

SPECIAL REPORT: IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

GARDEN DESIGN

Elegant Style
for Seating,
Storage, Décor

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Gorgeous Grasses
in Hot New Pots

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The Luxe Life Outdoors!

Fresh, Inviting Spaces for Year-Round Entertaining



Left: A recently renovated Joseph Eichler house in Palo Alto offers views of this garden, designed by Bernard Trainor, from every room, including the master suite seen here. The black screen behind the dining terrace is a nod to Japanese garden design. **Opposite:** The L-shaped courtyard packs a lot of living area into a small space. A low, poured-concrete wall just right of the wall-mounted fountain allows for extra seating, and the dining set (from Design Within Reach) hints at romantic dinners under the stars.

Wallace Stegner said it best when describing this region: ‘You have to get over the color green; you have to quit associating beauty with gardens and lawns; you have to get used to an inhuman scale.’ For me, that’s meant learning the value of restraint.”

Restraint is a theme (though on a way-different scale) in Palo Alto, California, where tight urban lots and the midcentury modern aesthetic of homes designed by Joseph Eichler requires unsentimental editing in the landscape. Eichler, a visionary developer from the late ‘40s through the early ‘70s, built some 2,700 of these clean, sleek houses in Palo Alto — more than anywhere in the United States. When the architecture is this compelling, how then to create a strong landscape that complements but doesn’t overwhelm the residence?

“You have to fight fire with fire,” says landscape architect Bernard Trainor, whose firm specializes in these historic properties. “When the man-made elements are this powerful, each feature in the landscape must have its own strength.”

Look no further than Trainor’s design for a Palo Alto client, where a long run of concrete block wall on one side and the dramatic linear fencing and black screen on the other make his point. “We used materials similar to those found inside the house as our starting point, and while we weren’t completely literal, we did keep to the idea of the strict, clean lines of the building,” he says. “What was important here was to continually edit and refine, edit and refine until we achieved the right balance.”

To let the plants and garden features shine, Trainor used a mix of local crushed gravel, simple poured concrete pavers and a few flagstones to create the floor, and then brought in large-scale boulders to add subtle rhythm to the landscape. One of the most magical elements here is the fountain installed into the block wall. A simple stainless-steel spout trickles water onto a large rock — it looks so natural, it could almost go unnoticed if not for the sound.

Sustainability plays a significant role in the design of this garden. “Green is not only about using less material overall, but using it more thoughtfully,” says Trainor. Plants are a big part of that imperative and so were chosen not only for their rich colors and strong lines but their adaptability to periods of drought. Aloes, kangaroo paws, ferns, succulents and a grove or two of bamboo are quite happy and luminous under the late-afternoon sun when this garden is most often enjoyed by the homeowner.