

2018 APLD INTERNATIONAL LANDSCAPE

Designer of the Year

MARGIE GRACE APLD

Sycamore Canyon, Montecito, California

Open “meadow”
plantings require
little water and
provide little fuel
for wildfires.



Indoor/outdoor living
reigns supreme when
dining and lounging
under the grand Oak.



RESIDENTIAL DESIGN
Sycamore Canyon, Montecito, California

Margie Grace APLD

Grace Design Associates, Inc. Santa Barbara, CA

USDA ZONE: 9A JUDGES' PERSPECTIVE:

Beautiful work, impeccably installed; love the wide selection of Xeric plants and how they are used in this design. Great job! ➔

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LEPERE STUDIO AND JIM BARTSCH PHOTOGRAPHY



A walled Japanese garden provides privacy for the master bath.



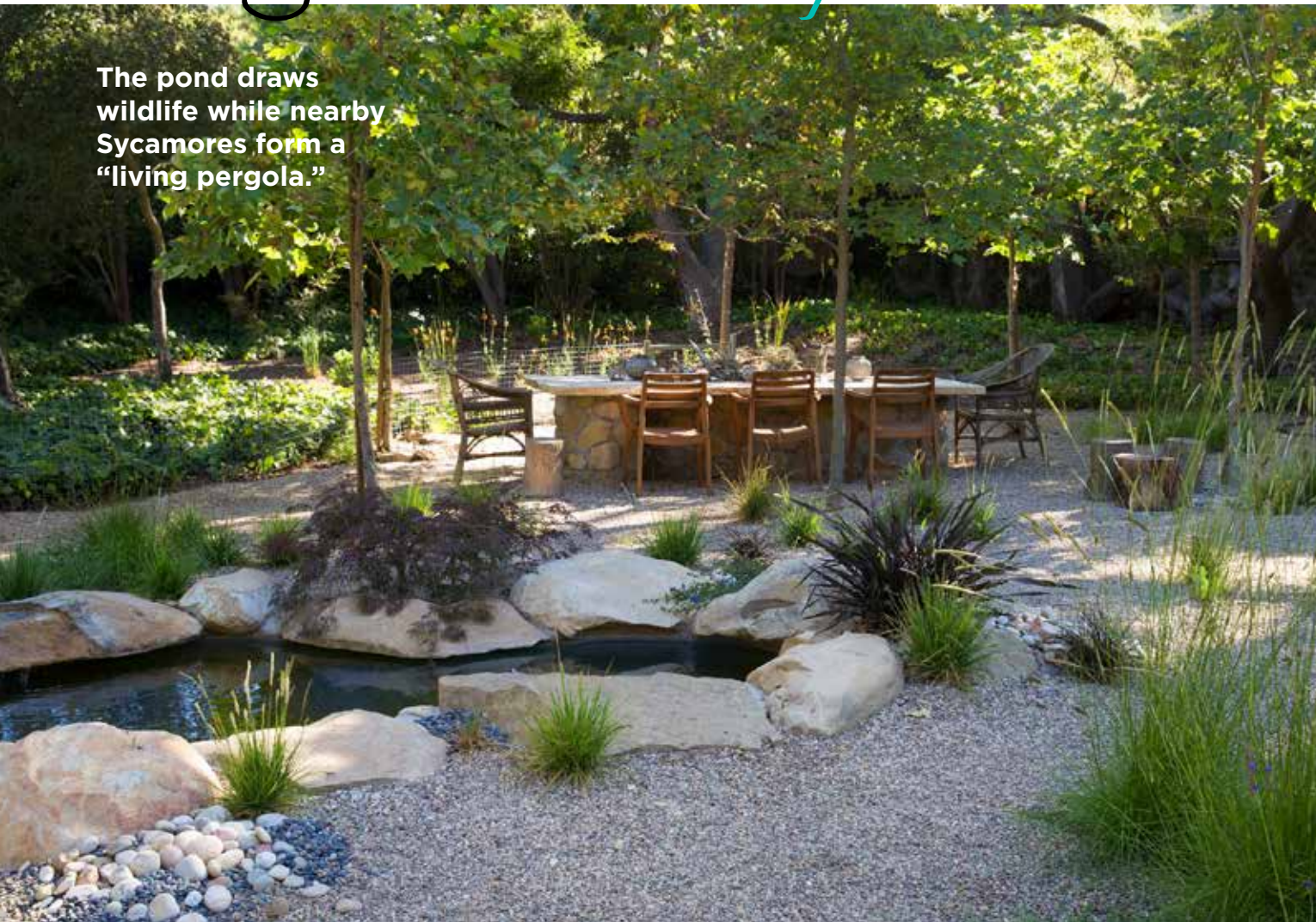
“We live by water here,” said Margie Grace, the 2018 APLD Landscape Designer of the Year. Her winning design, Sycamore Canyon, is the landscape surrounding her house just outside of Santa Barbara, California. Water—the lack of it or, in the case of recent floods and mudslides that stopped just short of the property, too much of it—informed almost every design decision of the project.

As you look to the southwest, the lounge area, fire pit, and CalArc pavers welcome guests.

“The clients” in this case were Margie and her husband, the project, rejuvenating a neglected plot of dead lawn, Junipers (“Rat condos,” said Margie), and asphalt flanking the 1920s-era house. “If you want property in Santa Barbara, you have to be willing to invest in some sweat equity,” she said. Even the smaller houses, if they’re within normal price ranges, are generally falling down, and the yards aren’t any better. “We took the house down to the studs,” she said. Then they started on the outdoor living space.

“We’re working on perfecting the art of outdoor living,” she said. “We have perfect weather nine out of ten days here. You want a fabulous yard and just enough house to go inside if it rains.” She described the backyard, in particular, as parklike, with wide open spaces and some large, established trees. “The trick was to create outdoor rooms of a human scale, so they’d be comfortable for people to spend time in.” ➡

The pond draws wildlife while nearby Sycamores form a “living pergola.”



Looking east from the edge of the “Lotusland South” garden toward the motor court.



In addition to water use and proportion, the other guiding factor was the house’s neighbor, Lotusland. Two Palms at the front gate of that garden peek over the hedge that separates Sycamore Canyon from the road. “I used those as an axis for my front plantings.” Grotesques, a type of sculpture also seen in the Lotusland Theater Garden, were used here and there at Sycamore Canyon and her Bromeliad garden also pays homage to the famous botanical garden across the street.

Lots of little touches make this a complex and interesting landscape. Here are a few of those details.

WATER MANAGEMENT

Margie says she likes to see “how low can I go” when it comes to the water bill while also creating a lush, cottage garden look. All of the plants in the garden will survive without supplemental water, though they look better with just a few of the rationed units the property is allotted.

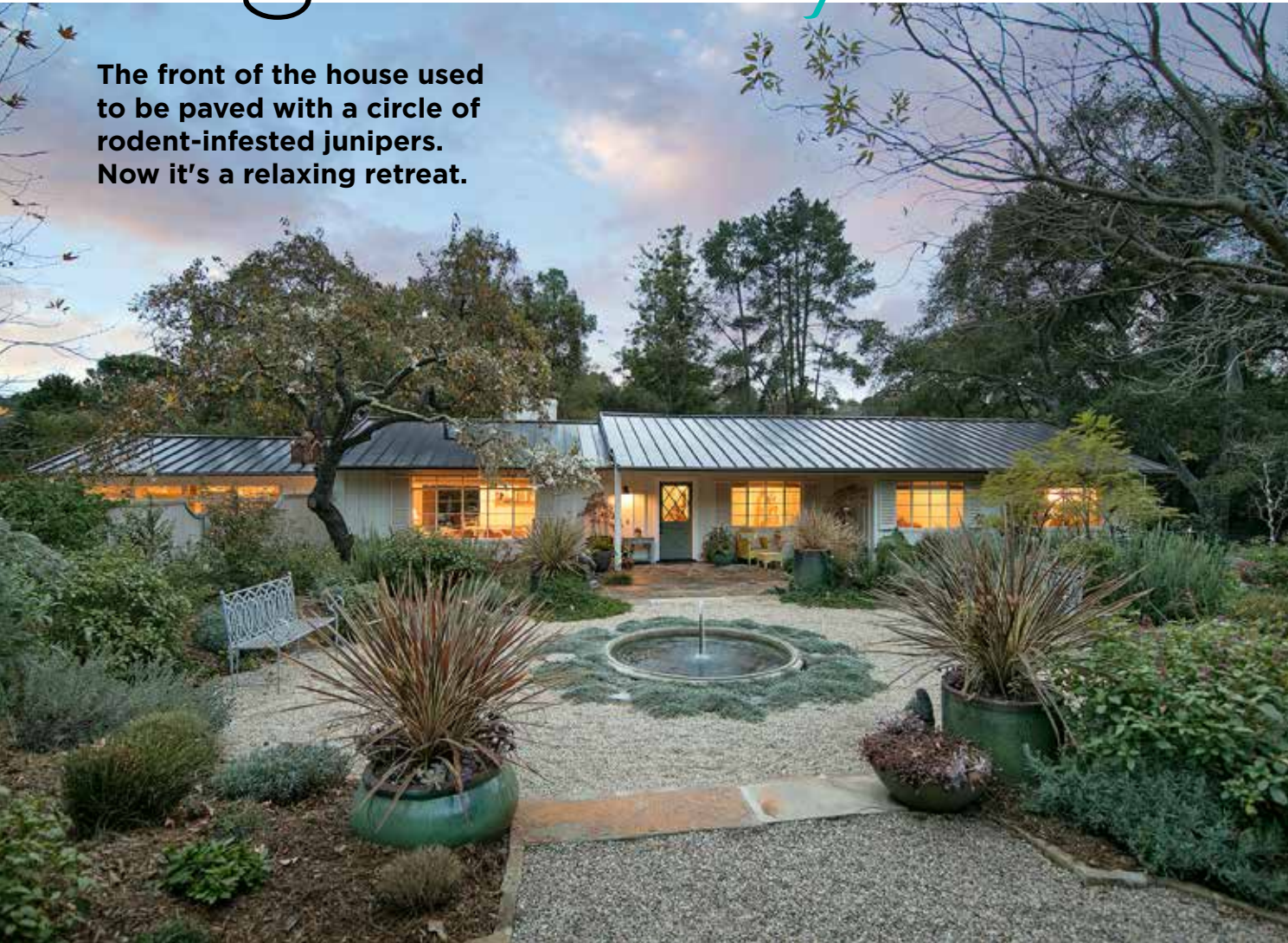
Most of the yard had to be re-graded to direct water flow (when it is present) away from the house. Margie chose to put in a few terraced beds for contouring and delineating the outdoor rooms. This opened an opportunity to resurface with more permeable materials. “I like to first allow the water to percolate where it falls, then direct overflow toward the larger trees. I want to keep as much water on property as possible,” she said.

You’ll notice a small pond or water feature in the photographs, which plays into the next detail.

TREADING LIGHTLY ON THE LANDSCAPE

For a major overhaul, the design is relatively low impact. “We selected plants that will grow to the eventual size we want,” which cuts down on maintenance. There are a few small water features here and there, but those are mostly for the benefit of wildlife. Plants have been selected for high habitat value, offering food or shelter to birds, ➡➡

The front of the house used to be paved with a circle of rodent-infested junipers. Now it's a relaxing retreat.



insects, and mammals. “The finches love the tall grasses,” said Margie. “They shimmy along the stalks, causing the stalks to bow down and almost touch the ground. When the birds hop off, the leaves spring up, flinging their seed everywhere so the birds can eat it.” She also says, “I always try to leave a few dead logs around to give the bugs something to eat so the birds have something to eat.”

CREATIVE CODE COMPLIANCE

“We live on Sycamore Canyon Road and there were no Sycamores here,” she said. She fixed that by planting a live pergola of six Sycamore trees around a short stone wall topped with a slab of limestone. “The dining room is in part of the setback where we’re not allowed to build permanent structures. There were no rules about planting the trees, however.”

MARKING SPACE

To make the landscape livable, Margie always makes sure to include all of the

amenities you’d find indoors, including fans, Wi-Fi, and music. She also carefully divides the space, not with fences and boundaries, but with changes in elevation, varied materials for pathways, patios, and garden areas, and with strategic use of plants, such as the sycamore pergola.

PERSONAL TOUCHES

Because this project is her own, Margie has personalized it with favorite bits and pieces from designs she’s done over the years, including ones from the San Ysidro Ranch and Patina Farm, along with the tributes to Lotusland.

She also created one completely original and specific garden room that she calls the Purple Rain Garden. It includes a series of three purple hoop arches with mirror garlands. They’re called Gracie Modern Arbors, manufactured by TerraTrellis. “We were working on a show house in LA, and these arbors kind of became associated with me because of the name. They’re plant supports that you can walk through, but I use them as art.” She said they’re a reminder to lighten up and enjoy what is around her. “I live right by the beach, but I haven’t been in a month!” (Possibly because her garden is so comfortable and livable, there’s no reason to leave.) She said, though, “Really, it reminds me to take five seconds out of the day to remember how good life is.” 🐞



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