

GARDENS OF THE YEAR

# FIELD OF VISION

Opening up a seascape sets the stage for a spectacular garden tableau

BY EVA DITLER • PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARTIN MANN



A glorious expanse of craggy cliffs combined with the vast blue of the Pacific Ocean delights the mind and serves as the backdrop to Frank and Victoria Hobbs' rear garden in La Jolla. But that wasn't always the case.

"Victoria's parents had lived here a long time; and when we moved into this house, the landscaping had matured to the point that it was no longer appealing," Frank says. "A particular issue was a stand of acacia trees along the western and southern boundaries of the property that obscured the view of everything."

One day, Victoria realized that the acacias, shrubby myoporum and a plethora of Indian hawthorn also were eating up flat, usable surface areas.

"There was a fair amount of property that was unused," she says. "We had hired Torrey Pines Landscape to do the maintenance, so we asked [owner] Harry Thompson to draw up plans. Then we sat on those plans for about 18 months and finally decided to do it."

The garden's makeover impressed attendees of May's La Jolla Secret Garden Tour and 2015 Gardens of the Year judges

In summer, family and friends gather in the sunken outdoor living room, where chairs swivel toward the ocean view and warmth of the fire pit or face each other for conversational ease. The curved bench wall ensures plenty of extra seating. A barbecue grill and counter bar are handily located on the other end of the trellis-covered structure.

Previous spread: Sand and coarse gravel were rough-tumbled with manufactured used brick to match the existing wall. New columns flanking the steps convey a sense of entry.

"There's a great use of brick to extend and complement that which existed."  
— GARDENS OF THE YEAR JUDGE CIRO DELGADILLO





Sara Bendrick, Jason Jarvis and  
Ciro Delgadillo. The juggling  
of colors and textures inspired  
Sara, while Ciro appreciated  
the masonry components and  
Jason mentioned the “great use  
of natives that give contrast to  
the yard.”

Harry juxtaposed gentle  
curves and rectilinear forms in  
the updated hardscape, which  
helped add visual interest to the  
pool that the couple use often  
and wanted to retain.

“Victoria and Frank asked  
for a modern living and entertain-  
ing area around the pool,”  
he says. “Working with the  
parallelogram shape was a big

challenge, because it did not  
seem to fit gracefully into the  
site.”

A curved, brick staircase —  
to which Harry’s team added  
brick columns to mimic those  
at the front of the California  
ranch-style home — leads down  
from the house to the pool.

Originally, the pool had a  
swimming lane at one end that  
connected the main body of  
water to the hot tub directly  
in front of the pool house —  
“a shed that contained the  
pool equipment and collected  
spiders,” Frank elaborates.

Now, bougainvillea cascades  
down the wall near an updated

pool house that contains a  
conveniently located kitchen  
and bathroom.

A lounging area behind a  
trellis of white star jasmine  
replaces the swimming lane,  
and the hot tub has been moved  
to the other side of the pool  
and raised to provide an ocean  
view. Its new spot is near the  
outdoor dining area and a black  
slate water feature that Frank  
designed (“my one contribution  
to the new landscaping,” he  
says, although he also made a  
stainless steel box that conceals  
a pop-up, big-screen television  
that he wanted in the barbecue  
area).

Above: Low-growing bougainvillea  
by an observation point along a  
hidden pathway maintains the  
majesty of cliff and ocean views.

Facing page: Zwartkop aeonium  
lines a casual, basketweave brick  
path that leads from the house  
down winding stairs to the pool  
area.





Above: An arched niche along the wall was built with the same specifications as the water feature by the pool “so that it is a reflection of the wet fountain,” says Harry Thompson, owner of Torrey Pines Landscape Co.

Facing page: Threads of colors and textures run through a walkway that includes dwarf mondo grass and a dry streambed of river rock.

“I absolutely love the use of color, texture and variety with this plant palette.”

— JUDGE SARA BENDRICK

“Off to the south side of the remodeled pool, we created a sunken outdoor living room with a bar and barbecue,” Harry says. “Curved walls provide extra seating around a fire pit. The heavy-beam shade structure above the space makes it feel like a room — one of a series in this landscape that’s connected by paths.”

Meandering walkways enchant this back garden, but none are more intriguing than the decomposed granite trail with rough timber steps heading down to a secret garden that’s not visible from the house.

Lavender swaths of rosea ice plant flank the steps. Sea green and hetzi juniper hedges line the far edges of the path.

Farther down, the yard transforms into a striking mix of succulents with a variety of agaves and aeoniums. The pathway provides a series of lookouts and culminates at a circular sitting area blessed with an astounding view of cliffs and the Pacific Ocean. The profound sense of nature’s power encourages meditation

in this tucked-away, Zen-like spot.

“You could go to a thousand gardens and never have something like that,” Frank says. “The whole back yard has a different feel now that it’s been opened to the ocean view. But I could have my back to the ocean and be perfectly content. I love the landscaping.” ❖