A photograph of a yellow house with a white window and a large water garden in the foreground. The house is partially obscured by lush green trees and bushes. In the foreground, there is a wooden deck and a pond with a waterfall. A large green frog sculpture is on the left side of the pond.

After Hurricane Hugo destroyed several massive trees on their Weddington property, Rick and Doris Alexander added a large water garden, built by Johnny Massengale in the late 1990s.

Peaceful Paradise

PASSION FOR KOI TURNS BACKYARDS INTO TRANQUIL WATER GARDENS

By Nan Bauroth | Photos by Ray Sepesy



IT WAS LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT for Cathy Goodrich. "The second I saw the backyard, I told the Realtor: 'I wanted this house,'" she recalls. The entire landscape behind the suburban home had been transformed into an ethereal Japanese water garden with cascading ponds teeming with colorful koi and surrounded by lush foliage, shaded by a canopy of Japanese pines and evergreens.

To Goodrich, the vision appeared like a dream. Twenty-six years ago she had been abruptly widowed with two young daughters. Asked at the time to describe her idea of paradise, she envisioned a tropical lanai. Now, after



THE KOI
SOCIETY
STAGES A
TOUR OF
PONDS EVERY
SUMMER AND
PROMOTES
THE ENTIRE
HOBBY OF
KOI AND
WATER
GARDENS.

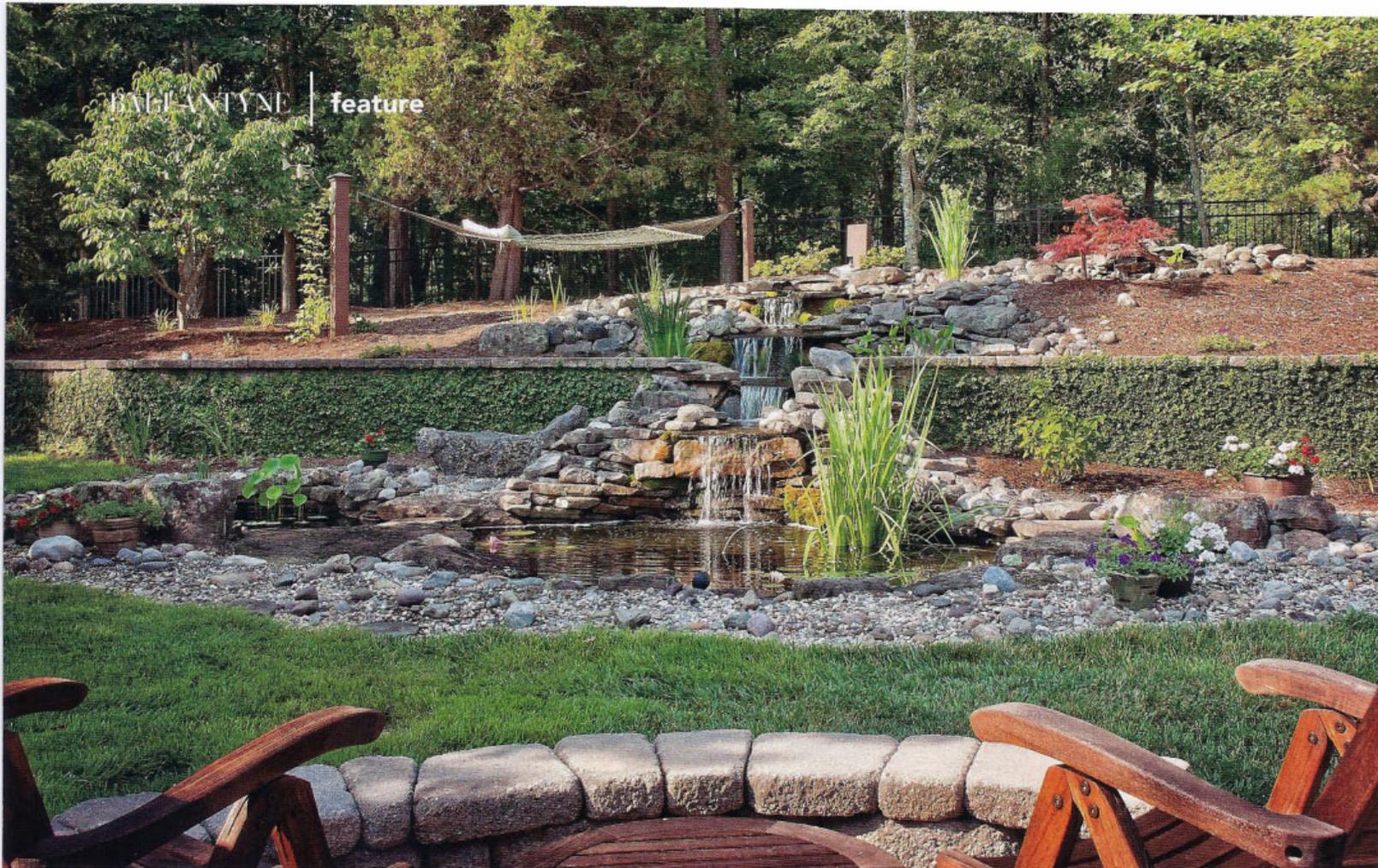
many hardships and struggles she was about to realize her fantasy. One year later, Goodrich still can't believe it. "This garden is my paradise," she says.

That same allure of a serene koi pond

with flowing waterfalls mesmerized Myles and Mary Martha Weiner when they moved to the Ballantyne area from

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Behind Cathy Goodrich's suburban home is the Japanese water feature she fell in love with when she first saw the property.



When Myles and Mary Martha Weiner moved to Charlotte, they selected their new home largely because of the koi pond.

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Cleveland two years ago. The couple was determined to downsize so long as there was an ample kitchen, but the instant Myles caught a glimpse of the backyard, it was a done deal. "I knew we had bought the house," he says.

Koi Group

In both cases the new homeowners knew nothing about koi or koi ponds, so they joined the Piedmont Koi and Watergarden Society, which has provided them with a wealth of information as



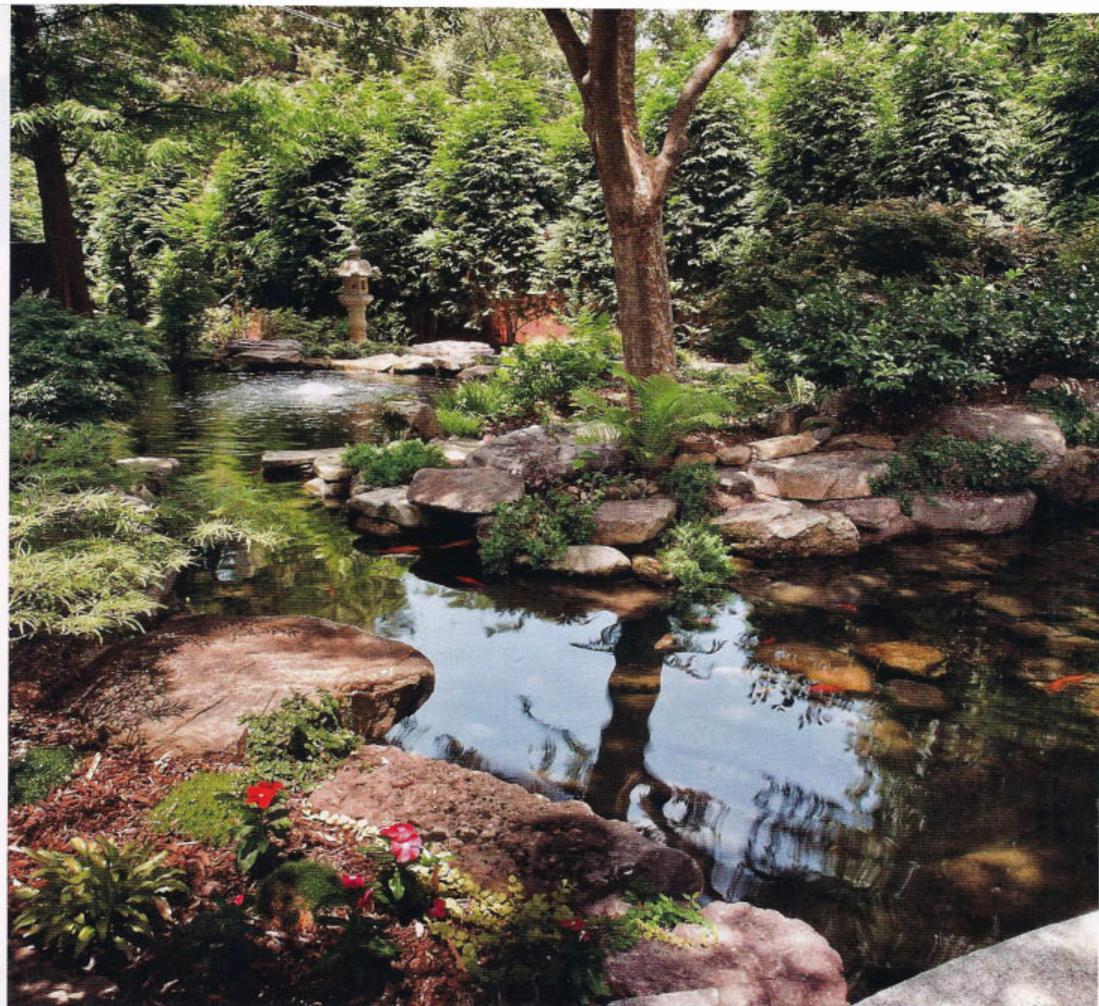
The roots of water plants provide nutrition for koi. Lily pads, pictured here, also produce lovely blooms.

The peacefulness of her backyard is Cathy Goodrich's personal paradise.

well as newfound friends. "Our membership has doubled in the last two years with people either buying a house with a pond already installed or who enjoy fish and want a pond built," says Brannon Raines, society president.

The society, which stages a tour of koi ponds every summer, promotes the entire hobby of koi and water gardens. "We run the whole gamut, from those just interested in water garden plants to members who collect, breed and show koi," Raines says. He and others in the group have also formed an offshoot club, the Koinetters, whose mission is to rescue koi and find them homes.

Johnny Massengale, owner of Ponders in Harrisburg, N.C., is considered the mastermind of pond construction in this region. Over the past 25 years he has designed and built approximately 1,000 koi



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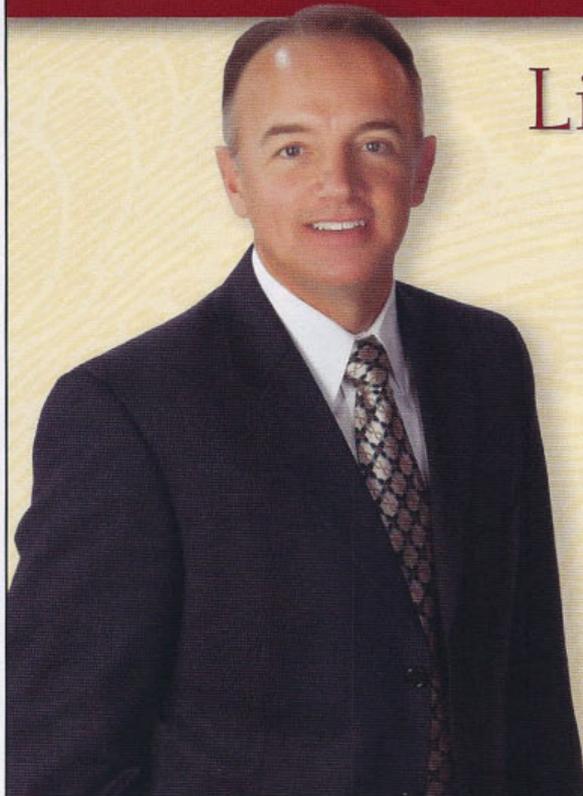
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ponds and water gardens. "He is one of those designers who instinctively knows where the right rock needs to go within a waterfall or water feature to make it look 'wow,'" Raines says.

According to Massengale, people spend anywhere from \$3,000 to \$100,000 on a koi pond. The largest he ever constructed is 120,000 gallons, but most run 2,500 to 3,000 gallons. "The more you spend on filtration, the less maintenance you have," he says, noting that every fish requires 300 gallons of water.

Since koi devour plant roots, Massengale constructs hybrid ponds with a header pool featuring vegetation and a decorative water feature that leads into the aquatic area for the koi. "We create bog gardens around the edges so you can still get the plants but fish cannot access them," he notes.

Weddings on the Pond

Sixteen years ago Massengale built a 30,000-gallon, 10-foot deep pond for Rick and Doris Alexander. It features seven waterfalls that appear to flow from the deck of their 1883 farmhouse in Weddington. Giant Dixie Deb Louisiana irises provide a focal point behind a Japanese bubbling stone that aerates water for the koi on the far side of the pond.

"We built the pond after Hurricane Hugo destroyed several massive old trees on our property," Doris says. The wedding party for the couple's son was staged on the pond's 35-foot-long cypress walkway, and a neighbor's daughter also

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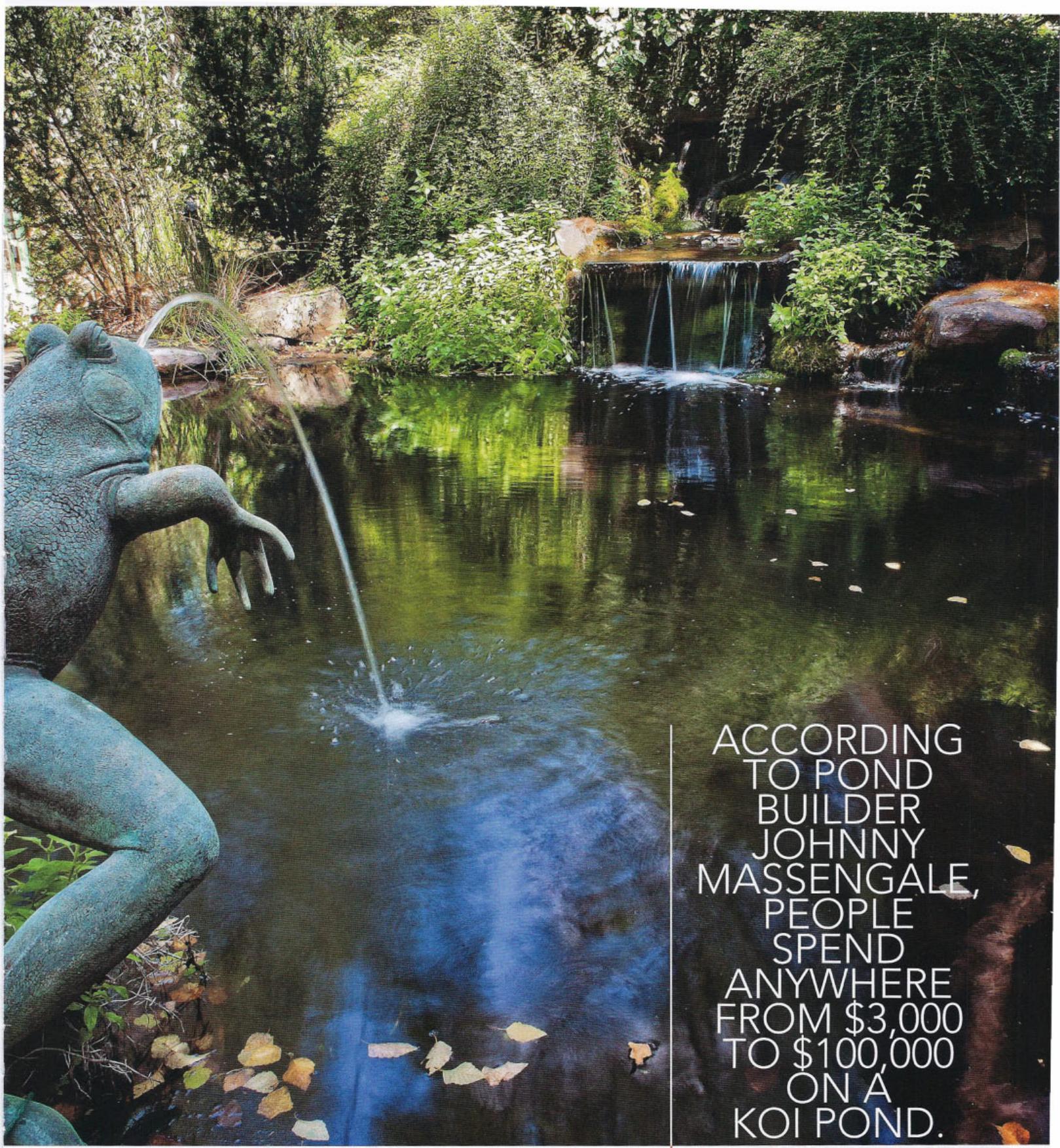
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PEOPLE
SPEND
ANYWHERE
FROM \$3,000
TO \$100,000
ON A
KOI POND.

chose their koi pond for her wedding.

Raines advises homeowners to do some research before they dig. "There's tons of information online, but I recommend you come to our meetings because you will learn everything others have done," he

says. The Weiners concur. "People in the club are so generous," says Mary Martha. "They've given us lily pads, irises and other plants we have rooted in our pond."

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The Alexanders have seven waterfalls as part of their 35,000-gallon water garden at their historic farmhouse.



The cypress walkway over the Alexanders' large koi pond is not just a place for relaxing. It has been the site of a party after a wedding and a wedding itself.

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Discouraging Herons

To deter herons, some owners position a row of fishing line eight inches high around the edge, while others swear by mirrored gazing balls bobbing on the surface whose lights bother the birds. The Weiners float a Mylar-covered pyramid and also have had success with a plastic life-size heron. "Heron are territorial, so if they spot another at a pond they move on," Myles explains.

The more people get involved with koi, the greater their passion grows. It's not unusual for owners to swim with their fish. "The man who built my ponds loved to snorkel in the deep pool with his koi," Goodrich says. Many owners name their fish, getting to know them so well that the koi will feed from their hands. Scales can range from the brilliant red and whites of show koi to shimmering hues of black, blue, orange, platinum and even gold, while newer species called butterflies sport angel-like, flamboyant fins.

For many owners such as Goodrich, though, the real benefit of a koi pond and water garden in her backyard is that it instills a sense of living on a higher plane, as if it were her personal Shangri-La. "This place is my idea of peace," she says. ☐

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