



LA DOLCE VITA

SWEET IDEAS FOR GRACIOUS
OUTDOOR LIVING FROM
MONTECITO—A HAVEN
OF HORTICULTURE IN THE
HEART OF SANTA BARBARA

THE SECRET OF SANTA BARBARA—AND ITS ELEGANT SUBURB MONTECITO—LIES IN ITS GEOGRAPHY. Located on one of the few east-west coastlines in the country and nestled below the Santa Ynez Mountains, the beaches and hillsides face sun all day and temperatures remain mild year round. Its very special Mediterranean climate has nurtured a staggering assortment of plants and outdoor-living opportunities. Nurserymen and fruit growers discovered the area in the late 19th century. The rich and glamorous followed in the 1920s, designing grand Spanish Colonial Revival estates and gardens. The traditions of expert horticulture and exquisite outdoor design continue today. Join us as we share ideas from three gracious Montecito gardens—full of ideas for outdoor living and decorating wherever you live. And if you get to the area, we offer places to visit and shop for Santa Barbara style.

BY DONNA DORIAN PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEVE GUNTHER

A curtain of cape fuchsia (phygelius) drapes the gate leading to Penny Bianchi's outdoor living area, where she entertains her friends under the arms of a live oak.





A GARDEN FOR QUAIL AND CASUAL ENTERTAINING

GROWN FROM THE GROUND UP TO ENCOURAGE A HABITAT FOR NATIVE WILDLIFE, PENNY BIANCHI'S Montecito garden, flush with gates made from willow, roses, olive trees and thickets of vines, holds all the resonance of a carefree cottage garden in the Provençal countryside.

An interior designer with a penchant for creating the enchanted *mise-en-scene*, Penny formed the vision for her garden soon after she and her husband purchased their property nine years ago. While exploring a neighboring 45-acre nature preserve and working closely with her landscape advisers, she began to observe firsthand what it would take to create a garden that would follow nature's course.

Penny's first act in her own garden was to create a pond. Today a list of wildlife almost too long to cite—blue gill and bass, deer, raccoons, skunks, ducks, great blue herons, redtail and cooper's hawks, some 50 other species of birds and even a coyote—can be seen in and around the pond. In the midst of the pond is a duck cote. Penny anchored it there after discovering that it takes at least 52 days for baby mallards to fly, making them prey to a great range of animals. Now nine full-grown pairs of mallards make their home in her garden.

Some years after the pond went in, a longtime resident of Montecito came by and mentioned how nice it was that Penny had brought the pond back after it had been covered up so many years ago to make room for a riding paddock. It was only then Penny realized that her first act in the garden was to restore a native wetland.

When Oprah Winfrey moved in next door, a covey of wild quail, upset by the initial commotion, made their way into Penny's yard. Penny didn't mind at all. (She reciprocated by handing Oprah fresh chicken eggs

Above: A gate made from willow leads to the guesthouse. Right: Punctuated by purple butterfly bush, the pond is at the center of a certified National Wildlife Federation Backyard Wildlife Habitat.









through the fence on many mornings.) Because quail are ground-nesters, Penny planted low-growing shrubbery around the pond to provide them with cover.

Instead of grass or concrete, Penny covered much of the ground with pea gravel, which allows rainwater to seep directly into the soil without runoff. Elsewhere, she planted roses to feed the deer (yes, really) and covered the house with vines (morning glory, Virginia creeper, clematis and wisteria) to feed the birds and provide cover for small animals. At the same time she banned all clippers, blowers and mowers, as well as all pesticides and herbicides. When Penny contacted

the National Wildlife Federation, they certified the garden as a Backyard Wildlife Habitat.

Penny and her husband usually wake to the call of their rooster, who seems to think he owns the place. Being partly responsible for the 11 chickens born this year (one of the hens hid her eggs behind a bag of alfalfa), he has certain claims. As domesticated animals, the 22 chickens, rooster and two dogs are all treated just as well as the wildlife, walking behind Penny through the garden, under the arbors and over the bridge that crosses a small stream running across the back of the yard.

Penny hosts parties under the branches of two live oaks. The long table is covered with a printed Provençal tablecloth and set alongside antique wrought-iron chairs, a scene that seems to have stepped out of an Impressionist painting. Penny says, "A visitor once told me that he rents a house in Provence every summer, but he thought I didn't need to do that. He said, 'You already have your place in Provence right here.'"

"THE FARM TABLE SET FOR A PARTY SEEMS TO HAVE STEPPED OUT OF AN IMPRESSIONIST PAINTING"



Left: Surrounded by oak trees and with a chandelier hanging in the tree-tops, Penny Bianchi (holding dog, right) hosts her parties Provençal-style. Succulents and lanterns decorate her table (top).