



Growing Forward

SHARING A GARDEN with a few kindred spirits may be the new formula for sustainable urban living. Or so hopes Dennis Allen, the developer of the Santa Barbara, California, experiment in shared green living shown here. (He also owns and lives in one of the units.) Allen and his wife are one of three couples, all friends, who purchased a 50-foot-wide, 225-foot-deep lot near downtown Santa Barbara. They refurbished an existing Victorian house up front where one of the couples lives, constructed a three-unit building in back, and created a communal garden in between. "We're so close to downtown now, more often than not we just walk," Allen says.

The residents' communal garden is large enough to feel like a minipark. There's space enough for fruit trees, a beehive, a vegetable plot, wildlife habitats, an outdoor dining area for the whole group, and quiet corners for relaxing or reading. Rain feeds directly from the roof to a 14,000-gallon storage bladder in the basement via copper guttering. That's enough water to satisfy the landscape's irrigation needs for the entire year. The process of planning a project like this brought the families closer, and the shared garden helps them maintain that bond. "We look out for each other," Allen says. "We're a community."



Thanks to the home's many features, such as solar photovoltaic panels, the energy needs of the buildings on the property are nearly carbon neutral (the project was certified Platinum by the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED for Homes). The garden is just as sustainable. This is the first residence among 155 projects worldwide selected to participate in the Sustainable Sites Initiative pilot project (find more at sustainablesites.org; also asla.org/sites). **DESIGN:** Margie Grace, Grace Design Associates.

Double duty (*above and right*) The seat wall around the vegetable plot provides extra seating during parties to supplement the garden's more intimate spaces.

Edible arbor (*opposite page*) Fig plants are beginning to trail across a series of steel arches built to support them. Eventually they will form a green tunnel.





THE DETAILS

PERMEABLE PAVING. Paths and patios are of gravel or decomposed granite. Both allow rainwater to pass through to plant roots.

STORM WATER INFILTRATORS. Rainfall not absorbed by the soil recharges the groundwater table; none flows off-site.

SUBSURFACE IRRIGATION. This feature eliminates surface evaporation and overspray.

AUTOMATED PLANT FEEDING. An injector pump provides organic nutrients through the irrigation system.

RAINWATER COLLECTION. A 14,000-gallon cistern collects roof runoff for watering plants.

HABITAT PLANTS. Most of the plants attract pollinators and tolerate drought. They include catmint, grasses, penstemons, and salvias.

WATERWISE LAWN. 'UC Verde' buffalo grass fronts the property.

RECYCLED MATERIALS. Seventy-one percent of the materials generated from the original structure were reused in the remodel or recycled.

Communal dining (*above*) A large table, conveniently close to the vegetable garden, accommodates everyone who lives in the complex. The long water feature behind it is low enough to draw wildlife.

Garden gallery (*opposite page*) The walkway leading to the alley and garages is designated the Art Walk because of its wall hangings. Like the rest of the garden, this path was designed to be wide enough for wheelchairs.



“This is a *Big Love* project. These people like each other. They jumped in together to live closer to the land, and to each other.”

—MARGIE GRACE

“A blue and white color palette is always cool and soothing to the eye, but especially so in a dry climate.”

—MARGIE GRACE, *landscape designer*

Perennials

FLOWERING PERENNIALS stage a comeback year after year, but not all behave in the same way. Herbaceous types die down to the ground in fall, then put up new growth the following year. Others are evergreen and remain leafy and virtually unchanged throughout the year. Still others fall between the two extremes—dying back to low tufts of foliage during the winter months. And finally, there are shrubby perennials with woody-based stems.

The perennial border traditionally mixes flowering perennials in a wide bed against a fence or wall; put one on either side of a walk for maximum effect. Combining plants with varied bloom times, plant shapes, foliage textures—and flower colors, sizes, and shapes—is what gives borders their distinctive looks. Perennials also serve well in mixed borders that include shrubs, roses, bulbs, annuals, ornamental grasses, or even small trees.

Arrange perennials along a path for multiple seasons of color, or plant an “island bed” in the lawn, using plants of varying heights and anchoring the bed with the tallest ones in the center.

Tranquility (*left*) A beautiful blend of shrubs and perennials, this serene border mixes low-growing catmint and succulent blue chalk fingers with lavender, spiky Pride of Madeira (*Echium*), and snowy white roses. The haze of gray along the top is silvery *Centaurea*. **DESIGN:** Grace Design Associates.

GREAT
IDEA

A built-in firepit mimics a campfire in this garden. Sandstone cobbles edge the 5-foot-diameter lava rock-topped pit, which blazes with gas-fed flames. A sandstone wall, scattered with cushions, serves as seating. Thyme and other herbs grow around the firepit and between the seat wall's stones. **DESIGN:** Margie Grace, Grace Design Associates.



Balls of fire (above) A collection of spheres appears to float on a sea of black lava in this concrete fire bowl. It looks stylish whether lit or not. **DESIGN:** Russ Cletta Design Studio.

Water trough (left) Flames leap from the water in this prehistoric-looking fountain fitted with gas jets. Water spills over the edge and is recirculated through a buried collecting basin. **DESIGN:** Matt Randolph, KornRandolph Landscape Architects.

Bold geometry (opposite page) Framed in charcoal gray concrete, this gas-fed firepit warms the lower patio of a hillside garden in Shell Beach, California. Vivid red tumbled glass mulch inside adds to the drama. Benches nearby are of ipe wood. **DESIGN:** Jeffrey Gordon Smith Landscape Architecture.



THE CLASSIC ADIRONDACK CHAIR

Nothing reminds you that it's time to relax quite like an Adirondack chair. Once you settle into one, plan to stay awhile. The original version was designed by Thomas Lee in 1903 for his summer home in the Adirondacks. The Adirondack chair was quickly copied and has retained its popularity ever since—largely because the combination of low-slung seat and broad fanned back remains unmatched for comfort. The wide armrests—broad enough to hold a cup of coffee or a cocktail, a romance novel or an iPad—are convenient too. If these chairs feel a bit traditional for your garden, consider an Adirondack made of recycled plastic in a bright contemporary color or clean white (pictured above), such as the ones from Loll Designs.

Fiberglass (top right) Lunar-looking chairs and a matching table appear even more surreal on a fancifully cutout carpet of synthetic turf. **DESIGN:** Grace Design Associates.

Wood (bottom right) A pair of sensuous teak chaises on a sandy overlook in Malibu, California, pick up the tawny tones of the dune grasses in the background. **DESIGN:** Pamela Burton & Company Landscape Architecture.

