

KING *of the* HILL

*A Golden Hardscape
Crowns Santa Barbara*

By Robert Andrew Folwer, RLA



Left: During the construction phase of the project, the owners were able to purchase the adjoining property and thus, rather than be crowded and have views blocked by another home, we had the luxury of converting the vacant lot to a native landscaped wildflower meadow to help blend the property into the surrounding hillside. The tree is a *Melaleuca leucadendra* (paperbark tree).

PHOTO BY TOM BURT, WWW.TOMBURT.NET

Below: The expansive patio enjoys some of Santa Barbara's best views. Here the Cherokee Creek quartzite flagstone has been laid out in a natural five-sided cut pattern where one notes the craftsmanship of the tightly-fitted joints. Black bamboo extends from the Asian sea-foam-green ceramic pots at right. Bromeliads, blue agaves and purple echeveria succulents grow in the pots at center. PHOTO BY TOM BURT

“TV Hill,”

as it is known in Santa Barbara (due to its location near a local TV station) is home to what may be Santa Barbara's best view lots. The area is blessed with spectacular 360-degree panoramic views that include a clear shot of the harbor and beach area (for July Fourth fireworks viewing), a down-the-coastline view to Ventura, a view of the Channel Islands, a splendid north view of the Coast Range and a dramatic overlook on downtown Santa Barbara.





Above: The redesign added this pedestrian link from the street, which is flanked by olive trees as well as sages, marguerite daisies, kangaroo paws and daylilies. The stepway and path provides a more interesting pathway to the front door and helps to serve as a pleasant distraction from the 35 vertical feet of elevation change between the street and front door. The stairs are Cherokee Creek ledgerstone.

PHOTO BY TOM BURT

The owners were familiar with my work, in particular the Ralph's supermarket downtown. This is the flagship market for the Ralph's chain and may be the most expensive grocery store in the country. Designed as a gateway project to the city, it was created to take on the detailing of a fine Montecito estate.

Even so, the hill was once considered a less-than-ideal location. Unlike the Santa Barbara Mission district, the site is subjected to fog a little more often than other parts of the city. Nonetheless, there is no shortage of beautiful days and nights to take advantage of its spectacular views.

First Steps

I was contacted by architect William Wolf (of Pacific Architects of Santa Barbara) and asked to be part of a team in order to help develop a master plan for the site.

I was introduced to Chad and Ginni Dreier, the owners of what then was a rather generic tract home. Chad is an executive with the Ryland Corporation (a national homebuilding corporation) and was no stranger to custom homebuilding. Chad and Ginni sought a garden design style that evokes a more natural and free-form garden style that would blend contemporary garden elements in a relaxed flavor.

They wanted their garden to be fun, a place they could share with guests. The panoramic views already went a long way at setting the table for fun.

Incorporating Stone

The interior remodel was underway upon my initial walk-thru with architect Bill Wolf. The property was gifted with perhaps the best panoramic views in the neighborhood, but the house itself was clearly a dated 60s design that appeared to have been plunked on top of a hill.

I immediately saw that this house was crying for more curb appeal. Bill has always had an appreciation for my abilities with creative and thoughtful hardscape and landscape design. As part of the collaborative effort, we were comfortable with offering suggestions that crossed into the other's realm of expertise.

Since I planned on incorporating stone into the hardscape and garden, I suggested that some of the existing masonry site walls and the building would benefit from selective applications of stone veneering. As a result, Cherokee Creek ledgerstone was incorporated into the entry surrounding the front door and garage, as well as onto a series of terraced masonry site walls. Cherokee Creek is a stone from Oklahoma that was introduced locally and has proven to be a nice material because it closely resembles the local Santa Barbara sandstone. I used the gold-copper-toned stone on all of the exterior

vertical masonry elements, retaining walls, stone piers and as a cap to some of the existing stucco walls that we wanted to tie back to the house and the garden.

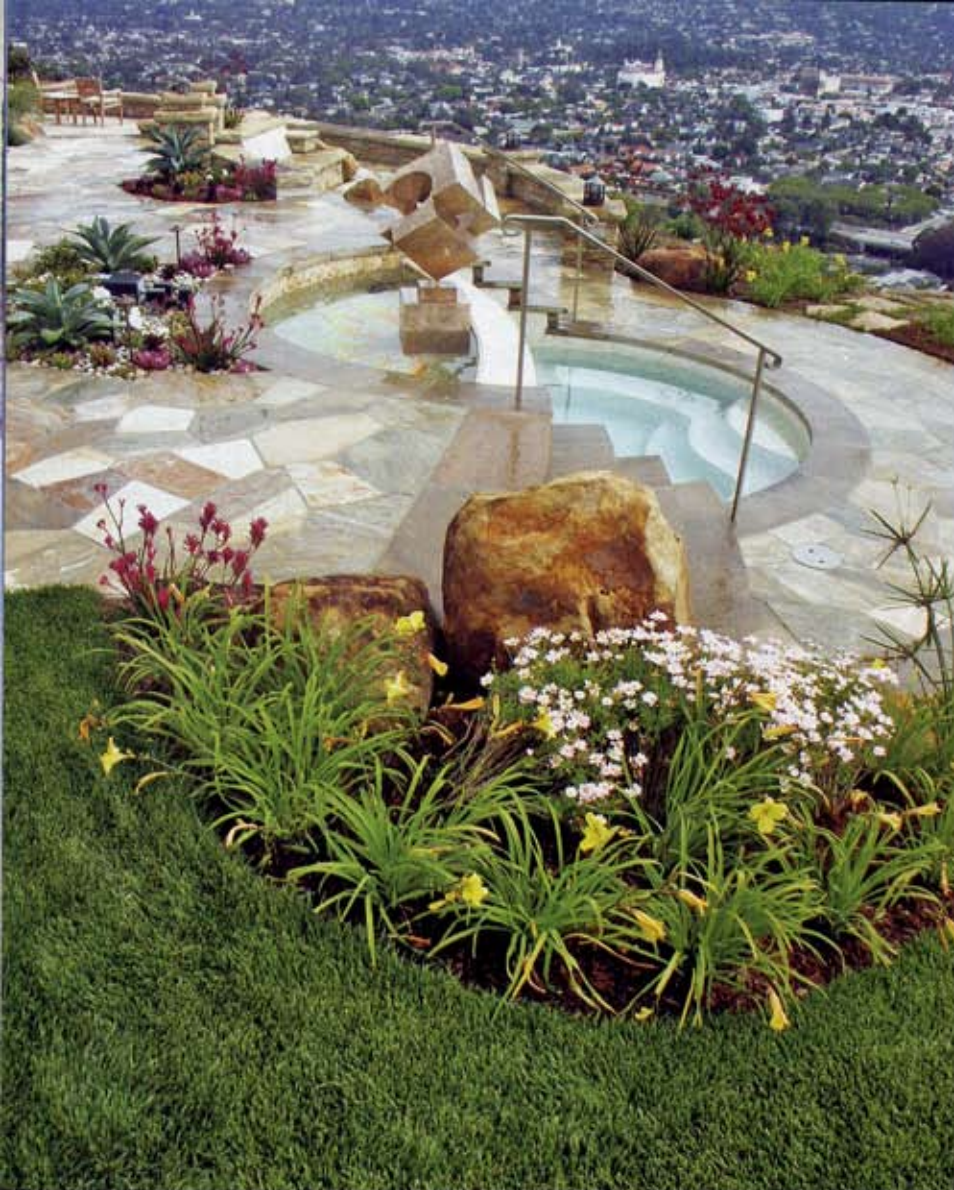
Planning for Guests

The Dreiers are socially active in the community and enjoy entertaining guests. They are philanthropists, and volunteer their time and resources with a number of causes. As a result, planning for social events was a big design consideration. This, combined with maintaining and appropriately capturing all of the dramatic views, contributed to each outdoor room. The outdoor rooms were weaved together

One has to pay attention to the natural circulation routes and allow additional patio space to create cozy nooks where people can sit and relax and not feel that they're in the way. In addition, these nooks and bulb-outs need to relate to the adjoining house interiors.

Below: The boulders here are local Santa Barbara sandstone, each carefully mortared in place and coordinated with an underlying series of engineered base slabs, grade beams, caissons and elaborate drainage system to respect the steep adjacent slope. PHOTO BY TOM BURT





Above: Small drought-tolerant, succulent plantings are utilized to break up the expansive patio space without compromising key views. Water runs from the sculpture (at center) along a curved weir pool directly into the spa. Iron handrails keep guests safely out of the pool and spa while climbing the stairs on either side.

PHOTO BY TOM BURT

with a very organic and amoeba-like flow in which the undulating terraces reached out to create a series of cozy spaces.

Santa Barbara has a fine selection of professional contractors, trade craftsman and artisans. Custom home projects require collaboration between many trades and professional consultants. During construction I was present on almost a daily basis to meet with the various trade contractors to further discuss, interpret and refine the intent of the drawings.

Contractor Joe Campanelli was instrumental in keeping the various trade contractors coordinated and focused.

There was significant re-contouring of the slope to help lay the groundwork for the stepway that parallels the driveway. I had to fight to convince the foundation contractors to undulate the forms to create a natural progression up the slope rather than a straight shot like an escalator. (Although an escalator or rope tow might have required less exertion to get from a car to the front door.)

Here Comes the Sun

Ginni has a real love for art with the sun as a symbolic element. As a result, I kept my eyes open for bold and subtle ways to incorporate a nod to the Sun God. Suns showed up in a number of forms, shapes and sizes and materials. My contributions included a ceramic tile mural in the spa, a sandblasted sun inlay into the quartzite stone pavers, a large monochromatic sun pattern in the motorcourt, a travertine mosaic and a handpainted design above the mantel of the outdoor fireplace.

When designing outdoor seating areas, one has to pay attention to the natural circulation routes and allow additional patio space to create cozy nooks where people can sit and relax and not feel that they're in the way. In addition, these nooks and bulb-outs need to relate to the adjoining house interiors.

Likewise, the movement in the perimeter edge had to respond to the fact that the property sits on top of a hill, so that one edge of the patio has to be carefully engineered with a series of caissons poured to pin the patio in place—so it doesn't slide down the hill. I had to be very careful (with both of the hardscape and landscape design) to respect the slope's top edge and make decisions that would not compromise the stability of the edge.

One *Melaleuca leucadendra* (paperbark tree) was craned in and placed to provide a sense of protection from the shade and the wind, in the only spot where its location would not block any dramatic views. I changed the location from the one on the plan in order to find that perfect spot.

The backyard's seat wall was placed along this edge and is highlighted along its length with

The outdoor rooms were weaved together with a very organic and amoeba-like flow in which the undulating terraces reached out to create a series of cozy spaces.



Above: The home's driveway and front entrance is Golden River quartzite stone. The low garden walls, garage and front entry surround are veneered with Cherokee Creek, a stone from Oklahoma that has proven to be a good material choice in Santa Barbara since it resembles the local native sandstone. PHOTO BY TOM BURT



Inset: Landscape Architect Fowler developed this pattern in conjunction with Mike Crookston of Pyramid MTM (the Masonry Contractor). Here is an example of the effectiveness and simplicity of using only one material (and by forming it to different rectangular and five-sided cuts). PHOTO BY ROBERT ANDREW FOWLER

Right: The end of the stepway is highlighted with succulent and flowering plantings, a midway stone wall (to rest along the way). Here you are greeted with sculptor Aris Demetrius' bronze sculpture and waterfeature—a pedestal and basin aligned with a sparkling emerald glass tile. PHOTO BY ROBERT ANDREW FOWLER





Left: The sun motif on the front driveway is complemented by this glass tile inlay, 12-foot-diameter backyard spa where one can sit and enjoy spectacular views of Santa Barbara's beaches and harbor area. The sculpture here is one of several bronze castings by local artist Aris Demetrius. The tree at left, *Melaleuca leucadendra* (paperbark tree), was craned in and carefully-placed to shield the area from sun and wind.

PHOTO BY TOM BURT

Below: Uneven edges let the natural, random border of the flagstone dictate the shape of the planter. White carpet roses add a bright note here. The wall at right is part of the top of the backrest cap to the sunken fire pit seating area.

PHOTO BY TOM BURT

rope lighting—with the source hidden under a “U” channel. The wall serves to allow large numbers people impromptu seating to enjoy the particularly dramatic view of Santa Barbara, while providing a protective edge to prevent people from tumbling down a long hillside.

Wrapping it Up

The finished home is unique in many ways. I was there one day and with some interest watched the sequence of seeing the beginning of a house fire, then watched the fire trucks leave the station, make their way some 20 city blocks till they arrived and squelched the blaze. I then realized that this property provides round-the-clock entertainment in many ways.

Chad and Ginni proved to be delightful clients. They expressed their excitement at the presentation of the overall design and again as the project came to life. They showed a genuine appreciation for many of the finer points and details.

As a designer, sensing that you are creating an environment that your clients (and their friends and family) enjoy is a very fulfilling and satisfying experience. It almost becomes part of the “designer’s high.” You sense that they will enjoy the product of your efforts day in and out for years to come.

This part of the job is truly priceless! 



Project Details

Owners: Chad & Ginni Dreier, Santa Barbara, Calif.

Landscape Architect: Robert Andrew Fowler, Santa Barbara

Architect: Pacific Architects – William Wolf, Santa Barbara

Structural Engineer: Thomas Long, P.E. Engineering, Santa Barbara

Interior Designer: Savage & Assoc, Inc.—Richard Savage, Los Angeles

Landscape Contractor: Plowboy Landscapes, Ventura, Calif.

Masonry Contractor: Pyramid M.T.M. – Michael Crookston, Santa Barbara

General Contractor: Campanelli Construction – Joe Campanelli, Santa Barbara

Sculptor: Aris Demetrius, Santa Barbara

Photographer: Tom Burt, Santa Barbara

Graphic Assistance: Lesley Wolf, Santa Barbara