

# RIOS

By Abigail Stone  
Photos by Holly Lepere

The Moroccan room, created in collaboration with H el ene Aumont and on the site of the home's former greenhouse, is shaded by old-growth oak trees.



**ABOVE:** The lawn, which Read visually extended with a low water and drought ground cover called Myoporum parvifolium, is a majestic setting for a sculpture by Argentinian artist Adri an Villar Rojas. **BELOW:** The yoga deck, canopied by one of the property's old oak trees, is sited to take advantage of the view over the ocean.







**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** The azalea garden, designed by Lockwood de Forest III, is original to the property; fanciful balls of coastal rosemary and string gap, inspired by the work of Read's mentor, Nancy Goslee Power, nod to the deftly trimmed boxwood hedges in the Lockwood de Forest III garden room nearby; the home's outdoor shower, with its distinctive green wall, was created from weathered raw steel and designed in connection with the contractor; in the yellow garden, drought-tolerant plants were chosen for their ability to attract butterflies, bees and hummingbirds as well as for their golden color.



**WHEN HOMEOWNERS** of a four-acre legacy property in Montecito wanted to update the historic gardens while reducing water consumption, they enlisted renowned multidisciplinary design firm RIOS to spearhead the transformation. Perched on a hilltop overlooking the ocean, the estate showcased a formal garden created by Lockwood de Forest III surrounding a Spanish Colonial Revival home by George Washington Smith. "The project really proceeded in stages, very organically," says Elisa Read Pappaterra, RIOS' horticulture specialist. She'd visit the area every few months to check on its progress and curate the gardens. "Sometimes I'd find something at the nursery, or sometimes they'd say, 'What about we do something here?'"

Read let the environment lead her vision while navigating the clients' requirements—no bees by a new pool, a yoga deck positioned to capture the view and an area that showcased a piece by Argentinian sculptor Adrián Villar Rojas. The resulting design deftly navigates the tensions between whimsical and practical, formal and fanciful, predictable and surprising. "We have a mission statement at RIOS that every place has a story," she explains. "Collaboration is a big part of what we do. So the garden was about weaving together all these things—the people connected to the site, its history, the natural habitat, the seasons—and interpreting that in a way that is fun and modern."

Read simplified this area, ripping out the lawn and remodeling a former pond into a water feature with three bubblers and an interior lined with black Malibu tile.