

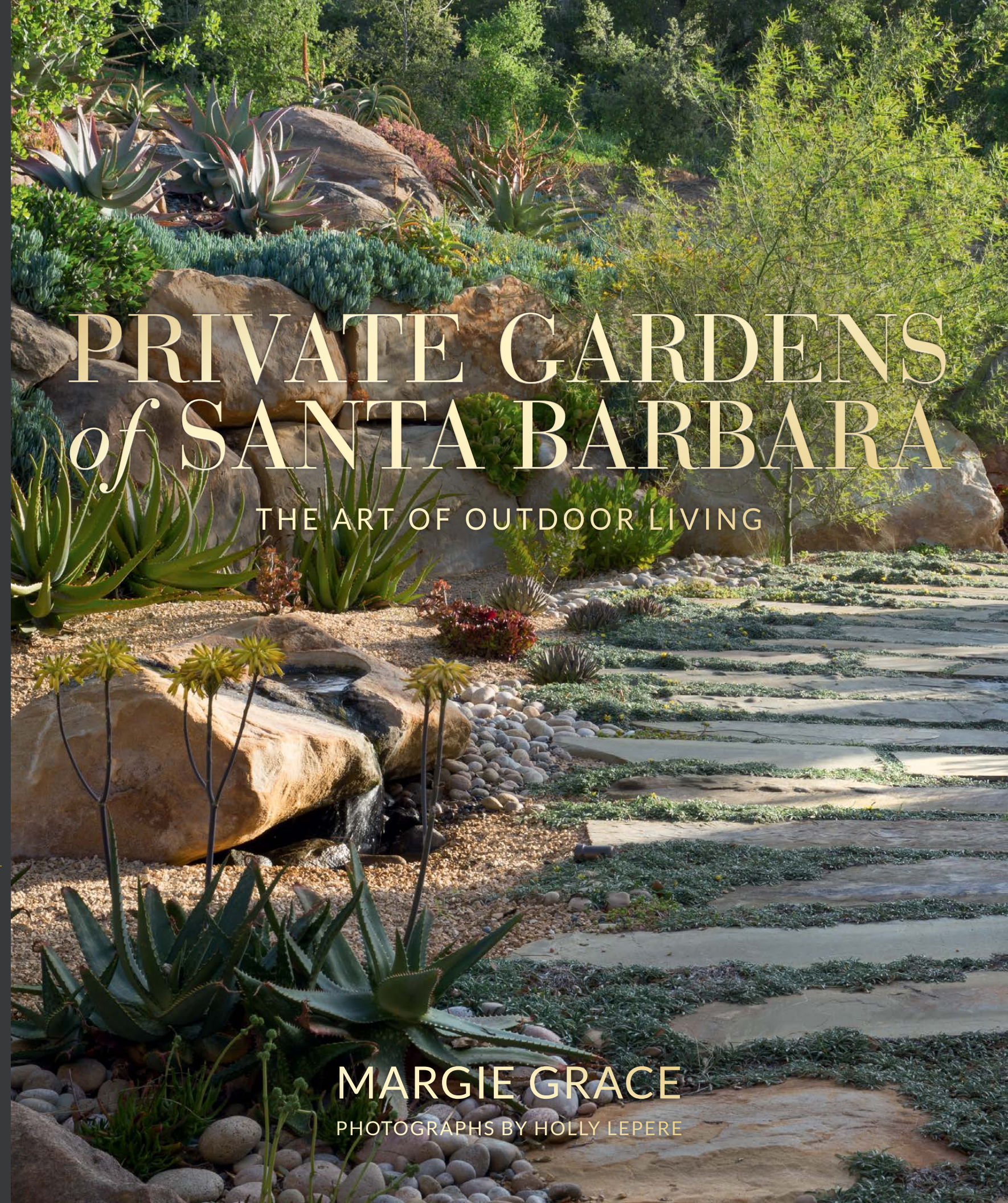


PRIVATE GARDENS of SANTA BARBARA

GRACE



GIBBS SMITH



PRIVATE GARDENS of SANTA BARBARA

THE ART OF OUTDOOR LIVING

MARGIE GRACE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY HOLLY LEPERE

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Sea Cliff

Avid and accomplished sailors, these homeowners were immediately smitten by this spectacular bluff-top site with its panoramic ocean, island, and mountain views. The existing house was to receive a complete makeover. The landscape, I was informed, was to be “midcentury mid-Pacific.” With a couple of photos provided by the owner to guide the vision—one of a calm sea dotted with islands at sunset, another of a Japanese woodblock print that put me in mind of waves—the design process was begun. A design that included movement, a rolling floor plane, a few Asian notes, and some drought-tolerant, tropical-feel plantings—with lots of amenities for enjoying being outdoors—ought to do the trick.

The design solutions are natural and repetitive. Landscape mounds evoke dunes, emphasizing the seaside location and hearkening back to the inspiration photos of waves and islands. Broad concrete pavers are used throughout the garden to create different effects: massed together, they provide seating areas; blended with recycled materials, they form a rich mosaic underfoot; and set as single brushstrokes, they lead the eye to the expansive views. A spectacular biergarten-style bench is suspended over the cliff on I-beams (left behind when an old deck tumbled into the abyss). Sand-filled trays between the beams provide a “beach” to delight bare toes—and to prevent anyone from accidentally slipping over the edge. Sitting at this table, soaring high above the waves with the wind blowing off the ocean, takes your breath away. The experience creates an illusion of being in a swift-sailing boat. This is a magical place to enjoy vibrant sunsets, passing hang gliders, and migrating whales.

Plantings were selected for erosion control, low water demand, high habitat value, and aesthetics.

A narrow biergarten-style table and bench are suspended over the cliff's edge, providing a bird's-eye view of the beach below.



A modern wooden house with large glass windows is the central focus, set against a backdrop of lush greenery and trees. The house features a dark wood exterior and a prominent overhang. The interior is visible through the glass, showing a well-lit space with art and furniture. The garden in the foreground is a mix of natural elements: large, smooth, light-colored rocks are scattered across a gravel path, interspersed with clumps of ornamental grasses that have long, feathery seed heads. Some of these grasses are illuminated from below, creating a warm, golden glow. In the background, a stone retaining wall follows the contour of a hillside, and a large, mature tree with dense foliage stands to the right. The sky is a soft, twilight blue, and the overall atmosphere is serene and elegant.

Pedregosa



This oval cedar "spool"—used for cool summer dips and warm winter soaks—holds more than 4,000 gallons of water, which can be used for firefighting.

Designed in the 1920s by noted architect George Washington Smith, this home and surrounding garden were once part of the architect's personal residence. The lot was formed when the original estate was divided into smaller parcels and contains portions of the original landscape, as well as the architect's original design studio, long since incorporated into a much larger residence.

Looking for a property that called to her and a project to sink her teeth into, the client purchased the home and dove into researching the property's history, intent on refurbishing both house and grounds true to the original design and time period.

Several key issues resulting from the division of the original estate and the subsequent home expansion would have to be addressed in the new landscape design. Wayfinding would have to be improved, as it was nearly impossible to find the front door from the street. Vehicular circulation was awkward as well, and many of the landscape changes made through the years conflicted with the period architecture.

Garden elements from the 1920s—a fabulous allée of black acacias (*Acacia melanoxylon*), fragments of tiled runnels, and a number of fountains—were restored or, if beyond repair, replicated. Discordant landscape elements were culled from the composition.

An inviting new entry courtyard now provides clear guidance to the front door. The driveway has been reconfigured to make a motor court, which resolves the prior constraints on vehicular circulation and provides extra parking. New and refurbished hardscape elements are historically and architecturally compatible with the home's roots, including custom reproduction tile, elaborately patterned brick flatwork, and wrought iron details. Refreshed plantings in vibrant colors reflect the homeowner's choice of color palette.

Two tiled fountains on axis lead the eye to the ridgeline beyond the garden. The fountain piece in the foreground is original to the property.





A bocce court, decorative pebbles, pavers, succulents, and native plantings combine to create a very low-water-demand garden rich in detail.



LEFT: The shared garden space is frequently used for community dinners.

ABOVE: Every square inch of the property is thoughtfully put to use. Here, a narrow recirculating fountain filled with harvested rainwater cools the space, mutes ambient urban noise, supports native fauna, and provides additional seating.



Colorful plantings thrive within the varmint-excluding walls of the garden.