen's work, log on to the Larsen Archive, [www.artsmia.org/larsen](http://www.artsmia.org/larsen), established by the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.



are important aren't so important."

—Jack Lenor Larsen

