

## A magical backyard, by day and night

Milton Davis and Madeleine Arel-Davis took an active role in turning their garden into a dramatically lighted, yet tranquil, sanctuary

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Some people rely on professional landscapers to make all the decisions during a garden renovation. Others, like Milton Davis and Madeleine Arel-Davis, seek a firm that will accept their input. They found **Suzanne and Mike Morrison of Earthscapes**, who encouraged their active participation in the design process.



As an occupational therapist who counsels individuals with visual loss and other disabilities, Madeleine is sensitive to accessibility issues. And although they are both able-bodied presently, the couple intends to remain in their Grover Beach house into retirement. The house met their requirements, but the garden needed work.

The previous owner, a photographer, had created various garden vignettes as backgrounds for portraiture. It appeared old-fashioned, was labor-intensive and



suffered from neglect. Madeleine and Milton envisioned their garden as a private sanctuary—contemporary and artistic, with sinuous lines rather than hard angles.

With a background in theatrical lighting and sound, Milton currently designs lighting-controlled electronics for the entertainment industry, including

several Las Vegas casinos. He perceived this garden renovation as an opportunity to integrate similar lighting techniques in a domestic setting.

After the Earthscapes crew cleared away the old garden in February 2006, Milton and Madeleine laid out the area to be paved. They also delineated a raised planting bed that would allow plants to thrive over a



problematic underground drainage culvert. Using a trial-and-error technique, they marked lines on the bare earth, then went indoors to view it through the windows, going back and forth until they were satisfied with the shapes. The curvaceous and spacious patio extends from the front gate to a backyard Jacuzzi.

Madeleine selected plants from a list Suzanne Morrison supplied, intentionally keeping the palette simple: verbena, penstemon, lavender and rosemary predominate. Two Australian willows (*Agonis flexuosa* “After dark”) add height and drama to the raised bed. Next to the house, young lilacs exude their evocative scent, and the soft rush, *Juncus effusus* “Carman’s Japanese” shimmers in the breeze.



After dark, the garden becomes a magical environment. Milton’s LED-based color lighting system can be programmed into various patterns. Currently, each light fixture rotates individually

through a rainbow of colors, washing the patio and plants in hues that change at an almost imperceptible pace. Visitors are mystified and enchanted.

During construction, Madeleine and Milton shopped for garden accents. The trio of basalt columns came from Santa Barbara Stone. They call the lowest one their “meditation seat.” The taller columns are secured with stainless steel pins. An uplight embedded in the concrete among them illuminates their rugged surfaces. A painted concrete fountain from High Tide Nursery in Shell Beach was placed opposite the back door, so its sinuous waterfalls can also be enjoyed from indoors.



The garden gate was more complicated. They wanted it to conceal the garden but to foreshadow its style. They found a woodworker, David Sipos of Ojai, to craft the frame. But they had to search the Internet to find the right metal artist, Tony Viscardi of Kentucky. The project required countless three-way e-mails, but the finished product is exactly what they had envisioned — just like the rest of the garden.