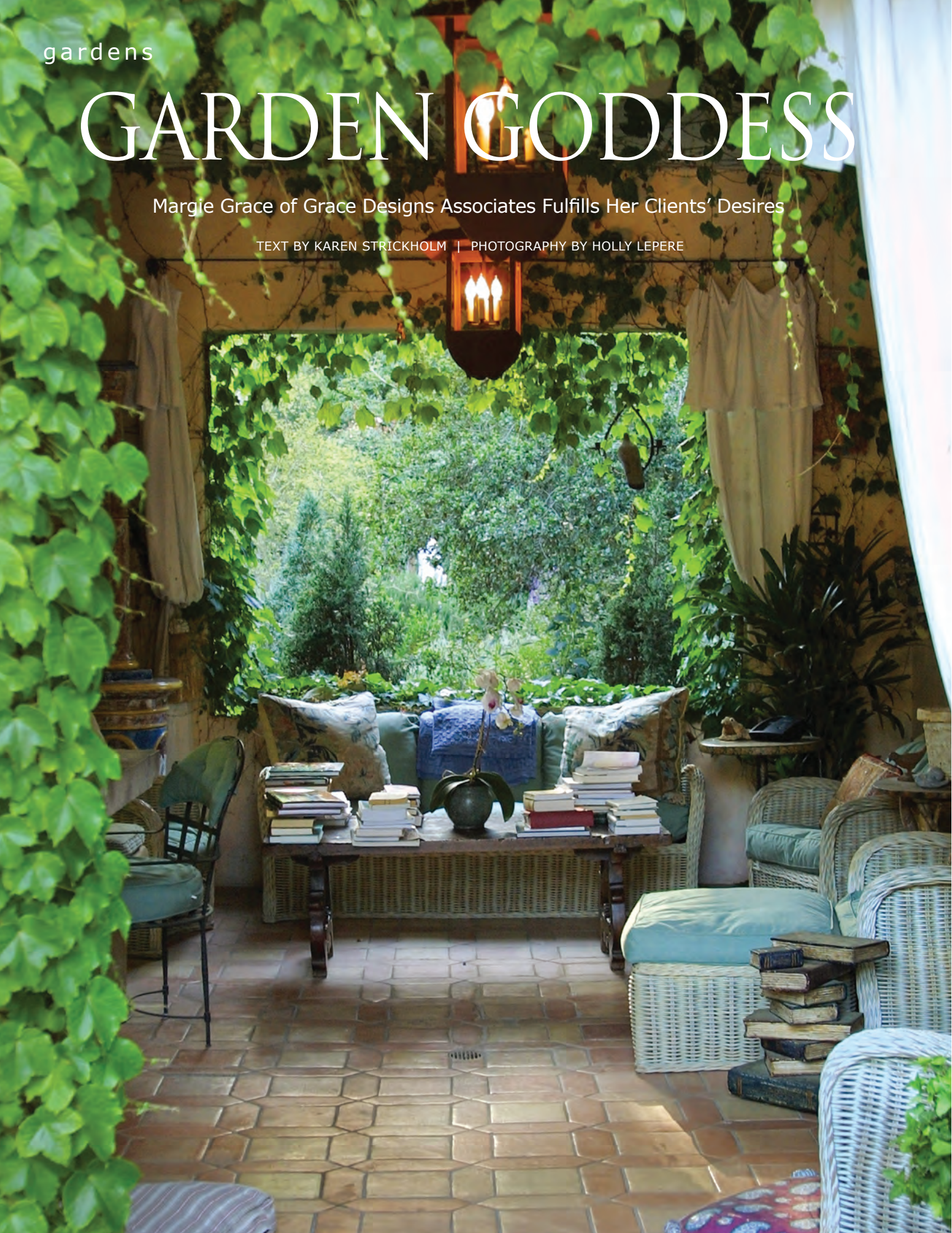


gardens

# GARDEN GODDESS

Margie Grace of Grace Designs Associates Fulfills Her Clients' Desires

TEXT BY KAREN STRICKHOLM | PHOTOGRAPHY BY HOLLY LEPERE







*How did this one-time housewife*

and recreational gardener become one of the most prominent landscape designers west of the Mississippi?

“I started off on the kitchen table, and when I ran out of room, I expanded to the surface of the ironing board,” laughs Margie Grace.

Now overseeing a design firm with five in-office employees and two full-time crews in the field, Grace Design Associates, Inc. has come a long way in the past two decades.

“Winning International Landscape Designer of the Year from the Association of Professional Landscape Designers was a big deal for me,” says Margie. “I entered this field through a different door—that of biology and earth sciences.”

The result is that when Margie looks at a potential project, she assesses how the house sits on the land, how that land came to be, hidden problems to consider, including underground streams, grading issues, and how the property relates to the neighborhood and earth features surrounding it.

Her design methodology differs as well. “I approach each garden with the home owner, listening carefully for what they want this garden to be for them. Usually it must fulfill several functions—a place for entertaining, outdoor cooking, child and/or pet play, privacy, property value enhancement, and of course, beauty,” says Margie. “The result is a garden that is unique to that home owner, one that embodies their vision. We don’t do cookie-cutter gardens at Grace Design.”

OPPOSITE Cozy indoor-outdoor room hidden in Boston Ivy (*Parthenocissus tricuspidata*) with a view beyond to a certified wildlife habitat in Montecito, CA.

TOP A cedar hot tub tucked into native Coast Live Oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*) creates a lush, Mediterranean oasis of Lion’s Tail (*Leonotis leonurus*), Pygmy Date Palms (*Phoenix roebelenii*), Myer’s Asparagus (*Asparagus densiflorus ‘Myers’*), Cream Delight Flax (*Phormium cookianum ‘Cream Delight’*) and Jerusalem Sage (*Phlomis fruticosa*).

CENTER Echeveria and Sedum varieties make for stunning, low maintenance pot fillers and borders.

LEFT The formal rose garden filled with boxwood topiaries (*Buxus japonica*), Trailing Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis ‘Prostratus’*) and annual color gives way to the natural meadow beyond and a sweet bench under the California Pepper (*Schinus molle*).



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Margie and her firm now work on projects well into the six figures. “But we still enjoy doing more intimate spaces,” says Margie. “Lately, we’ve done several vacation homes in the area. These home owners wanted to capture the natural beauty and views, have a designed space for relaxing and entertaining, and enjoy low maintenance.”

Grace Design Associates has worked on several high-profile projects that are LEED-Platinum certified, and these projects, as well as many of her others, have been honored with regional and national awards for design excellence.

“If we keep growing the way we have been over these past few years, I’m going to have to put that ironing board back into service!” she jokes. Headquartered in Santa Barbara, CA, her work can be viewed at [www.GraceDesignAssociates.com](http://www.GraceDesignAssociates.com)

LEFT A fountain surrounded by Lily-of-the-Nile (*Agapanthus africanus*) defines the porte cochere area; An arbor backing it is draped with Chinese Wisteria (*Wisteria sinensis*).

BELOW Flagstone staircase winds by a graceful urn, blending with the surrounding natural stone formations and woodland landscape.

