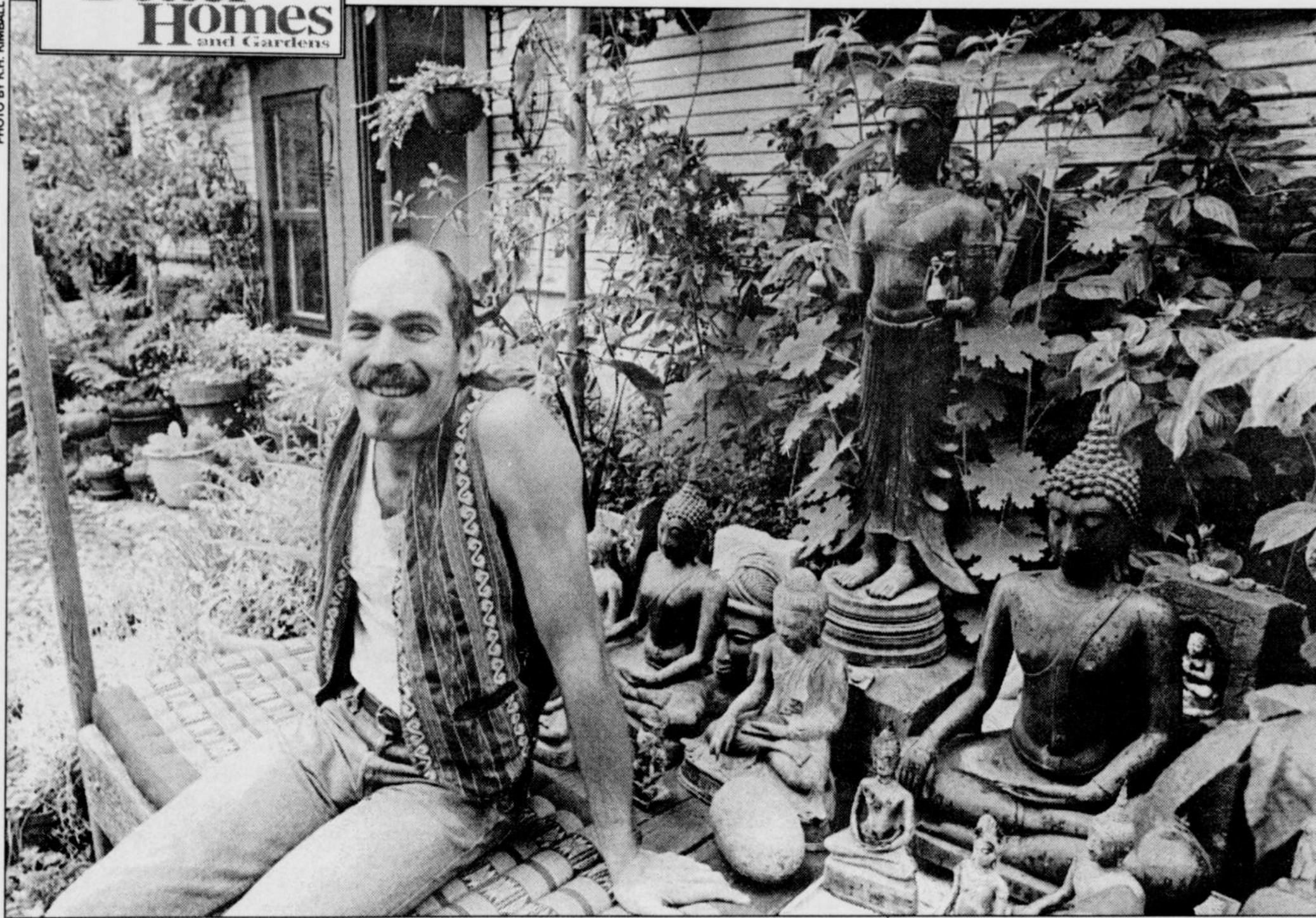


Our Own
Better Homes
and Gardens

PHOTO BY K.H. KIMBALL



Jeff Bales, among friends and on his path

FEELING VOYEURISTIC?

Join *Just Out* on a tour of six queerly fabulous Portland-area homes

by Oriana Green

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Whether we live in studio apartments or mansions, in yurts or condos, in bungalows or basements, there is something special about our homes. Many of us tend to turn away from the city and retreat behind fences and hedges into a world of our own design—a place where we have at least the illusion of control over our environment.

Gay men of a certain inclination have always had a reputation for gracious living, but lots of us knew how to live well long before Martha Stewart instructed the masses in the fine art of picking paint colors to match designer chicken eggs. Even style-impaired lesbians can create havens worth celebrating, though they may include a line strung up between two pines for the flannel shirts to dry on.

So join me for a tour of six homes—each one wildly unique and personal—but each one clearly, queerly fabulous.

Eat your Araucana heart out, Martha!

Hidden and Seeking

Though set back only a few yards from the street, Jeff Bales' city home is invisible, surrounded by lush plantings. As I climb the steps to his porch, splendid fragments of Indian temples come into view. A bright red altar hangs beside the front door where each day Bales lights incense, offers a prayer to bless his home and rings a small temple bell.

"It works," he assures me, leading the way into his amazing world. A small sign above his front door reminds all who enter to "Stay on Path"—an admonition full of many meanings. And for good measure, he has draped his porch with Tibetan prayer flags, which are said to release prayers with each breeze that flutters through them.

Bales needed daily prayers—for himself and his house—to survive the past 15 years in a rough inner-city Portland neighborhood. For most of that time, he was sandwiched between a gang living on one side and drug dealers on the other, but his house was cheap, and he believed the neighborhood would eventually revive into a livable place.

After only four years, Bales was able to pay off his mortgage, which enabled him to pursue his real love—travel. For the past nine years he has spent his winters traversing the back roads of Asia, particularly India, which he affectionately calls "a crowded, filthy, spectacular mess."

While soaking up the culture and traditions of each place he visited, Bales accumulated a treasure-trove of discarded artifacts, native crafts and slabs of stone that he shipped back home. One cache of exquisite stones traveled 1,200 miles overland to Bombay, India, halfway around the world by ship to Los Angeles, and

finally overland again to Portland. That's how much Bales loves exotic rocks. It's a passion he inherited from both sets of rock-hounding grandparents, who took him as a boy to the rich lands of central Oregon in search of wonder.

Entering his home I am at once immersed in all things Asian. The elephant-headed god Ganesh beckons to a small altar; fabulous silver-threaded sari silks adorn the windows; every piece of furniture is covered in hand-woven textiles from Vietnam and other colorful places Bales has wandered through. Native music sets the mood, and tea is brewing on the stove this damp morning.

The house began its life as a modest bungalow, but has since been totally transformed into an Asian temple. In fact, the transformation is so complete it seems as though Bales spends *all* of his time in Asia. All the walls and ceilings are painted in jewel-toned hues that modulate from room to room—gold, purple, turquoise. Every inch of space is filled with artifacts and collections and precious mementos of his journeys.

And now he has twice the room for it all. Last year Bales was finally able to buy the crack house next door and is busy renovating it into an office for his landscape design business. He quickly knocked down the fence and doubled his backyard space.

In his garden there are two beds. If you had the good fortune to fall asleep on one, you would be forgiven for believing you had awakened in heaven. Bales has made a lifelong study of Persian paradise gardens—the lush-walled gardens of eternal spring. Lying down is his favorite way to enjoy his space.

"It is an invitation to close examination and discovery," he explains, reclining and reaching out to pluck a perfect raspberry, which he offers to his guest. On an arbor above the platform, grapevines twist and wind and



Jeff Bales believes lying down is the best way to view a garden—especially his

promise to reach down later in the year with their succulent offerings.

The breeze stirs a concert of chimes, and looking up I am astonished to see that from every rafter tail hangs a different Nepalese temple bell. Adding to the sense of tranquillity is the gentle sound of a stone frog spewing water into the pond, which is surrounded by an intricate medicine wheel that Bales created. Based on the astrological teachings of Sun Bear, the wheel features subterranean stones from Cave Creek that are color correct for their positions on the wheel.

Evidence of the spiritual inspiration for his garden is everywhere. Even the lines of his palms are preserved in glass tile stepping stones as a kind of permanent oracle—and perhaps

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