

SOCAL DESIGN

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SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S PREMIER DESIGN MAGAZINE

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**CALIFORNIA
COOL**
A BREATHTAKING
MAKEOVER FOR A
WATERFRONT GEM



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[GARDENS]

LUSH LANDSCAPES | INSPIRING DESIGN | PEACEFUL RETREATS



Seeds of contentment

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO GARDENS HAS WON L.A. LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT PATRICIA BENNER A LOYAL FOLLOWING—AND NURTURED HER OWN SPIRIT, AS WELL
BY MAILE PINGEL

LOS ANGELES-BASED landscape architect Patricia Benner, who also has an office in the Bay Area, has created some of the city's most beautiful green spaces. From terraced canyon gardens to lush but lawn-less examples, Benner's projects share the common threads of classical design, structure, and what she dubs "gusty foliage." Here, we ask her about childhood influences, changes she's seeing in the field, and a few of her favorite resources.

What is essential to you for a successful garden?

Foliage form, texture, and color in a planting palette. I love the impact of acanthus or artichoke contrasted with a mass of finely textured grasses, and delight in the piquant effect of lime-green leaves against a cool, dark-green background. Having come from the East Coast with its distinct seasons, I've attuned myself to the more subtle rhythms of California and seek to bring seasonal interest into the mix. Classical principles inform my designs, but I'll also go for the unexpected in the right situation.

How has your mother's work as a garden designer influenced your own approach?

I grew up in her lovely garden, and she was constantly taking me and my siblings to garden tours in New England and the New York metropolitan area—sometimes to our adolescent chagrin! She taught me about effectively structuring a garden, using foliage composition to develop texture, and how to amplify the delights of seasonal interest. She lived and breathed gardens and most certainly passed the garden-lover gene to me.

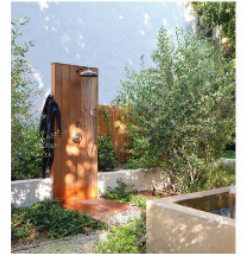
PHOTO: JESSICA SAMPLE

ROGER DAVIES



← To increase the living space of a Rustic Canyon home, Benner designed multiple outdoor "rooms" on different levels

↓ An outdoor shower is the first stopping point after a day at the beach



What design-related changes are you seeing?

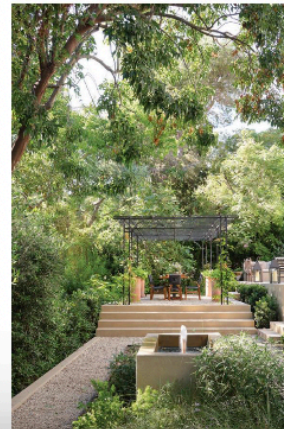
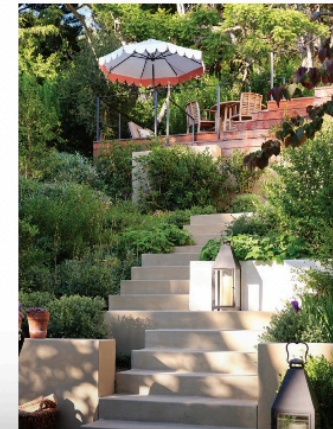
Beautiful performance fabrics, sophisticated furniture, advances in heating systems, and new technologies that are making it possible for outdoor rooms to be an extension of the interior. Large steel windows and new types of sliding and bifold doors break down the opacity of a home's envelope, with some residences becoming like pavilions in a garden.

How are your clients responding to our worsening drought?

Last summer was the first time I noticed genuine and sustained client interest in moving toward sustainability. With water bills rising, they're motivated to reduce usage. I start the conversation with the concept of a water budget and describe how each plant has its own water-use factor. Clients are often surprised that their beloved hydrangeas and roses aren't necessarily the culprits. They can keep those favorites in limited quantities and still conserve significant water if they substantially reduce the footprint of their lawn.

Where should we look for inspiration?

The Theodore Payne Foundation in Sun Valley is the best place to learn about and buy California native plants. They have demonstration gardens and a nursery chock full of plants to try. If you're heading up to Santa Barbara, The Well in Summerland is great for antique and custom garden furniture, pots, and objects. And I love books, especially those by Piet Oudolf, the Dutch landscape designer who creates sumptuous meadows with perennials and grasses masterfully contrasted with swaths of clipped forms. Two of my favorites are *Planting the Natural Garden* and *Designing with Plants*. ■



↘ A steep slope connecting the upper and lower gardens became a stairway with "an unfolding series of lovely viewpoints," says Benner

↓ The dining pavilion is defined by a custom iron trellis