

# Sunset

LIVING IN THE WEST | HOME | TRAVEL | FOOD | GARDEN

## Our best side dishes

Add new favorites to your Thanksgiving menu

Top 10  
fall color  
walks

Ginger-garlic Hawaiian turkey with sausage dressing and stir-fried brussels sprouts

Discover Zion National Park

Plant an easy-care border

Preview our House of Innovation

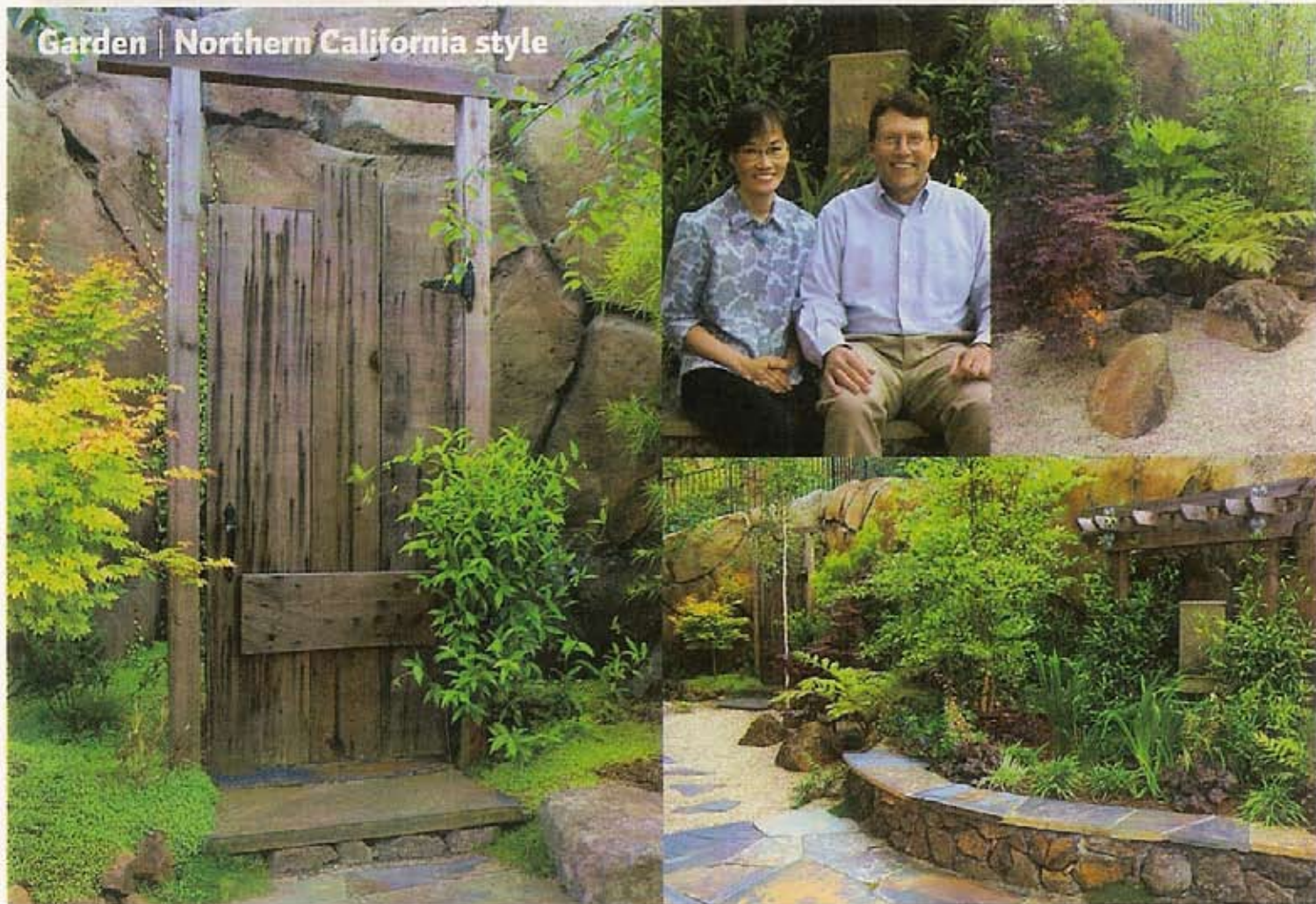
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\$4.99/\$6.50 in Canada

## Garden | Northern California style



## Serenity in the city

Lessons from a South San Francisco garden for making a small lot seem larger

BY DAVID C. BECKER PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROB D. BRODMAN

**THE SITE** had its challenges: a narrow backyard just 12 feet deep and 45 feet long, dominated by a huge retaining wall. Yet the garden behind Larry and Elaine's house in South San Francisco is so inviting you hardly notice the awkward layout.

To screen out the wall, landscape designer Katey Mulligan planted layers of greenery. Then she divided the yard into two outdoor rooms. On one side is a patio and seat wall, both paved with slate. Trees, shrubs, vines, and perennials create a woodland backdrop; a fountain bubbles beneath a redwood arbor. The other "room" is paved with gravel and accented with mossy rocks, scattered to look as though they've tumbled down from the retaining wall. River birch, Japanese maple, and mayten are open enough to let precious sunlight through their branches.

**INFO** Design: Liquidambar Garden Design, San Francisco ([www.liquidambar.biz](http://www.liquidambar.biz) or 415/613-5976). Contractor: The Village Gardener ([www.thevillagegardener.com](http://www.thevillagegardener.com) or 650/592-9440).

### Four great ideas from this garden

**1. Think tall.** To give a flat, confined garden a greater sense of dimension, add vertical interest. Mulligan erected an arbor in front of the retaining wall to screen the imposing wall and frame the fountain.

**2. Add illusion.** If your garden feels hemmed in by walls, build a false door. Mulligan made one from rough-hewn recycled redwood and put it against the retaining wall at the wall's highest point; it gives the appearance of space on the other side.

**3. Limit the color palette.** The slate that Mulligan used to pave the patio and cap the seat wall picks up the bronzy tones of the retaining wall. Similarly, the plants she chose have foliage of burgundy, bronze, and rosy pinks among the greens.

**4. Use tough plants.** Skillfully arranged, they're often the best choices for busy homeowners. Mulligan used daylilies, heuchera, liriopé, and, in the sunniest part, Spanish lavender. "There are no precious plants in this garden," she says. ■

**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT** *Acer palmatum* 'Sango Kaku' and star jasmine, underplanted with baby's tears, frame the recycled-redwood "mystery door" that fronts the retaining wall; Elaine and Larry Barney; *A. palmatum* 'Bloodgood', Australian tree fern, and birch bring the tall retaining wall down to scale; the gently curving raised bed is filled with plants such as daylilies, liriopé, and bronze-leafed heuchera.