SAN DIEGO HOME/GARDEN

LIFESTYLES®

36TH ANNUAL HOMES OF THE YEAR

Encinitas' Beach Contemporary Garden

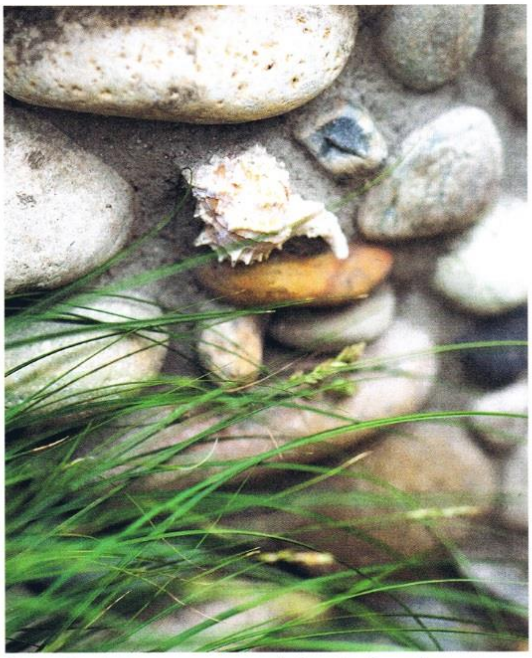
Make Way for Local Distillers

FEBRUARY 2015 $4.95
$4.95
02>
0 74820 65895 6

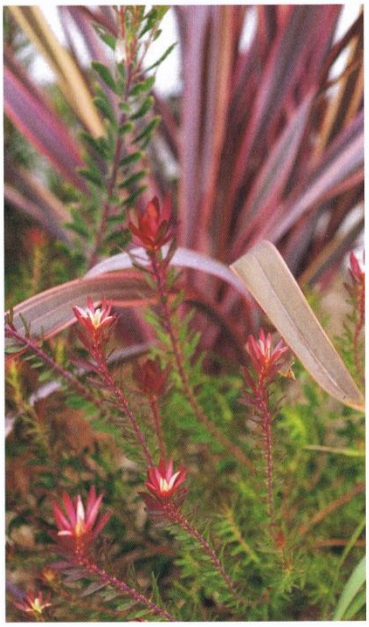
A SEA CHANGE

TRADING A COUNTRY ESTATE FOR AN ENCINITAS COTTAGE LEADS TO A FRESH TAKE ON OUTDOOR LIVING THAT FITS THE SETTING

BY MARY JAMES
PHOTOGRAPHY BY YUKI BATTERSON



Above: Seashells accent stone walls fronting Dana Saxten's home in Encinitas. Facing page: Plants surrounding the backyard spa include tufts of *Carex tumicola*, *Aloe striata* in raised beds and, along the fence line, *Miscanthus sp.* 'Sentinel,' *Juniperus torulosa* and *Feijoa sellowiana*.



WITH TWO LABRADOR retrievers in tow, Dana Saxten left behind country living on an acre estate in Rancho Santa Fe for a contemporary cottage just blocks from the ocean and downtown Encinitas.

"We had lived in Del Mar years ago, so it seemed natural to return to the beach," says the restaurateur who owns Jake's Del Mar and a dozen other restaurants in California and Hawaii. "Plus, my son, his wife and two grandkids live just one street over."

Her recently remodeled home features pared-down interiors that match her vow to "keep things simple."

Front and back yards were little more than "patchy grass and a funky porch," Dana says. "I knew I wanted something modern but nothing elaborate. I'm a quilter, not a gardener."

Impressed by a project in Cardiff, she connected with its designer, Ryan Prange of Falling Waters Landscape, who describes her totally revamped garden as "beach contemporary."

"There are nods [to the ocean] throughout the setting, but nothing over the top," he says.

Above: Yellow-flowered *Achillea* (yarrow) near the stone fire pit complements the yellow accents in seating areas. A potted *Dracaena marginata* on the front porch adds a little bit of height to the landscaping.

Left: The brachts of *Leucodendron* 'Safari Sunset' and variegated leaves of *Phormium* 'Maori Maiden' add tinges of red for contrast.

Facing page: A backyard corner becomes an attractive *"tableau vivant"* with a combination of *Miscanthus sp.* 'Sentinel,' *Phormium* 'Yellow Wave,' *Aeonium* 'Zwartkop' and the climbing vine *Pyrostegia venusta* that yields orange flowers.

Muhlenbergia rigens flanks the home's cedar-fence entry. Other plants in the raised frontage include *Aloe striata*, *Euphorbia lambii*, *Rosmarinus prostratus* and *Erigeron karvinskianus*. The stone wall is composed of Mexican Beach Buff and field cobblestone, with an occasional seashell embedded into the mix.

Subtle motifs first appear outside the entry gate, where a long bed is fronted by a cobblestone wall occasionally accented with seashells. Dancing California native deer grass, trailing rosemary and red-tinged coral aloes catch the sun beneath towering Mexican fan palms, sentinels at home here for decades.

Inside the gate, deep green sedge (*Carex divulsa*) forms a billowy meadow that sways and slumps as if buffeted by ocean currents. Adding to the under-the-sea feel are boulders brushed by coral-hued yarrows, agave and aloe rosettes. A giant artichoke seasonally thrusts purple thistles into the salt air.

Three young Mexican fan palms circled by blue fescue stand across the driveway from a scalloped ribbon of snow-in-summer that recalls foaming water lapping the shore. Around the corner, in a secluded side yard, a gleaming abalone shell holds soap for the new outdoor shower.

When her day winds down, Dana enjoys peak-a-boo Pacific views from the redwood deck that wraps around the west and south sides of her two-story home. Other times, she relaxes in a rectangular soaking pool ("we call it a poolcuzzi," she says) set in another raised deck in the back yard where Italian patio lights flicker at night.

Steps away is a dining patio made of concrete pavers separated by gray river rock that allows water to percolate into the ground. A nearby swale adds to Ryan's goal to contain all irrigation and rainwater on the site.

New double-sided, cedar fencing around the property creates a backdrop for linear plantings: drifts of pineapple guavas; windswept Hollywood junipers; Carolina cherry laurel; 'Anna' apples; and lacy, multitrunk tea trees. All add texture, softness and bursts of color.

"One wonderful surprise was seeing the tea trees bloom all along the driveway with these pretty pink flowers," Dana says.

Her desire to use front and back yards equally sparked the design of a custom fire ring crafted of beach cobblestones and tucked below the front deck, alongside the entry walkway of floating concrete pads.

"We moved the ring three times to site it right," Ryan says. "We wanted it to be welcoming, not a barrier."

Dark gray Adirondack chairs by Loll Designs here and on the front deck are favorite gathering spots, especially at dusk when the sky and garden glow. Mustard yellow accent pillows echo two midcentury Gainey Ceramics planters collected by Ryan. One holds a sculptural dracaena and the other a bold African aloe.

Whether gazing at the garden from her upstairs studio-office, splashing with her grandsons in the pool or savoring a quiet moment with her dogs, Dana relishes "city" living.

"I love being part of the vitality of life here," she says. ❖