



Enhancing the outdoor life

BY RUSS CLETTA

A recent online post challenged people to send in images of what they could see from their window. People sent in spectacular images of lakes, mountains, balconies, jungles, courtyards, deserts and cityscapes

from around the globe, but the truth is, in Brentwood, what we can see right in our own backyard rivals any gorgeous view elsewhere.

Although Southern California has its faults (literally), it is truly a spectacular place to live;

near-perfect weather, low humidity, ocean air and abundant sunshine often make it difficult to stay inside for long. In such uncertain times, one thing is clear — people are planning to spend more time at home and are contemplating ways to enhance the experience. What better way to enjoy the outdoors at home, and take advantage of all this raw material, than to create a private garden retreat.

Each home garden should be unique, accentuate the site, accommodate the user and reflect the natural surroundings. Some home gardens are best viewed from inside, some are to be strolled through, some best designed to entertain. Others, to farm, read, dine, play or contemplate with a glass of wine. A garden should be a reflection of its inhabitants and the people who enjoy it.

Before beginning this outdoor adventure, take some time to plan and consider the setting and the surroundings. Take note of the sun and shade, the wind and exposure, the privacy and views. Acknowledge how the garden changes throughout the day and through the seasons; is the morning light particularly beautiful in a certain corner in the spring, does the low light in early fall create a seductive vignette, is the summer sun a welcome visitor or an oppressive guest? What areas do you want to spotlight, and why? At what time of day?

Decide how you intend to use the garden and acknowledge how that use may change over time. With the rare exception of formal manicured gardens, there's a saying: "A



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541 Rialto Avenue
Venice, CA 90291

russcletta.com

310.452.0248

Landscape Architect Lisc. #4284
Landscape Contractor # 961672

garden is never finished." Keep this in mind as plants will grow and change along with the needs of the people enjoying them. A play lawn may evolve into a vegetable garden, or a shaded patio for reading. There will be enchanting changes along the way, as long as you remain true to the natural site and surroundings.

Create the outdoor space with the same consideration as the interior of a home. Walkways and paths connect interiors to open spaces and patios. Often the most immediately convenient spot to place a



patio isn't the best place to truly enjoy the garden. Carefully plan the garden layout before narrowing in on specific plants or materials. If you get the 'bones' of the garden right, it will provide a structure to build from; masonry and woodwork add stability while the plants add character, color and movement.

We're fortunate to be able to grow a dazzling array of plants in Los Angeles, some more appropriate to our climate than others. Choose plants that require similar growing conditions and avoid overplanting — as this causes problems down the road. Research the mature size of what you plant. A seemingly innocent little tree can grow to knock a house off the foundation in no time at all. Ask for advice if you're not sure.

Most importantly, learn that gardens take time. Embrace the process. If anything, staying at home has hopefully taught us to appreciate the nature around us and to enjoy its beauty. Creating a home garden is a way you can pay homage to that beauty and enjoy it for years to come.

Russ Cletta Design Studio specializes in custom residential landscape design and installation. See russcletta.com.