

THE GLAM GARDENER
Molly Wood is a model-turned-green thumb who designs vibrant outdoor spaces for clients as far away as Kuwait and runs her namesake showroom in Costa Mesa.



GREEN GODDESS

FORMER MODEL MOLLY WOOD'S GOT AN EYE FOR DESIGN, BUT IT'S YOUR YARD—NOT YOUR WARDROBE—THAT'LL PIQUE HER INTEREST.

By Wendy Bowman | Portrait by Melissa Valladares

“To personalize your outdoor space, garden designer Molly Wood suggests placing some one-of-a-kind objects—perhaps things you’ve picked up through your travels—in strategic places. They make for great eye candy.”

Molly Wood's love for garden design blossomed when she was a child—she's the product of a mother who wouldn't let her daughter become a couch potato. “If it wasn't raining, I couldn't watch TV, so I was forced to be outside,” says Wood, a Cali native who spent her time outdoors building forts, and constructing bicycle and dog courses. She had no idea that she was laying the groundwork for her career as a garden designer. She founded Costa Mesa-based Molly Wood Garden Design (mollywoodgardendesign.com) in 1995 (after working as a model in places like Milan, Barcelona, Hamburg and Zurich) and has since garnered plenty of accolades, including a Stars of Design award from L.A.'s Pacific Design Center. She also landed on *Western Interiors* magazine's Gold List as one of the West Coast's most influential landscape designers. She's completed more than 500 projects throughout O.C.—and that's not including work she's done for clients in places like Montecito, Rancho Santa Fe and even Kuwait.

When it comes to outdoor living spaces, Wood knows what's trending. But you've got to start with the basics. To be complete, every outdoor space must have three elements—shade,



water noise and comfortable furniture. From there, you can add personal touches and play into current trends. And this summer, fountains, custom birdbaths, brightly colored pots, pillows and fire pits are what's hot.

“I've come to the conclusion that we are all pretty much cave people. If we have fire, and we have water, we're good to go,” she says. “It's like a cultural anthropological study—you have a party, and you have a backyard with a fire pit, and everyone just goes right there to the fire pit.”

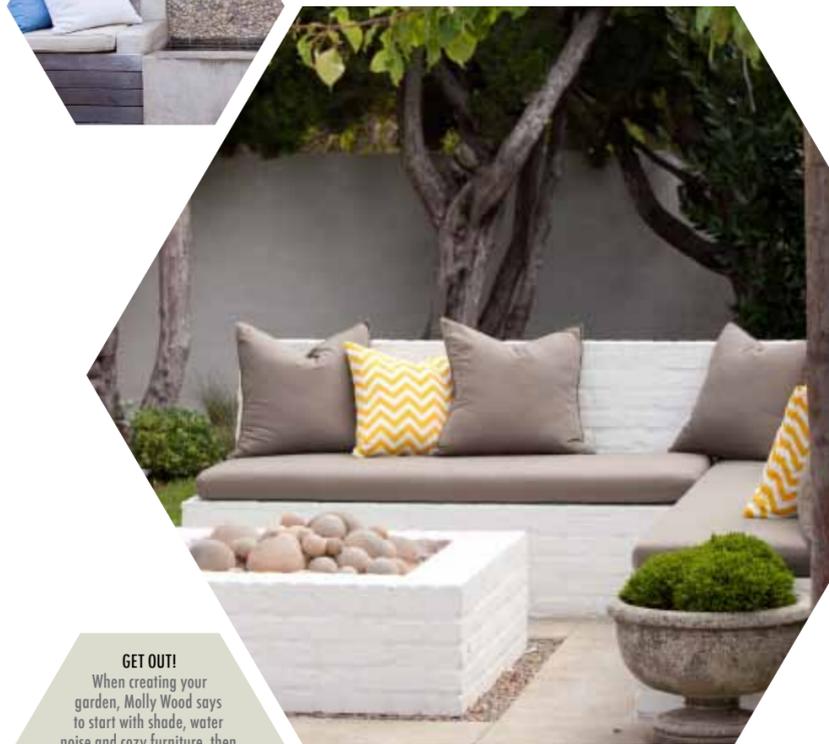
Instead of full lawns, Wood likes using sod plantings with gravel landing spaces—together, they add texture and visual interest to an outdoor retreat, and they require less water. “It's not just getting rid of something,” she notes. “It's creating something new. You can put in tables and chairs, and create a dining space. You can add a bocce ball court. ... It's just another space where you can hang out.”

Other popular lawn substitutes: vegetable and herb gardens. Wood—who, after studying art history at the Academy of Arts in San Francisco, honed her gardening skills at Laguna Gardens Nursery—says lettuce, basil, tomatoes and tiny carrots can all be cultivated in something as unexpected as a whiskey barrel that's been hooked up to irrigation. Or, she adds, try raising a box planter above the ground, placed over gravel, and adding benches around it for seating—herbs and veggies will do well in that setting. “People are really getting into it,” she says. “And compost goes along with that.”

To personalize the space, Wood advises clients to place one-of-a-kind objects—perhaps things they've picked up through their travels—in strategic places. They make for great eye candy. She carries a lot of unique finds in her showroom as well. In addition to furniture, pottery and plants, she's got a great collection of eclectic accessories and treasures she's found on her annual buying trips. She's acquired tables made of driftwood and other materials (including one fashioned out of an orange cage), rope chairs, spheres and balls, and lots of small items like ginger jars and Tibetan offering bowls that are made of beautifully carved wood.

It doesn't matter where all those garden elements originated from—the end result is what makes up what Wood calls “California style.”

“It's kind of sophisticated casual. ... Most importantly, it just has to work,” she says. “We want to live outside because we can. It's just so accessible for us, and there are still so many people who don't tap into that opportunity. We're very grateful for a beautiful day and to [be able to] go outside. It's a pretty darn good place to be a garden designer.”



GET OUT!
When creating your garden, Molly Wood says to start with shade, water noise and cozy furniture, then layer in details and trends—think textural elements, birdbaths, fountains, fire pits, one-of-a-kind objects and pottery.

