

MONTECITO JOURNAL PRESENTS

the

DESIGN | ARCHITECTURE | WIT

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Now THAT'S a reflecting pool!

MORE: BRUTALIST SANDCASTLES! | FARM-TO-TABLE? MEET FARM *ON* TABLE! | PALISADES PERMIT WHISPERER

ALSO: THE LAMBORGHINI URUS: EXPENSIVE FOR A CAR, BUT NOT BAD IF YOU ALSO LIVE IN IT.

MORE THAN
A LITTLE INSIDE



back yard bliss

The best room in the house may not have a roof. Around Montecito, it might have an olive tree overhead, a pool catching the late-afternoon light and a table that somehow keeps everyone seated long after dinner is finished. There may be a fire going. Music coming from somewhere you can't quite locate. Perhaps a cold plunge waits around the corner, or a pizza oven is about to turn dinner into something wonderfully imperfect in the best possible way.

Bliss, as it turns out, can take many forms.

For one person, it's a quiet morning swim; for another, herbs clipped from the garden for dinner. It might be grandchildren staying the weekend, friends lingering around a fire as daylight disappears, or simply finding a shady corner and doing nothing at all. The backyard has become the setting for all of it—a place to cook, swim, gather, garden, exercise, entertain or disappear for a while.

The line between indoors and out has softened accordingly, with rooms opening onto terraces and gardens becoming destinations of their own. But the most inviting backyards aren't necessarily the ones with the longest list of amenities. Again and again, the designers, builders and craftspeople in these pages return to a simpler question: How do you want to live out here?

The answers reveal the thought, ingenuity and craftsmanship behind spaces that feel almost effortless once they're finished.

Because perhaps that is *Backyard Bliss*: stepping outside, settling in and realizing there's nowhere else you'd rather be. And this is your guide to discovering your own exterior nirvana.



PROJECTS GENERAL CONSTRUCTION

Some backyard projects call for a hot tub. Others call for a hot tub that disappears at the push of a button.

With Christi Clayton and Projects General Construction, the latter is where things get interesting.

On one particularly memorable Santa Barbara project, the team installed a stainless-steel spa beneath a substantial wood-clad deck that slides open and closed by remote control—an ingenious bit of construction Clayton affectionately calls the “007 hot tub.” When closed, the deck remains completely walkable. When it’s time for a soak, a push of a button reveals the spa below.

It’s clever, certainly. But what Clayton loves most about the project is how little it announces itself.

The home was designed by a student of Frank Lloyd Wright, and every new element needed to respect an architecture already deeply connected to its surroundings. Rather than introduce pristine materials that would immediately read as new, Projects selected natural stone that echoed the existing masonry and materials that felt at home among the property’s mature oaks. The spa, barbecue, and fire pit weren’t meant to look freshly installed. They were meant to look as though they had always belonged.

“Everything doesn’t have to look brand new all the time,” Clayton says.

That sensitivity is part of a larger philosophy at Projects. Clayton, a Cal Poly graduate in Construction Management, took control of the company in 2016 after years of helping build it from a small-project division into a full-service general contractor. Today, Projects handles everything from complete interior remodels and additions to new construction—and, when inspiration wanders outdoors, patios, hardscaping, gates, and other exterior projects as well.

“If you can dream it, we can build it” is an apt description of the approach. Projects can collaborate with a client’s architect or designer, bring trusted trade partners into the conversation, and manage the many moving pieces required to turn an unusual idea into something beautifully buildable.

And in Montecito, those ideas increasingly have little regard for the traditional boundary between house and garden. Pocketing and bi-folding glass doors can make that division all but disappear, allowing kitchens and living spaces to spill naturally onto patios and into gardens.

“We definitely live in what I would say is almost a perfect climate for entertaining, for living, for bringing family home,” Clayton says.

For her, the backyard is simply another room—one where the ceiling happens to be the sky. Bring out a few chairs and the wine glasses, gather around a fire or slip into the hot tub, and the forgotten edge of a property becomes a sanctuary.

The trick is making it feel like it belonged there all along.



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