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## Hot Tub Time Machine

George Nakashima's sublime Japanese-style bathroom endures at his rural estate.

TEXT BY  
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PROJECT  
Sanso Villa  
ARCHITECT  
George Nakashima  
LOCATION  
New Hope, Pennsylvania

The sunken bathtub in George Nakashima's Sanso Villa mimics the shape of a swimming pool on the grounds. His daughter, Mira Nakashima, took over the studio after his death and now lives and works

on the property. "A Japanese garden often has a central pond derived from the character for 'heart' or 'spirit,' and this may be an abstraction of that character," she says of the tub's sculptural form.

Completed in 1977, the Sanso Villa, or "reception house," was the last of 13 buildings George Nakashima designed for his property in New Hope, Pennsylvania. He spared no expense in the space, which was used to host guests and hold dinner parties, incorporating rare woods and lavish materials throughout. Aware of the looming late-1970s energy crisis, he also wanted a structure that did not depend on fossil fuels and purchased a wood-fired boiler from Japan to heat water for his playful interpretation of a traditional soaking tub in the bathroom.

Blue and white penny tiles imported from Japan form the abstracted patterns, which Nakashima designed with help from his grandchildren. "He thought it would be fun for the kids to have their artwork preserved in the bath area," says his daughter, Mira, pointing out their names set into the floor and bathtub. He built the towel rack from holly and used cedar and teak elsewhere in the room. Like much of Nakashima's work, the space is connected to nature: Sliding glass doors lead to a moon-viewing platform with a panorama of the valley. "Luckily," Mira says, "we don't have neighbors nearby." □