

gardens

Grace NOTES

GARDEN DESIGNER AND BUILDER MARGIE GRACE OF SANTA BARBARA IS AMONG THE HIGHEST RATED IN THE COUNTRY

BY KAREN STRICKHOLM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HOLLY LEPERE

These historic Montecito estate gardens were restored with formal plantings that play up the dappled light and classic structures.



PHOTOGRAPH BY CORAL VON ZUMWALT

It all started with a geology pick, a handful of seeds, and a “waste not, want not” upbringing.

“I entered landscape design through a different door than most,” Margie Grace explains. “Many landscape designers are university trained. They tend to see land as space to be filled. When I view a site, I see an entire ecosystem at work.”

Strongly influenced by her geologist mother, Margie gained a keen understanding of the land at a very young age. She rounded out her education with a degree in biology and geology.

The fourth child in a large family of seven, every penny counted, vegetables were home-grown, and a pile of bricks by the roadside meant slamming on the brakes and salvaging the found treasure to be repurposed back home.

“I got my own row in the family garden when I was ten,” says Margie. “I still remember the sense of wonder, watching my seeds sprout from the earth my mother had taught me so much about. From that moment on, I was hooked.”

Margie works closely with home owners to articulate their garden vision. The result? A widely diverse, award-winning design portfolio.

Margie began landscaping professionally in 1982, learning maintenance, installation and design. In 2000, with a newly earned contractor's license, she founded Grace Design Associates, a landscape design-build firm headquartered in Santa Barbara.


She developed an impressive roster of clients, drawn to her unique perspective on the land, her ability to work in many design modalities, and her "soup to nuts" approach—Margie designs and builds her client's gardens, from start to finish, from choosing the site for the house right down to the furnishings and garden art.

As her company has grown, so has her reputation. Winner of multiple awards and honors, including International Landscape Designer of the Year from APLD—the highest honor in her field—Margie now focuses on gardens in the five- to six-figure price range throughout the West.

"Margie's gardens vary in style—from soft and naturalistic to bold and urban, traditional to contemporary, romantic to whimsical," says her client and renowned interior designer Penelope Bianchi. "You can always identify a Margie Grace garden, because it honors the unique character of the site, sits seamlessly in the environment, and blends harmoniously with the home's architecture."

"We incorporate green design-build practices whenever possible," says Margie. "We just finished Victoria Garden Mews, a LEED-Platinum Certified four home project in Santa Barbara's historic district. The entire project was conceived and executed with sustainability in mind." Victoria Garden Mews is one of only 150 projects worldwide selected for The Sustainable Sites Initiative Pilot Program.

Margie's work is featured in national magazines and newspapers, landscape books here and abroad, and in broadcast media. She serves on several national boards and advisory groups.

What's next? "I'm always seeking the next challenge. In addition to my current projects, I'm working on a book and developing a line of garden products. In the fall, I'll rendezvous with my sons in Taiwan and explore the flora of the island—and probably sneak in a quick trip to the mainland." 





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—PENELOPE BIANACHI, INTERIOR DESIGNER