



Bruce Gregga and  
William Laman's  
classic garden retreat

# Designing Duo

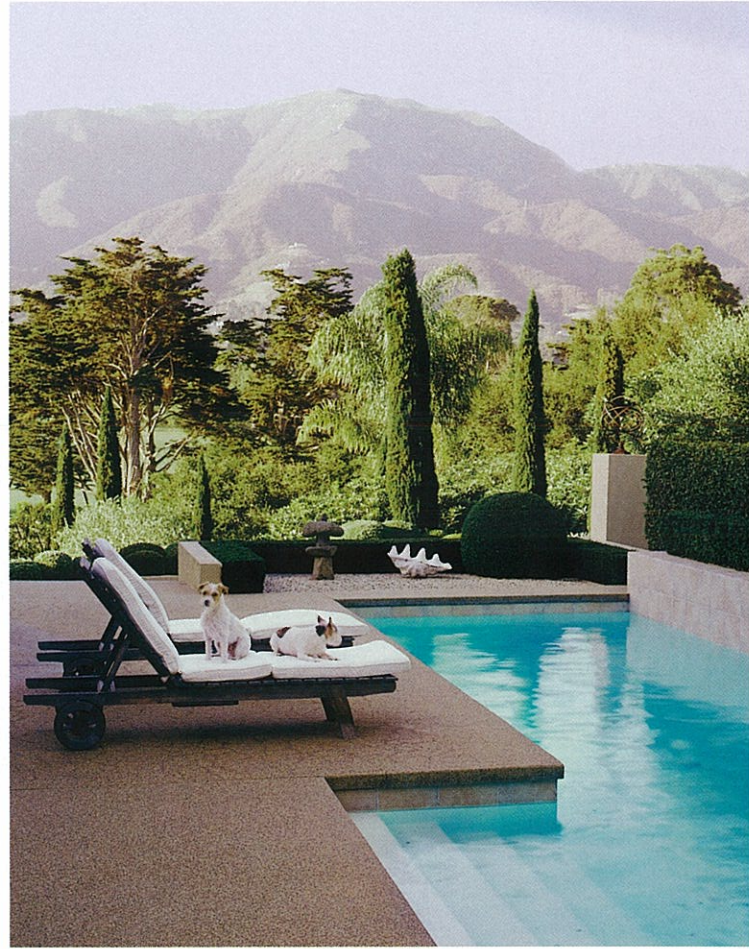
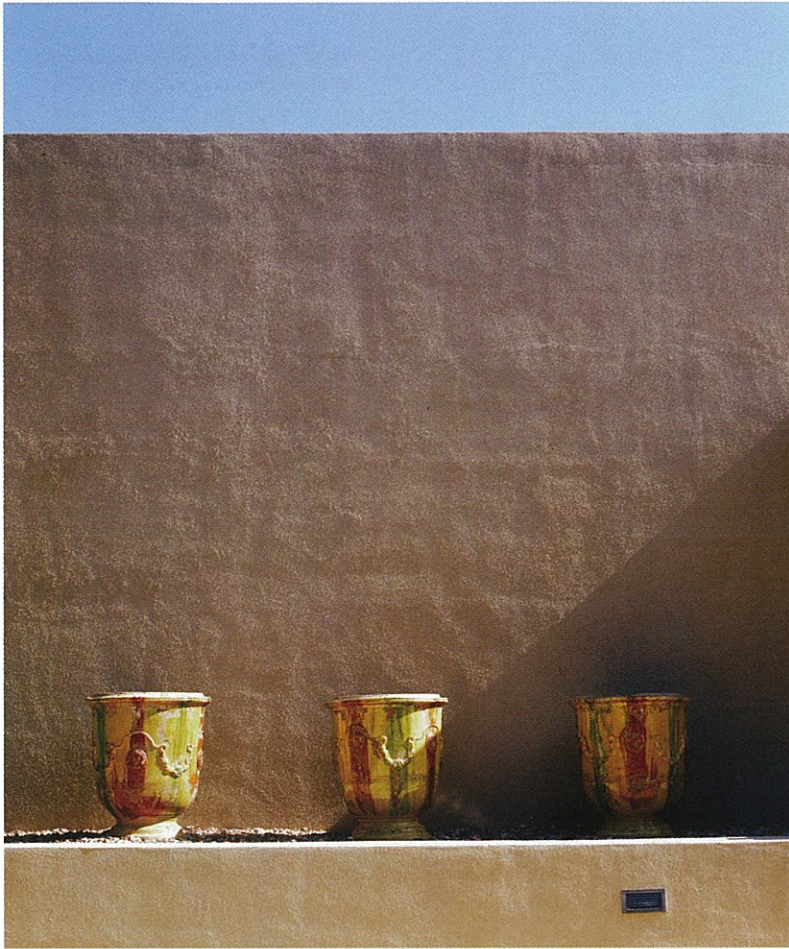
BY DALE KERN PHOTOGRAPHS BY VICTORIA PEARSON



**THIS PAGE** Bruce Gregga and William Laman (on terrace) have created a home that's all about understated elegance and livability. **OPPOSITE PAGE** A bronze bird and contemporary claw-footed Italian stone fountain add a note of serenity to the garden.







**“THE NEED TO DESIGN HAS BEEN IN MY SYSTEM SINCE I WAS SIX YEARS OLD,” SAYS WILLIAM. “IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN MY FIRST LOVE.”**

How do interior designers go about creating the spaces they inhabit themselves? Do they fashion their own home as a showplace to entice future clients? Or do they take the opposite tack and use their living spaces and gardens as a showcase for their unbridled creativity, taking risks and making design statements they would otherwise feel professionally obligated to restrain?

In the case of noted interior designer Bruce Gregga, whose tastefully sophisticated interiors have graced the pages of virtually every important design magazine for 35 years, the answer to how he approached the design of his Montecito home is not all that surprising. “The way the house sits on the land, how the rooms are laid out, and the proportions are the first step in determining how I approach any project—a client’s or my own,” says Bruce. “The style of a house also determines how you deal with it, to some extent. I bought this house because it has the contemporary look that I personally like, with its high ceilings and expansive walls that are great for hanging large

pieces of art.” (It was originally built on spec by Warner & Gray Inc. Architects, a local firm.) Bruce, who’s only the second owner of the house, notes, “Luckily, not too many people have had a chance to destroy the integrity of the design, as unfortunately happens when houses get renovated. Then, of course, there was the lure of that pretty impressive view.”

While most people perceive the ultimate Santa Barbara vista as an unending vision of the Pacific Ocean, this house sits on a site with a pastoral panorama of the Valley Club golf course, with its sprawling manicured fairways, yawning cypress and ancient oak trees, all framed by magnificent mountains and a sky-blue backdrop. Ironically, proximity to the golf course wasn’t a selling point for either Bruce or his partner, William Laman. In fact, in the seven years they’ve lived in the house, neither has ever teed off at the members-only club. “We’re not golfers,” they note.

Bruce and William (who owns William Laman Antiques, the chic boutique in Montecito’s Upper Village), purchased **▶▶ PAGE 204**



**THIS PAGE** The severity of the paths are softened by precisely manicured rosemary poufs in raised, concrete planters, and spiky cypress. **OPPOSITE PAGE** A trio of uniquely glazed French Anduze pots flank the entry wall to the home. Jack Russell Terriers Buster and Maizie hold court poolside.







**THIS PAGE** A charming French stone poulet planter holds hens and chicks succulents. **OPPOSITE PAGE** Granite paths are flanked at each end by tall zinc obelisks, while bountiful bushes of iceberg roses complement fretwork chairs and rosemary topiaries.





“THE WAY THE HOUSE SITS ON THE LAND, AND THE PROPORTIONS ARE THE FIRST STEP IN DETERMINING HOW I APPROACH ANY PROJECT,” SAYS BRUCE.

◀ PAGE 196 the house seven years ago, though it wasn't love at first sight. "I was out of town doing an installation," recalls Bruce. "So William saw the house first and he wasn't wild about it." Bruce saw the house in an entirely different light, however, knowing what he could do by moving a wall or two, enclosing an outdoor space and, of course, by filling the interior with some of the treasures that he had acquired over the years.

"The need to design has been in my system since I was six years old. It has always been my first love," he says, noting that he took on his first design venture "when I was in my teens. My mother went off to Ohio, and when she returned I had painted the dining room chairs white and covered the seats in a lime-green fabric." At first mom wasn't pleased, but eventually she got used to it, and the dining room stayed that way.

Before getting into the design business, Bruce worked in advertising in Chicago. Assisting on photo sets for Victor Skrebneski, a noted commercial photographer perhaps best remembered for his celebrated Estée Lauder advertisements from the '70s through

the '90s, Bruce's creative life took a decidedly positive shift as he soaked up all the glamour of that world. Then, one holiday season some 35 years ago, he visited Hollywood.

"My big Christmas gift that year was when I had lunch with George Cukor (director of *The Women*). He told me that his agent wanted him to sell the three cottages on his estate. Kate Hepburn was living in one (and had her trysts with Spencer Tracy there), one was rented out and one was vacant. Everything changed when I moved in there." Not long after relocating to the West Coast, Bruce found himself working on Hollywood set designs on the Samuel Goldwyn Studio lot. "I was happier than a pig in that proverbial you know what."

Soon he was developing a national reputation as an interior designer, with a signature look that juxtaposed contemporary and antique furniture, and classic and contemporary art, in rooms heightened with cool, livable colors. This look has served the designer well not only in his professional life, but in his home as well. His use of fine period antiques and ▶ PAGE 241







**THIS PAGE** The 19th-century French ormolu clock mirrors a contemporary pencil sketch of a camel, and a vintage French majolica dish. **OPPOSITE PAGE A** 1930s American Cubist painting hangs above a drop-leaf Queen Anne Chinoiserie desk, watched over by two Chinese porcelain bunnies. The Venetian leopard stool features a carved wood black Moor.





THIS PAGE A Staffordshire China rabbit and 19th-century Chinese porcelain vase rest on a Regency Chinoiserie lacquer tray table. OPPOSITE PAGE A 19th-century Chinese curved music stand doubles as a coffee table. The sofa is 1930s Danish and the painting is an American contemporary work from the 1970s.













THIS PAGE A rare carved stone antique sarcophagus from the Wright Luddington Estate is flanked by neatly trimmed box wood hedges. OPPOSITE PAGE Faux four-legged friends graze between the tall Mediterranean cypress.





## DESIGNING DUO

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furnishings, along with a brilliant collection of pre- and post-revolutionary Russian, modern and contemporary American art—and very personal pieces, such as the Botero painting he bought in Mexico in 1956 when he had very little money—form a design vocabulary recognizable as pure Bruce.

That signature style extends to the exterior of his home as well. “There wasn’t much here to begin with—except, of course, the view—and it certainly wasn’t in harmony with the existing landscape,” says Bruce of the original garden. The series of clearly defined, tiered spaces he created with talented local landscaper Sydney Baumgartner now lead the eye from the house to the garden, the golf course, the mountains and the sky beyond in one harmonious sweeping vision.

Rock steps, edged and traversed by

blooming thyme, lead to granite paths that together form a gradual decline to the edge of the golf course. Each tier features precisely manicured, geometrically shaped boxwood, pittosporum and rosemary hedges, plus olive, tangerine, lemon and orange trees planted as much for their fragrance as their beauty and fruit. There is always something blooming, starting in May and going well into winter—from a sea of purple jasmine to lavender, iceberg roses, creeping fig, Russian sage and white alyssum.

As might well be expected, there are several divine planters and imported ornaments in the garden, many of which can be found at William’s shop. Handsome lead planters house sumptuous hydrangeas. Japanese lanterns shed a lovely light on the occasional spherical lead ornament. French iron and Belgian

wood garden chairs, elegant in their simplicity, provide a site-specific view or a private reading area.

With all this beauty, one would imagine that Bruce and William would spend a lot of time enjoying their garden, but that is not the case. In fact, the two are in the process of moving on to another Montecito residence, having sold this one. Despite the fact that they made Montecito their permanent home three years ago, they do not feel tied to their homes or their possessions.

“At heart I am a whore,” says Bruce with a laugh. “Everything is for sale. I have a few things, like personal photographs, that are favorite things that I hold close to me. Stuff doesn’t matter. People you care about and good health are the things that matter in life.”

• Dale Kern is working on a book on roses.

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