





# Bringing the Outside In

*The gardens of Margie Grace*

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# WWW

WHEN THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL LANDSCAPERS (APLD) awarded Margie Grace 2018 Designer of the Year in 2018, the industry's highest honor, and a Gold Award for her Sycamore Canyon project, it was more than special because the winning project was actually her own home. "We had a no-holds-barred attitude because we had only ourselves to please," she says. "I had the opportunity to explore and experiment a little and perfect what we call The Art of Outdoor Living—the ultimate Santa Barbara lifestyle. We envisioned a seamless connection between indoors and out, tripling our living space with lots of outdoor "rooms"—places to enjoy any time of day, any time of year."

The original front yard of the Sycamore project was a single plane and sloped toward the house creating a drainage problem. It was dominated by asphalt and a four-foot thicket of planted junipers that had grown together to form a rat-invested wall. The back was dominated by an expansive flat lawn, concrete paths and a small patio. All was taken out, except for the mature trees, including a dozen "show-stopping" live oaks, a large she-oak and some relic pines which were then incorporated into the new design. The goal was to keep the park-like feel while creating intimate spaces within the yard and making it drought-tolerant. The flat lawn was replaced by drifts of perennial grasses, a sandstone-lined pond and pots with dramatic plantings. Garden features include low broad stone steps and grading to create two distinct dining areas. Concrete pavers make the patio a natural extension of the home, complete with fire pit. The front yard features matching metal benches, pots with dramatic plantings and beds of blousy pink-tinged foliage and pink-hued flowers. A central fountain is surrounded by the grey-green softness of Silver Carpet ground covering nestled between surrounding flagstone.

"One of my favorite things about this house is seeing the pink stucco wall of Madame Ganna Walska's *Lotusland* every time I look out my window, says Grace. "Since we're *practically* part of *Lotusland* (okay, I'll admit that's a stretch), *OF COURSE* we like to think of our little garden as *Lotusland South*. To me, that means distinct gardens, each organized around a theme, with a little whimsy and a lot of personality."

Grace Design Associates, founded in 2000 and based in Santa Barbara, is a design-build firm made up of talented designers and craftsmen committed to a unique style of teamwork that results in some of the most stunning landscapes in the Western United States. "By actually building the gardens we design," Grace says, "we provide our clients with the advantage of working with one



firm. Because the process is integrated, the finished garden is, too.”

Grace’s award-winning projects range from intimate gardens to large estates and have been featured in many national and regional magazines including *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Veranda*, *Traditional Home* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Her diverse education and experience foster a unique, well rounded approach to design. She collaborates closely with clients and artisans, creating a wide range of finished work. Rather than a stylized design approach, Grace strives to create projects that have the potential to impact people’s daily experience of the world while providing value to clients, the community and the environment. In 2020 Grace will publish her first book, *Private Santa Barbara Gardens*, an anthology of some of her favorite projects of the more than 350 her firm has built since its inception. The book will also reflect her diverse knowledge in the earth and life sciences, for which she holds degrees from both UC Santa Cruz and U.C.L.A.

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