



Steve and Brooke Giannetti built their home around the ancient valley oak trees. The canopy of this 250-year-old oak provides shade for this outdoor dining area.

Opposite: Chickens were the Giannettis' first foray into farm animals, but the docile Daisy and Buttercup, two of four miniature Sicilian donkeys, soon followed. When Steve and Brooke are working from their home offices, they often take breaks to spend time with the donkeys.

FARM CHIC



From farm animals to flowers, produce to potted plants, this backyard farm has it all. After seeing its breathtaking style, you'll want to move in.

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A restrained color palette creates harmony between the hardscape and the house. Here, Hanley Gold gravel echoes the tones of the antique terra cotta tiles, which were cleverly sliced and set into the chimney stack, camouflaging the metal liner. 'New Dawn' roses, trained on wire, grow over the front door.

AFTER 10 YEARS of living in Santa Monica, California, Brooke and Steve Giannetti packed up and skipped town. The couple—who collaborate on everything from raising a family to running a design firm and the luxe home furnishings shop Giannetti Home (giannettihome.com)—had been yearning for a more nature-centered life than the densely populated coastal city offered. In Santa Monica, Brooke had already torn up the front lawn and replaced it with raised vegetable beds. Steve painted bucolic landscapes. Their youngest of three children, Leila, was crazy for horses. The family had begun to raise chickens.

A client project introduced the Giannettis to Ojai, a small city set surrounded by the Topatopa Mountain valley about 2 hours north of Santa Monica. When the Giannettis came across an undeveloped 5-acre parcel there that contained only a cluster of majestic centuries-old oak trees and unobstructed views of the nearly 1,800-foot summit of nearby Black Mountain, they launched their next collaboration: Patina Farm.

The stunning house they built on the site was inspired by a range of sources, including the Spanish Colonial Revival style of the region, particularly the work of renowned 20th-century architects George Washington Smith and Wallace Neff. The Giannettis also looked to homes they'd seen in the French countryside and in Belgium, where rustic and modern materials blend fluidly. Steve, a classically trained architect, ended up designing an H-shaped, one-story structure infused with light and air throughout. Two courtyards were created by the house formation, and they flank a center section that contains the

living room, dining room, and kitchen. The semi-open plan of the three common areas allows family members to be together without being on top of one another.

True to the farmstead's name, Patina is rich with materials that have improved with age. The roof is made of antique French terra cotta tiles that arrived with a covering of moss. The doorbell is an old schoolhouse bell rigged to a pulley system—"so much better than the Avon Lady *ding-dong*," Steve quips—and paneled doors from a Parisian flea market hang on the walls of Brooke's office. In the chicken coop, Brooke's collection of vintage watering cans lines a shelf above a repurposed zinc trough sink, and a corridor of apple trees is planted in vintage wine barrels. A secondhand rowboat floats in one of the two ponds, and a barrel-size antique oil jar from Greece sits at the center of a circular lavender maze.

The property was large enough to accommodate the nature-lovers' extensive wish list. Brooke had dreamed of a rose garden and a greatly expanded potager; Steve wanted boxwood clouds, among other things. They both wanted an orchard. And fountains. And a fire pit. And then there were the animals.

The two dogs and eight chickens that made the trip from Santa Monica soon grew into a proper menagerie that currently includes 18 chickens, four dogs, three African Pygmy goats, two Babydoll Southdown sheep, an Angora rabbit, and four miniature Sicilian donkeys. The owners originally were going to get miniature horses but went with donkeys since they are hardy and seemed lower maintenance than their mini-equine counterparts, happy with a simple



1 One accent color that appears periodically in the home is the pale blue that can be seen on the living room's three-screen hand-painted wallpaper panel (from graciestudio.com). Foliage from an unknown tree species creeps in from the outdoors.

2 For 9 months of the year, the cutting garden yields vase-worthy flowers. Brooke grows only David Austin roses, beloved for their fragrances and peony-like blooms.

3 This area of the chicken coop, where Brooke keeps supplies, has a galvanized sink made from a vintage trough.

4 The master bath looks like it's outside, but it's actually enclosed in floor-to-ceiling glass. Dense hedges and a sycamore tree screen it from view, and boxwood indoors and out contribute to the illusion. Blue hydrangeas pick up the home's light blue accent color.



The kitchen window serves as a pass-through to the adjacent outdoor dining area, shaded by an awning of inexpensive willow fencing resting on gray-painted rebar. Virginia creeper and Boston ivy climb the surrounding walls, softening the stucco facade.

An antique stone quatrefoil from Belgium is the crowning glory of the kitchen, presiding over oak cabinetry, a generous center island, the sizable Lacanche range, and wood floors. Copper and stainless-steel cookware hang from an unlacquered brass rod. Boston ivy creeps in from the window.



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PALETTE TO CREATE A CALMNESS, A FLOW.”**

—BROOKE GIANNETTI, HOMEOWNER

1 After dinner, the family often gathers around the fire pit in the outdoor lounge area. The close-growing low boxwood clouds and catmint make the space feel intimate, even though views extend to San Antonio Creek and to the top of nearby Black Mountain.



2 The children's rooms are separated from the rest of the house by this porch where the informally placed topiary collection connects interior to exterior. The glass walls go directly into the wood columns.



3 Steve's office looks onto the back garden through doors set into antique barn doors. A simple trellis for the wisteria vine encourages a vernal awning, and the upright cypress at left is one of many sprinkled through the property.



4 Limestone steps lead to a delivery box at the front gate. The steps are flanked with Spanish lavender and no-mow grass.



regimen of water and hay (unless a tasty rose bush happens to be nearby).

“They do need their hooves taken care of every few months,” Brooke points out. “So a farrier will come and give them a mani-pedi.”

The ponds, which are stocked with mosquito fish to keep the insect population down, have attracted ducks, frogs, and the occasional turtle. Because the ducks could be “taken out,” as Steve puts it, by local coyotes, foxes, possums, and raccoons, the Giannettis bought a floating duck house that operates as an avian safe house on one of the ponds.

In less skillful hands, the mix of gardens, parterres, patios, pens, and outbuildings might have resulted in visual cacophony, but the Giannettis kept Patina Farm uncluttered and unified by relying on two central design principles.

Their first tenet was to create an underlying geometry throughout the property, a series of axial lines that determined the siting of each component. The center of the house, for example, lines up with one of the largest old oaks, which also lines up with the rose garden and the rectangular kitchen garden. On an intersecting axis, the donkey pen lines up with the kitchen garden, which lines up with a rose-covered trellis and the lavender maze. The aerial view of the landscape plan—which appears in *Patina Farm* (Gibbs Smith, 2016), a photo-filled monograph of the project written by Brooke—highlights those axes, but when walking through the spaces all the geometric and linear continuities are simply meant to be felt.

A second precept, Brooke explains, was to knit together the myriad elements of their new life using a consistent palette of colors and materials.

“In the house and in the garden,” Brooke says, “we limited the palette to create a calmness, a flow.” That is especially important in the mild California climate, according to Brooke, where outdoor rooms get as much use as those indoors. So the pale interior plaster walls connect to pale exterior stucco. Interior French limestone floors extend through doorways and onto patios. The same weathered cedar siding of the mudroom is used on the front door shutters and garage exteriors, and two prefab sheds have been stained gray to match. Sturdy scaffolding boards are enlisted everywhere from greenhouse shelving to the bell tower stair treads. And the garden pathways and motor court are paved with Hanley Gold, a warm-toned pea gravel that complements stone landings outside the house’s front and back doors.

The streamlining extended to plantings throughout the property. “We don’t really believe in having a bunch of varieties,” Brooke says. Catmint and lamb’s ear are the only groundcovers, and a short list of edging shrubs includes rosemary, lavender, a non-fruiting dwarf olive cultivar called ‘Little Ollie’, germander, boxwood, David Austin roses, ‘Iceberg’ roses, hydrangea, and wisteria.

Using such a restrained palette would be a tough sell to some of the couple’s clients. “It’s hard to tell someone you’re only going to use 10 plants for the garden,” Steve says. “It sounds weird.” But Patina Farm’s harmonious design shows that a minimalist approach can unify without feeling spare. Partial credit for the property’s welcoming appeal must go to the decision to let plant habits remain loose, with only some of the boxwoods clipped into perfect balls.



Top: A tile-topped bell tower rises up above the single-story house just to the left of the main entry. It houses an old schoolhouse bell, which visitors can operate by pulling on a rope that’s attached to a series of pulleys. For those willing to climb the tower’s steep steps, windows at the top offer excellent mountain views.

Bottom: Along the front entrance and drive, guests are welcomed by sweeps of white floribunda ‘Iceberg’ roses, which grow above carpets of lamb’s ear and catmint. For height, the Giannettis planted clusters of native sycamores. The goats roam in this area with the Giannettis; otherwise they’d eat all the roses.

In the center portion of the house, designed to look older than the wings of the H formation, antique roof tiles and a stucco exterior contrast with glass-paneled doors and windows framed with thin steel mullions. The more modern look of the wings, with standing-seam metal roofs, still speak to the center through repetition of other building materials, such as the willow awnings and the terra cotta chimney details. Low plantings alongside the garden paths illustrate the limited plant palette in use.



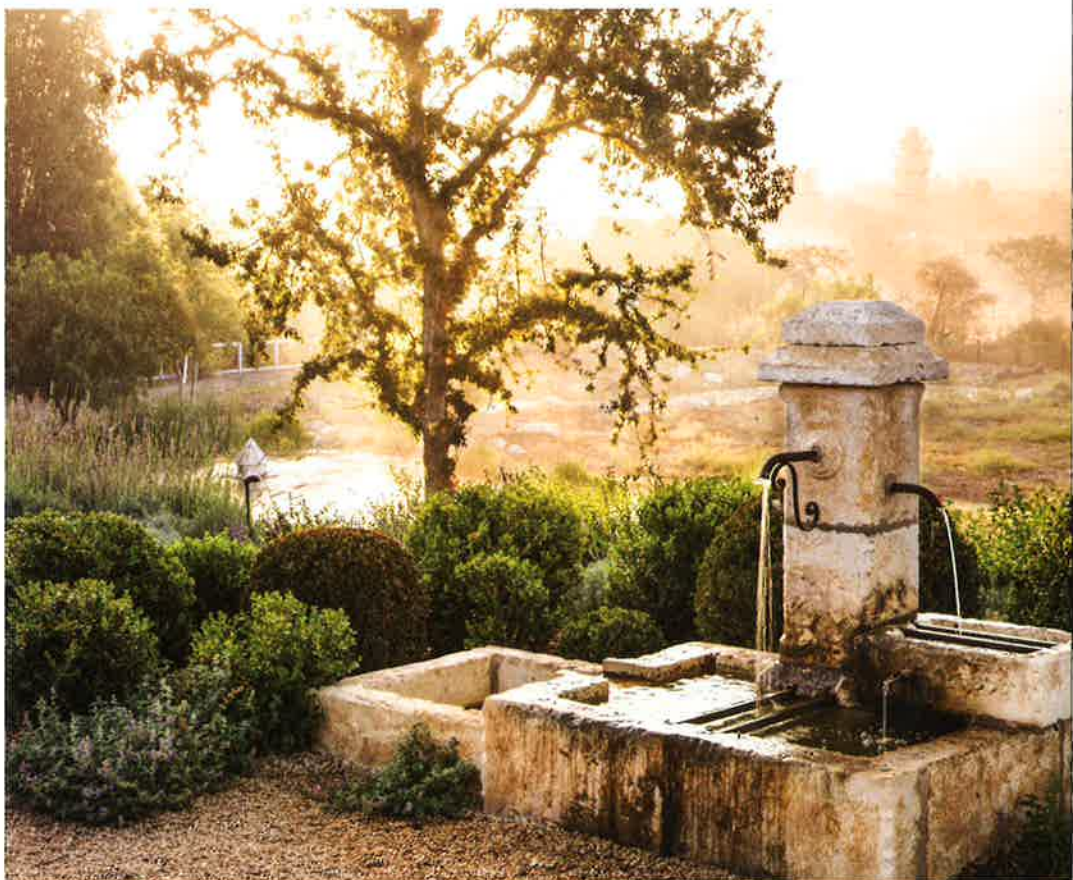


“GARDENS ARE SUCH AN EMOTIONAL COMPONENT OF OUR WORLD. PEOPLE INHERENTLY LIKE TO BE AROUND NATURE. IT’S IN OUR DNA.” —BROOKE



Above, left: In order to level the house site, dirt was excavated from the property in two places, and the resulting holes were turned into ponds that are fed by well water and connected to each other via a small stream. A windmill aerates the water, and drainage from the roof and driveway is diverted into the ponds. “Steve bought me the duck house for Valentine’s Day,” Brooke says. “It gives the ducks a safe place to lay eggs because predators won’t cross the water.”

Above, right: The well fountain, a French import made of limestone, sits outside the dining area on the parterre at the rear of the house, just above the slope that leads down to the ponds, the potager, and the animal compound.



The effect is relaxing, and requires less upkeep than more formal plantings.

“It’s not as manicured as a lot of gardens we’ve done,” Steve says. “That’s intentional, so that we wouldn’t need to have people clipping hedges all day long.”

Even what Brooke calls “their crazy ideas”—the oversize vintage cupolas on the donkey shed and chicken coop, the duck house that ended up in the pond, and the master bath set amidst glass walls—were added with an eye toward blending into the landscape.

In Ojai, beaches may be 16 miles away compared with Santa Monica’s 16 blocks, but the tradeoff has been worth it. The animals provide endless entertainment with their antics, and the chickens (now

free-range) offer pest control in addition to eggs. The farm is set up for pleasurable experiences that are deeply tied to the land: watching the sunsets (Ojai’s famed “pink moments”) from the parterre; gathering around the fire pit; floating in the pond boat; harvesting vegetables for the evening meal.

“Gardens are such an emotional component of our world,” Brooke says. “When you walk into an arbor of roses, you just smile. People inherently like to be around nature. It’s in our DNA.”



1 A native sycamore tree is at the center of this fenced-in area that houses the potager, greenhouse, and shed. The Giannettis grow a variety of vegetables, herbs, and cutting flowers in the 20 raised beds located here.

2 The greenhouse came as a kit, with redwood framing and polycarbonate walls (sunshinegreenhouse.com). To give it presence, the Giannettis raised it up on a foundation of heavy cedar timbers. In the foreground, 'Fuji' apple trees planted in repurposed wine barrels form a miniature allée.

3 A lavender-lined rose trellis planted with climbing 'Iceberg' roses runs parallel with the center line of the house on the slope above. At the far end of the trellis sits an antique oil jar from Greece. This is also where the trellis opens onto a lavender maze.

4 The chicken coop is on the top level of the property. The Giannettis haven't lost a chicken yet, even after releasing the birds to range freely, but they've taken the precaution of locating the coop inside the potager fence. In the garden, Brooke grows everything from tomatoes and corn to chard, berries, and kale.