

PHOENIX

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Glorious Desert Gardens



High-Desert Oasis

Wise plant choices and good design transform a Santa Fe garden

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Visitors rounding the corner outside the

Santa Fe home of Barney Cohen and Joan McCoy often stop in their tracks. Taking in a garden unlike any they have seen in this northern New Mexico town, they are left momentarily breathless.

The reason: Rising on a slope behind the residence is a multi-terraced garden, lush with tall grasses, ground covers, flowers and bushes in stunning visual variety. Amid the rustling of leaves—and at times notes of music floating from an open window in the couple's house—is the calming sound of water tumbling down a gentle waterfall and into a stream that ends in a small pond. It is this recirculating water feature that helps produce the feeling of being in a "special oasis, apart from the rest of the world," Cohen notes.

This oasis was created virtually from scratch by the local landscaping team of Monika Hellwegen and Azul Cobb, owners of Carlotta From Paradise. And, surprisingly, for a garden that would seem quite thirsty, it is relatively easy on water—a necessity in an area where drought can be severe. Drip irrigation provides sufficient moisture without overtaxing the homeowners' private well.

The garden transformation began in 1999, when Cohen bought the home built in 1908 by a protégé of Frank Lloyd Wright. When the landscapers began working on it, a tall dying elm that shaded a patch of weedy grass dominated the gloomy, almost bare backyard.

The first thing Hellwegen and Cobb did was take down the aging tree, opening the entire south-facing area to sunlight. Stone-faced terraces and the water feature were constructed, and poor soil was removed and replaced with organic topsoil and mulch. Next, a variety of fruit and flowering trees, shrubs and perennials was planted, creating year-round color and texture. The combination of thick mulch, dense plantings and natural wind protection from the slope of the land allows the soil to hold water to an unusual degree, Hellwegen explains.

On the property's upper level, where the stream begins, a wisteria-covered pergola provides an ideal setting for outdoor entertaining and sunset viewing. Just beyond sits a hot tub accented with tiles inspired by the aesthetics of southern Spain. The patterns were designed by Hellwegen and Cobb.

The homeowners and landscapers are all drawn to the Andalusian gardens of southern Spain, with their sunny, enclosed courtyards and Moorish-inspired designs. To create this look, a large sandstone patio was installed behind the house, with geometric patterns inlaid in dark-red cobblestone. The pattern echoes the clean lines of the home's Arts and Crafts-style architecture. Protected by the terraced slope, as well as by stuccoed walls on three sides and a long, covered *portal*, an outdoor dining area with fireplace remains comfortable for year-round use and adds to the Andalusian garden theme.

The couple also wanted a yard offering as much color as possible during each season. This was accomplished through a variety of flowering trees plus perennials and annuals, including winter jasmine, late-blooming roses, hummingbird mint, Russian sage and 'Autumn Joy' sedum.

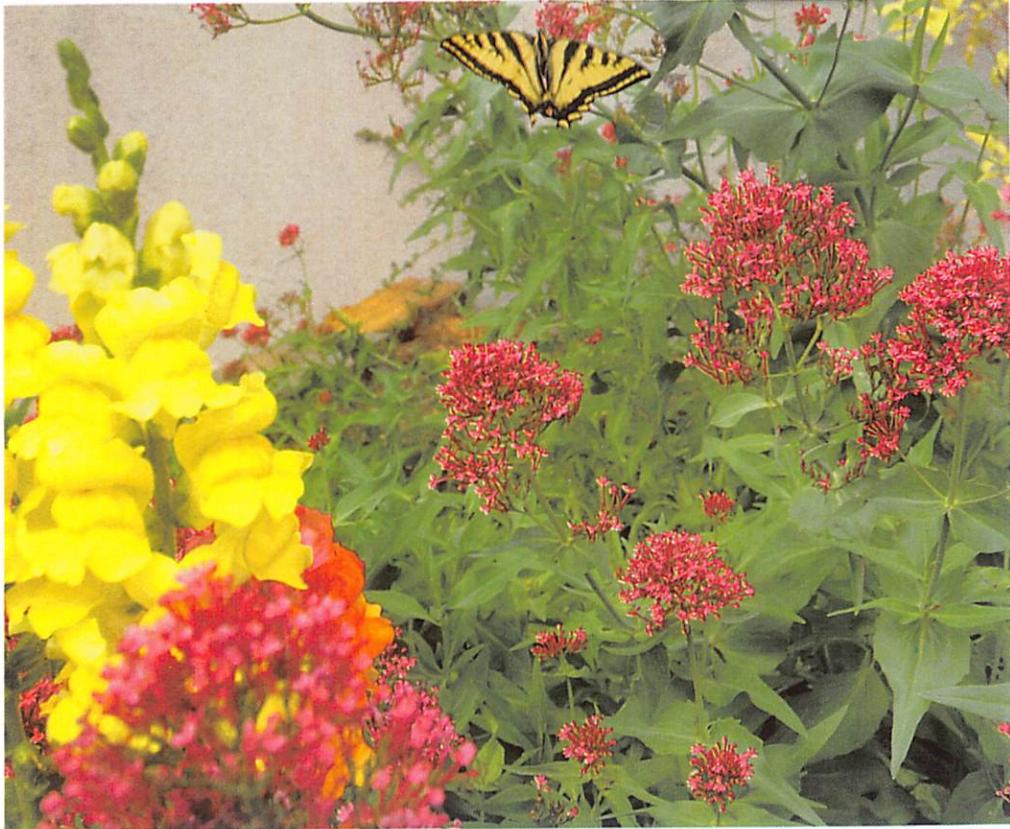
With its surprising lushness and its diversity of shapes, textures and colors, the property is a welcoming blend of visual drama and serenity. It also was the perfect site for Cohen and McCoy's wedding in August 2006.

"It's not just a garden to look at," notes Cobb. "It's a garden to live in." □

A lush backyard environment was created at this Santa Fe property with layers of vegetation in varying textures, colors and shapes. Included are 'Morning Light' miscanthus and blue avena grasses, as well as yellow flag water iris and 'Moonbeam' yarrow. A vine-laden ramada, trickling stream and comfortable outdoor furnishings enhance the verdant setting.



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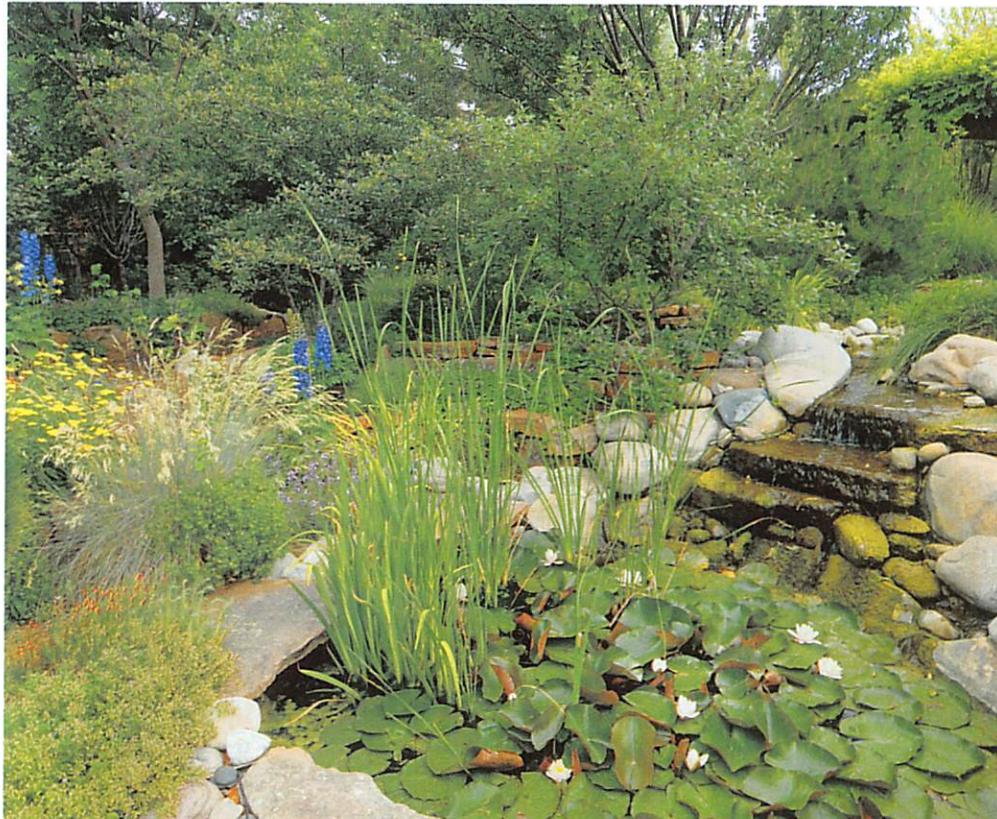
Above: A wisteria-covered pergola offers shade in an outdoor living area just steps from the house. Clusters of yellow grove bamboo lend exotic appeal. **Left:** A tiger swallowtail butterfly flutters among yellow snapdragons and magenta Jupiter's beard on the west side of the house. **Opposite top:** A purple leaf plum tree (top right) contrasts with low-growing shrubs and flowers, including arctic willow, daylilies and New Mexico privet. Dense plantings and protection from wind allow the soil to retain moisture and create a lush microenvironment. **Opposite bottom:** At the lower end of the man-made stream, a small lily pond with cattails and a gentle waterfall adds to the sense of being in a serene place “apart from the rest of the world,” notes the homeowner.

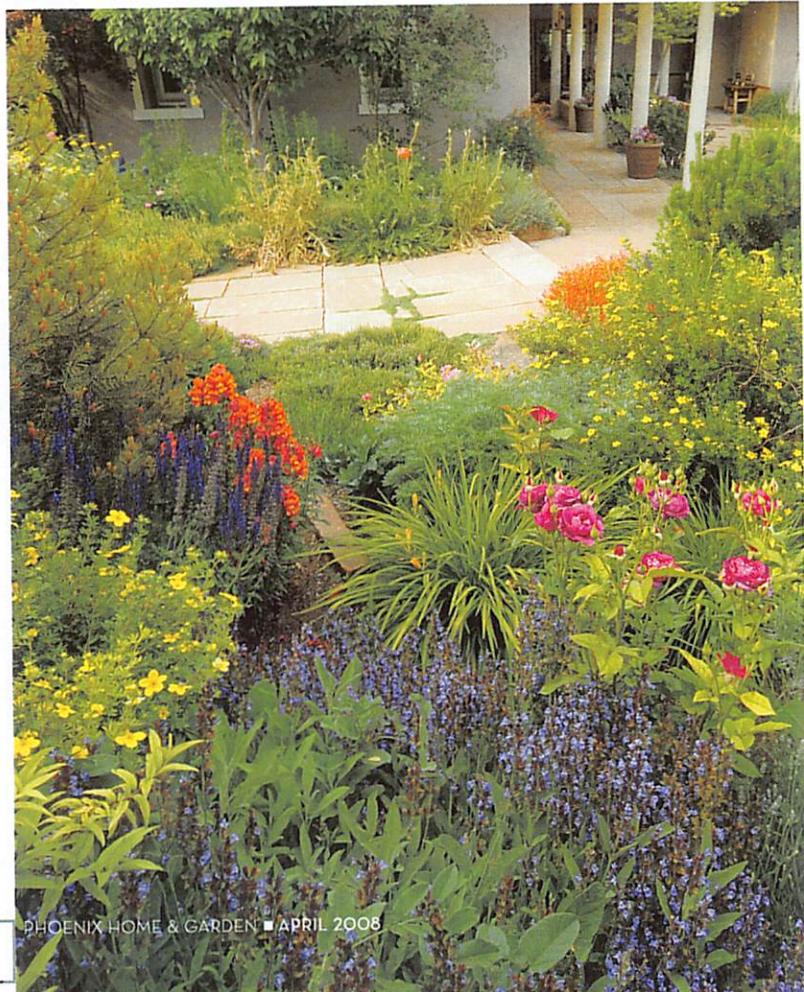


Azul Cobb. "It's a garden to live in"

GARDENING TIPS FOR THE HIGH DESERT

- Plant trees with fast-growing, aggressive root systems (such as aspen or poplar) a good distance from perennial beds. This allows the perennials, with their smaller, shorter roots, to get enough water.
- In areas with poor soil, use organic topsoil to a depth of 2 feet. Keep it healthy by mulching with a locally suitable organic mixture in spring and fall. For this garden, landscape designers Monika Hellwegen and Azul Cobb used a mulch mixture of steer manure compost, cotton burr and aged bark.
- Create microclimates for different kinds of plantings. For example, a Japanese maple will do well on the northeast side of a house near roof drainage. Less cold-tolerant plants will be happy in a flower bed or pots placed next to a warm south-facing wall.
- Clusters of tall grasses provide year-round interest. Green in summer, with seed heads in fall, they seem to glow when backlit by the winter sun.





Above: Blue sky larkspur (*Delphinium parishii*), 'Moonbeam' yarrow, yellow columbine and pine leaf penstemon bring a festive ambience to a spot overlooking the south-facing patio. With its outdoor fireplace, the space remains warm when temperatures dip, and the area is sheltered from wind year-round. Left: Thanks to a wide range of plants, the landscapers were able to fulfill the homeowners' desire for color each month. Here, meadow sage, snapdragons, roses and purple *Echinacea* flourish. Opposite: The property slopes upward behind the house, creating a perfect setting for a rock-lined water feature that originates near the pergola. Growing in the foreground are 'Morning Light' miscanthus grass, Greek yarrow and flowering purple and yellow *Veronica*.

See Sources.

