

Award Winner
Art Integration

SUSTAINABLE DESIGN MASTERPIECE

By Bruce Fordyce

For Madrone Landscapes, Inc., a landscape design and installation contractor specializing in sustainable landscapes, this home provided the perfect palette to show off their design and installation prowess. This project was on a hilltop west of Paso Robles, California, located on a 2-acre site surrounded by oak woodlands and adjacent to the homeowner's vineyard.





Above: What looks like a lap pool is actually a Bocce Ball court with a low artificial turf surface. The patio is made of flagstone, pebble and decomposed granite. Madrone installed large boulder seats courtside to help retain the nearby berm. A large specimen Coastal Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) is perched on the crest of the hill framing the view of vineyards and oak woodlands.

Right: This dry creek was graded at a slight angle, to allow rainwater to soak in and feed the landscapes, but not so flat to allow water to pool. Palms near the house are Sago Palms (*Cycas revoluta*) and Windmill Palms (*Trachycarpus fortunei*). Near the dry creek are dwarf flax (*Phormium 'Tom Thumb'*), Yarrow (*Achillea 'Moonshine'*), Cape Rush (*Chondropetalum tectorum*), clumping Gazania daisies, Santa Barbara Daisies (*Erigeron karvinskianus*), and Provence Lavenders (*Lavandula i. 'Provence'*). All the creek plants are irrigated by pop-up low-flow rotor heads.

Left: The cacti are *Echinocactus grusonii*, or Golden Barrel Cactus. They are drip irrigated monthly in the summer, but are very drought tolerant. They repeat the theme of spherical elements that runs throughout the home and landscape. Lining the stairway to the entry courtyard are three colorful spheres, designed by the owners and constructed from fiberglass and automotive paint. Anchoring the spheres is a 20-foot specimen Ascolana olive craned in for the project.

Inset, Left: This kinetic sculpture's three appendages slowly spin in the wind, flanked by native plants surround the sculpture, including California Lilac (*Ceanothus 'Centinneal'*), 'Lord's Candle' (*Yucca whipplei*), Deer Grass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*) and Coyote Brush (*Baccharis 'Pidgeon Point'*), along with drought-tolerant Provence Lavender (*Lavandula 'Provence'*), and Sageleaf Rockrose (*Cistus salvifolius*).

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY MADRONE LANDSCAPES, INC.





Top: These large crows are cast sculptures 1-1/2 times natural size. A perfect match with this local boulder found near the site of the house. All of the boulders used in the landscape were from the surrounding hills and vineyards. A variety of tractors, reach-lifts and skid-steers were used in their placement.

Middle: In the background of the sphere fountain are Windmill palms (*Trachycarpus fortunei*), with *Agave parryi* in the strip planter.

Bottom: The view from the entry courtyard reveals the alignment of the French Lavender (*Lavandula dentata*) ground cover with the lines of the Almond orchard on the neighboring hillside. The courtyard pool and solid Cantera stone sphere were built by Blue Heron Pools. *Agave parryi* were planted in the planting strip, mulched by black Mexican pebbles. All plantings shown are automatically drip irrigated.



Besides integrating native plants, Madrone was also commissioned to integrate 12 striking pieces of contemporary art around the property. Rick Mathews and his wife Loren, as well as foreman and irrigation specialist Efrén Castro designed the project. They also brought in stone specialist Higinio Benetiz. "Over the years our main niche has been that of a sustainable landscape company. We are known for our company involvement, for taking our relationships with our clients seriously," declared Mathews. "This design was a collaboration that started with the homeowner's vision. We were working from a vague conceptual sketch, but all the planting material was chosen in collaboration with the owners."

The project took four months to complete, and is populated with drought-tolerant and native species plants, in addition to stonework that accent the art pieces. Madrone built terraces, dry creek beds and dry-stack retaining walls. Rocks and boulders were excavated from the vineyard and used around the home.

The bocce ball court, the flagstone patio and the stairs descending from the back of the home to the court, are all major features. The patio and stairs constructed inside of steel frames made by the homebuilder are covered in decomposed granite, Three Rivers flagstone and Mexican beach pebbles were also used. "We sifted the DG to a fine texture, compacted it and added a stabilizer called Poly-Pavement to make it less vulnerable to the weather," said Mathews, "We also made a diagonal grid of French lavender that matches the angles of the adjacent hillside."

"We brought in more than 200 lavender plants to match that." A variety of California natives and drought tolerant species were used, including deer grass, feature reed grass, native yucca barrel cactus, horsetail bamboo, red hot poker plant, rosemary, rock roses, olive trees, ceanothus and several varieties of lavender. To stabilize the slope, Madrone planted large swaths of coyote brush. Yarrow and Tom Thumb flax were planted along the area of the stairs and back yard. Mexican fan palms add the tropical feel, and Madrone added 67 coast live oaks in 72-inch boxes.

With a \$200,000 budget, the project presented a host of challenges for Madrone, including grading, planting and masonry work, as well as setting off the art pieces to best effect the home. The biggest challenge was making the big garden work with a limited water supply. "We had to calculate the water use carefully to make sure it fit within





Above: Steel frames form the stairs on the path down to the lower barbeque patio. The walking surface is a mixture of flagstone, Mexican beach pebbles and stabilized decomposed granite. The plants are a mix of natives (including *Ceanothus* 'Centennial', *Baccharis* 'Pigeon Point', *Salvia clevelandii* 'Winifred Gilman') and drought-tolerant Mediterranean species (including *Rosmarinus* 'Irene', *Lavandula intermedia* 'Provence', *Cistus salvifolius*, *Achillea* 'Moonshine') covering the slopes with 'creekside evocative' plants (including *Chondropetalum tectorum*, *Phormium* 'Tom Thumb') lining the path. Red Hot Pokers (*Knifophia uvaria*) form a grid-like planting on the slope just inside the entry court. The slope was shaped to continue the circular shape of the driveway. Locally-quarried granite 2-inch rock was used to cover the slope. In the background is the unique 10-foot tall sculpture, "The Contortion."

Right: The wall sculptures, titled "The Climbers," are a whimsical addition to a small courtyard, containing several cactus varieties (including the *Stenocereus thurberi*, shown), which add incentives "not to fall."

the delivery and recharge criteria. We didn't want to run their well dry, so it is largely a drip irrigation with only four circuits for MP rotators," explained Mathews.

The design of the house was inspired by Mexican architecture with a unique modern flair, emphasizing the beautiful views and transitioning seamlessly to the surrounding oak woodlands of Western Paso Robles. The home was designed by the owners and architect Steven M. Dewan, and built by Woodruff Construction of Templeton, California. The project was an award-winning example of implementing the concepts of sustainability with style. 

