



Clockwise from left: *Iris pseudoacorus* shares the pond with water lilies; *Brugmansia x candida* 'Double White' mingles with palo verde blooms; red spurge (*Euphorbia cotinifolia*), variegated California lilac and giant timber bamboo are a study in contrasts; a decomposed-granite path winds past 'Happenstance' and 'Cecelia' roses, pluming autumn moor grass and a vintage grapefruit tree. Opposite: Tumbling aeoniums and strappy yuccas create a foil for the sweeping curves of the house.



Like

so much in Hollywood, Michael Taylor's desert garden presents a stylized, romantic version of the truth, softer than the real thing, more richly colored, seductive rather than harsh. Its medley of succulents and sages, roses and palm trees befits a house that comes with its own screen-world story. Designed by William Kesling in 1936, in the streamline-moderne style inspired by the era's trains, cars and ocean liners, it was a pied-à-terre for character actor Wallace Beery, a sort of glorified studio trailer where he stayed while making movies. In 1999, Taylor, a TV writer-producer and an ex-New Yorker, bought the place as much for its old-Hollywood pedigree as for its towering palms and classic L.A. looks. "I love the fact that Beery threw parties and probably stashed his mistresses here," he exults, "and here it is still, one of the city's pockets of history."

To do his vision of it justice—and to get more use from his 50-by-100-foot lot—Taylor hired Venice Beach landscape designers Barry Campion and Nicholas Walker to punch up the neglected yard, a ratty grass carpet in front and a jungle of ailing trees and shrubs behind. Taylor's request: "Tie the landscape to the lines and forms of the architecture."

The designers began by editing the existing jungle, keeping one ruby grapefruit, an old avocado and two palo verde trees and relocating specimen succulents to the sunnier beds in


front. To heighten the drama, Campion and Walker added more succulents with contrasting shapes—flowerlike aeoniums, strap-leaf yuccas—and framed these static sculptures with drifts of rockrose, verbascum and sage.

Behind the house, where its glass walls overlook the outdoors, they poured an angled concrete aggregate patio and edged it with a koi pond and bubbling fountain. Next, to give Taylor shady places to wander through, they created woodland walks with paths of decomposed granite that circle beds of California lilac, roses and ornamental grasses. Another fountain, which jets up through a chiseled boulder, provides what Walker calls "a hidden destination," while a stand of giant timber bamboo screens the little refuge from a neighboring apartment house.

Of course, like any movie, a garden has its evolving plot. When the avocado tree—a lone survivor from an orchard older than Beery's house—sickened and died, the woodland was suddenly bathed in sun. For Taylor, the tragedy created opportunity. The added light allowed him to introduce desert succulents to his California woods, a bit of inspired casting that completes the made-in-Hollywood picture. 🍷

See Resources, last pages.

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Green-and-cream-striped *Aeonium* 'Sunburst' offers a variation on the theme of leaves that resemble flowers. Opposite: Against a backdrop of existing palm trees and a new Mexican weeping bamboo, Michael Taylor's front garden mixes the static forms of succulents (spiky yuccas and aloes, rosette-shaped aeoniums) with rustling masses of pink rockrose, cabbagelike verbascum and pink and blue sages (*Salvia* 'Takao' and *S. coahuilensis*).

CALIFORNIA

THIS EXTRAVAGANT DESERT GARDEN WAS DESIGNED TO COMPLEMENT THE CURVES OF A HOLLYWOOD HIDEAWAY.

NATIVES

