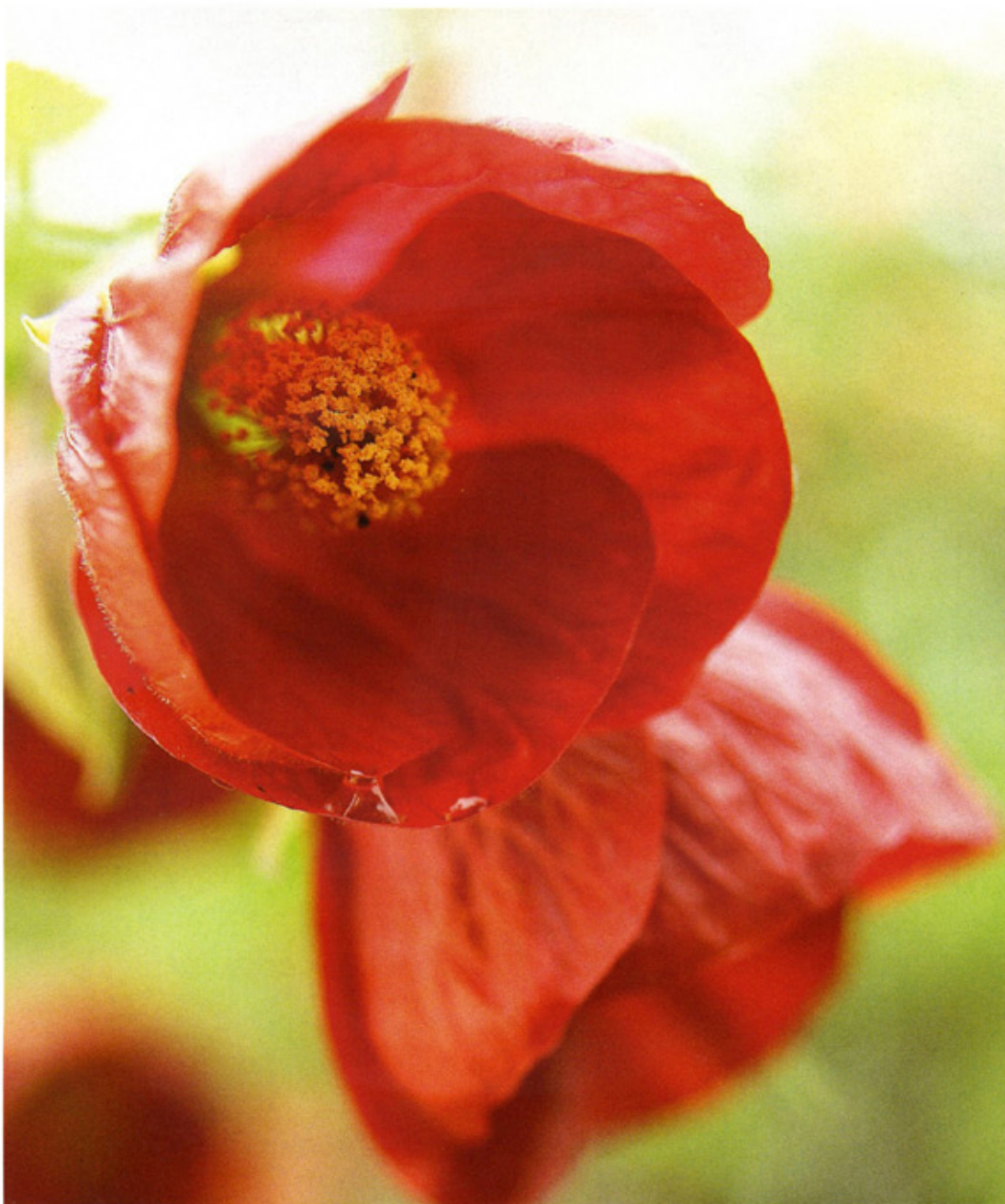


Gardens

BY REBECCA CHRISTIAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
HOLLY LEPERE



The Brittingham family—Poppy, 12, with Tallulah, Tommy, 8, Scott, and Ella with Digby—loves entertaining and spending time together in their Montecito garden overlooking the Channel Islands and coastal plain.

Blooms Flowering maple (*Abutilon*) was chosen by landscape designer Margie Grace because the profuse bloomer “plays well with the other old-timey flowers in the garden.”



PHOTOGRAPH: FLOWERING MAPLE: MARIY BALDWIN

time after Time

A YOUNG FAMILY BRINGS BACK A MONTECITO GARDEN THAT WAS ALMOST GONE WITH THE WIND

“When you look around, there is nothing to tell you that it’s not 1936,” says Scott Brittingham of his and wife Ella’s Montecito garden, perched on a hill with a view of the sweeping coastal plain and California’s Channel Islands. Nothing, that is, but the insistent beat of Grateful Dead tunes a live band might be playing during one of the Brittinghams’ multigenerational parties. The gatherings



spill from the long emerald lawn of the couple's quintessential California home down to terraces below.

Tucked away at the end of a lane off of one of Montecito's main streets, the property charms with beautiful old walls, topiary, a quartet of arbors abloom with iceberg roses and pink-throated jasmine, and majestic trees—including a redwood given as a sapling by Herbert Hoover. The home is so well hidden, Ella says, that "Visitors always exclaim, 'I never knew this was here!'"

The secluded garden is both symmetrical and elegant, with bone structure as enviable as Greta Garbo's—and a silver-screen connection, too. When the Brittinghams bought the 1930s home in 1997, a neighbor told them that the garden—stately but disheveled—was designed by Florence Yoch. She was the well-known landscape designer who created the spectacular outdoor set for Tara in *Gone With the Wind* in the days when movies were transitioning from fakey painted backdrops to live sets.

The couple got in touch with James Yoch, the designer's nephew and himself a landscape designer as well as a professor of English at the University of Oklahoma. The Shakespeare scholar says if

he could plop the garden down in one of the bard's plays, it would be in *As You Like It*, "because sections of it are civilized, but the edges have a sense of wildness." Yoch helped the couple restore the neglected garden in 1998, working from its original plan (before its some 30 acres were whittled to a single one).

A decade later, things needed freshening. So Ella (who cheerfully admits she has a black thumb) hired award-winning landscape designer Margie Grace to preserve the garden's integrity while making it work for the very contemporary Brittingham family. "I wanted to make it more *it*," Grace says with slightly unconventional logic. "I didn't want it to look like my garden at their house but to show who the Brittinghams are in their landscape." A priority was to find low-maintenance, period-appropriate plants that remember "they are the bridesmaid, and the bride is the view." There is considerable green-on-green in the shady garden, along with a romantic palette of pink and white. Ella loves her sweet peas, and Grace is triumphant that she was able to salvage junipers that had been growing in pots for nearly a century. "And I love to see the kids and dogs—two of each—tearing around in a blur of white fur and blond hair," Grace says.



Exterior Scott and Ella were drawn to their 1930s-style Californian home because it reminded them of their grandparents' homes.

Garden details (clockwise from top left) A sturdy agapanthus is pretty as well enduring.

- Roses, miniature roses, and Peruvian lilies fill pots beneath the lion-head plaque.
- An example of the old-fashioned roses that Ella loves.
- As in the original garden, potted lemon trees define the four corners of the lawn.



The Brittinghams have permitted the garden to evolve with their family, turning what was once a teahouse first into an art studio for messy small children and now into a place for parents to relax as children play ball on the sports court.

They also took out the home's original fountain, salvaging materials for possible future use. "The flowers around it kept getting crushed by footballs, and the balls kept getting popped by rose thorns," Ella chuckles.

One of their additions is an intimate pool and Jacuzzi hidden away at the side of the house. "The pool is small enough that we can play Marco Polo and actually catch someone!" Ella notes.

Scott, who had a first career in real estate, directs the Brittingham Family Foundation, focusing on education and social services. Ella has helped with historic preservation at Lotusland, the Santa Barbara botanical garden. They love the 200-year-old grinding stone left behind by the Chumash Indians, which they discovered while renovating the garden. It remains under an ancient oak so visitors can enjoy it—a metaphor for living in the moment while honoring the past. ➤

Landscape designer: Margie Grace **For more information, see sources on page 146**



Walkway Graceful arbors frame the view. In a period photo (left), garden designer Florence Yoch listens to companion Lucille Council.

Garden detail Statuesque acanthus stands out with its height, deep color, and complex texture.



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An Evolving Garden

1 | Steps to Nowhere...

but the view. Grace made the most of these original garden remnants by topping them with gnarled, century-old junipers.

2 | Wide, Imposing Walkways

were handy in the garden's heyday, because its owner often hosted large political gatherings on the grounds.

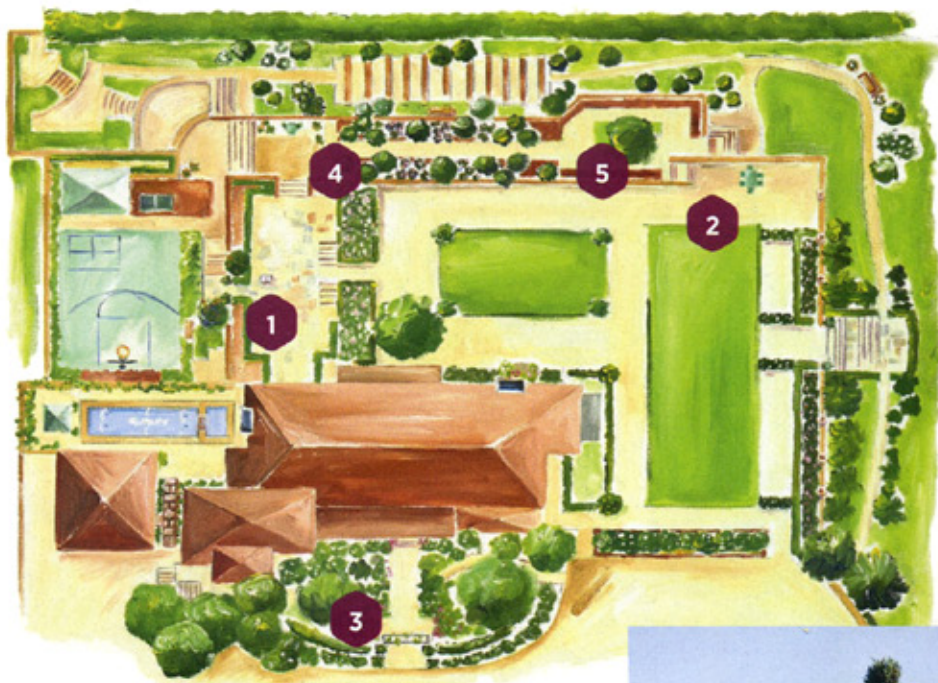


ILLUSTRATION: KATHRYN KUNZ FINNEY PHOTOGRAPH: SWEET PEA, DAVID SPEER

3 | Formal in Front, Friendly in Back

"In the back, the garden is a little devil-may-care," Grace says. "Inside boxwood hedges are masses of cottage roses."

4 | Topiary Points to the View

Topiary—a form of living sculpture—acts here as an exclamation point, announcing, "Behold the spectacular view!"

5 | The Romance of Sweet Peas

With fluttery blossoms, intense colors, and heady perfume, romantic sweet peas evoke an earlier age. 🌸

