Garden for all ages

A family creates a dream landscape full of whimsical details and multigenerational appeal in California’s San Bernardino Mountains

BY SHARON COHOON PHOTOGRAPHS BY JACK COYER

In the kitchen garden, summer crops such as strawberries and tomatoes thrive in eight redwood raised beds, each 3 feet wide and 12 feet long. A teak bench provides a place to relax between chores. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Stone gathered on-site cloaks an entry pillar; a snake-inspired path of flagstone slithers down the slope to the greenhouse; Richard and Elizabeth Krumwiede in the shade of an arbor; a fountain bubbles on the patio.
Imagine the life you want when you grow up. That's the assignment Richard Krumwiede was given when he was in high school. Richard envisioned marriage, children, owning a successful business, and—because he grew up under the shadow of California's Mt. Baldy and loved its forests—living in the mountains. Today, married with two children, he owns his own landscape architecture firm, Archterra Design Group, and he has the home and garden of his dreams—Sycamore Ranch, in California's San Bernardino Mountains.

Set in a gently sloping valley, bisected by a seasonal stream and surrounded by forest, the property gives Richard an opportunity to put his favorite landscape design principles to use. "I believe in giving people as many reasons to go outside as possible," he says.

To complement the mountain landscape, cobbles and boulders collected on-site are used for walls and garden accents

Gardening was an early love that drove much of Richard's progress toward his goals; while still in high school, he started a landscape-maintenance business that paid his way through college, where he picked up a degree in landscape architecture. He worked for others, then broke away to start his own firm. His wife, Elizabeth, joined the adventure early. "She married me when I was still a gardener," he says fondly.

On the couple's 3 1/2 acres, Richard developed a half-acre into a series of garden rooms, including an entertainment patio with a fountain and firepit, a raised-bed vegetable garden, and a children's play "island." Another acre consists of an apple orchard (where, every fall, the Krumwiedes host a cider-pressing party). The remaining property is covered by native oak and woodland.

To complement the surrounding mountain landscape and capture the essence of its forested peaks and hollows, Richard used cobbles and boulders collected on-site for walls and pilasters as well as garden accents. And he chose more than 30 species of native plants—including bush anemone, ceanothus, flannel bush, and California fuchsia—for continuity between the garden's designed areas and the native woodlands.

Outdoor rooms for fun and function

When the Krumwiedes bought Sycamore Ranch, the backyard was bowl-shaped and collectable water. "It was a real mud pit and basically unusable," says Elizabeth. Richard transformed the space into a full-scale outdoor room. At one end near the house, a dining area is sheltered under a shade pergola; at the other...
A stone-covered seat wall with brick cap sweeps around the fountain (beyond the light pillar at right) and leads to the firepit area, a favorite gathering place on cool evenings. Eldorado Stone cloaks the firepit, while yellow daylilies, columbines, and other summer bloomers brighten the slope behind.
end, a seat wall hugs a firepit. A water feature forms a focal point between the two spaces. The firepit keeps the area cozy nearly year-round, despite the property’s 4,500-foot elevation. “Winter is the only time we aren’t out there,” Richard says.

The spot known as Snake Island is a multigenerational playground. From the house, only a glimpse is visible—a bit of roof tower poking up through the trees. But walk down the path through the apple orchard, cross over a bridge, and you stumble upon a sight straight out of The Swiss Family Robinson: a two-story tower with an observation deck above, shaded seating below, a pair of swings on one side, and a slide ending in a cushioned landing on the other. Richard scaled the tower to appeal to adults as well as kids, and appeal it does. “My guests can’t resist the swings,” he says. “A lot of them try the slides too.”

The kitchen garden—an orderly grid of raised redwood beds—is inside a framework of picket fences and gated stone arbors that are draped in summer with hops and climbing roses. It was one of the first improvements Richard made to the garden. “Watching things grow had such an impact on me as a kid, I wanted my children to have the same experience,” he says. The whole family tends the crops, but Elizabeth probably reaps the most pleasure. “I love telling dinner guests everything came from our garden,” she says.

Preserving the land’s agricultural history was also important to Richard. (Remnants of apple orchards dating from the ‘30s grow on most of the properties in the area.) He nursed back to health 9 wizened apple trees that clung to life on his piece of land, then planted 25 more on the old terraces. He also put in dozens of peach and pear trees and several rows of raspberries. “We may not be able to grow tropicales here,” he says, “but we get enough chill hours to grow any stone fruit we want.”

The only drawback to such an alluring outdoor living space is that it can be hard to leave. “When we come back from a vacation, we sometimes wonder why we took it,” Richard says. “It’s like we’re already living in a mountain resort.”

Lessons from this garden

Here are four cleverly designed details that make the Krumwiedes’ property look and feel like a mountain getaway.

**FOUNTAIN AS FOCAL POINT** The water feature provides a great view from the dining room indoors, the dining nook outdoors, and the firepit seating area. Water spills from a brass fountain-head surrounded by a mosaic of Italian glass tile and gold leaf, continues through a tile-lined runnel, cascades into a lower basin, and bubbles back up again through a stone sphere.

**ARTFUL PATH** The multi-generational play area needed a path to make it easier to maneuver wheelbarrows from the top of the slope to the bottom, where the children’s garden and greenhouse are located, and back again. But Richard thought the ramp should also be fun; he dreamed up the rattlesnake motif that gave the space its nickname. The snaky path is made of hand-cut flagstone inset with “rattles” of lavender quartz.

**GREENHOUSE** The snake path to the lower end of Snake Island leads to a greenhouse used by the family during the colder winter months. Son Andrew Krumwiede propagated native plants here and sold them to neighbors, earning enough to buy a laptop.

**BUILT-IN SEATING** Though their entertainment patio isn’t huge, the Krumwiedes can host large parties here because of all the seating designed into the space. The whole length of the retaining wall provides seating (though the area that curls around the firepit may be the most coveted perch).