

# THE STRUCTURAL APPROACH

A landscape renovation team follows cues from a Rancho Santa Fe home's architectural elements

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When Alan and Mary Schulman bought a house in The Bridges at Rancho Santa Fe, they planned to give it what Mary calls “a facelift.” As so often happens, one thing led to another and the project turned into a major renovation. The landscaping became a collaborative endeavor that included landscape architect Greg Hebert, interior designers Paul Allen Wehsener and Shannon Crane Wehsener, general contractor Parker Piner, and the homeowners.

Early on, Alan also enlisted the services of an arborist to bring ailing tipu trees back to life. Native to South America, the threes had attracted Alan to the property; and he was not about to let them go.

“My husband will not take a tree down, period,” Mary says.

Past 10 evenly spaced strawberry trees in the wide driveway, two tipus flank the grid-patterned, teak entry door into the courtyard, where four more tipus offer shade. But for the trees, the original space — an expanse of decomposed granite with some gardenias around the tipus — held little appeal.

“We knew we wanted a platform with a dining area and a water feature,” Mary says.

The landscape renovation team created architecturally driven exterior spaces in keeping with the squares and rectangles of the home's architecture and a poured-in-place concrete bench in the back yard.

**Tipu trees, ‘Cousin Itt’ and coprosma bring shade and greenery to the courtyard at Alan and Mary Schulman’s home in Rancho Santa Fe. Mother-in-law tongue lines a wall along the walkway to the front door. The concrete fountain was inspired by a bench in the back yard. The ipe dining deck floats above the ground.**





Above: Plantings along a switchback of stairs include white shrub roses, grevillea and false agave. To the right is an ipe pool deck for lounging. The back yard overlooks the golf course of The Bridges at Rancho Santa Fe.

Below: Agave 'Blue Glow' is juxtaposed with firecracker plant in a planting bed near the house.

Facing page: A pair of tipu trees flank the entrance into the courtyard. In front is a grid planting of strawberry trees.



In the courtyard, Parker conceived a fountain with poured-in-place, sandblasted concrete. Water spills from a bronze bowl onto a concrete block with brass runnels on all sides that spill water into a concrete-edged basin lined with bronze-colored, glass mosaic tile. Behind the fountain is a concrete-slab table with a teak base and benches sitting on a hand-mitered ipe deck.

"Part of our directive from Alan was to not harm the trees, so the deck floats above the dirt [away from tree roots]," Greg says. "The ipe is important to break up the look of concrete and stone."

Around the courtyard, coprosma and grassy-fronded *Acacia cognata* 'Cousin Itt' (mini river wattle) grow amid a mulch-covered field. Next to the house, mother-in-law tongue (*Sansevieria* 'Bantels Sensation') provides contrast.

Squares of salmon quartzite flagstone surrounded by gravel form a generous walk-

way to the front door, where echeveria hybrids and fishhook senecio (*Senecio radicans*) fill a tall CORTEN planter. A similar planter sits in the back yard, edging a block of flagstone outside the back door. CORTEN also was used to surround a large planting bed in the back yard and for privacy walls along the side of the 3/4-acre property.

The design team replaced a row of plants in the back yard just outside a trio of floor-to-ceiling windows with a low-profile fountain edged in concrete and lined with the same blue glass tiles as used in the swimming pool; six bubblers are paired to center on each window.

"From the back door all the way down was completely demolished," Mary says, adding that the cracked pool was brought down to rebar. A wood deck around the pool was rotted. "You couldn't be barefoot on it without getting splinters," Paul says.



"I love the right angles and simplicity of design."

— GARDENS OF THE YEAR JUDGE JASON JARVIS



A new deck and stairs in ipe lead down to a strip of grass and concrete stepping stones to another sitting area in the shade of a California pepper tree and the infinity-edge pool that has a spa and Baja shelf on one end and an ipe deck for lounges at the other.

Alan wanted some grass for the couple's golden retrievers, Windy and Katie, who were accustomed to running around in the fenced 4 acres of Alan and Mary's previous residence. An element of grass also was important to visually tie the property to The Bridges at Rancho Santa Fe golf course visible below and to provide playing space for visits by Alan and Mary's granddaughter.

A few more steps down, a fire pit space offers unobstructed views (via a Plexiglas wall) down the wilderness-filled slope leading to the golf course. Following the theme, the fire pit comprises a block of sandblasted concrete. The flooring and built-in bench seating are made from ipe.

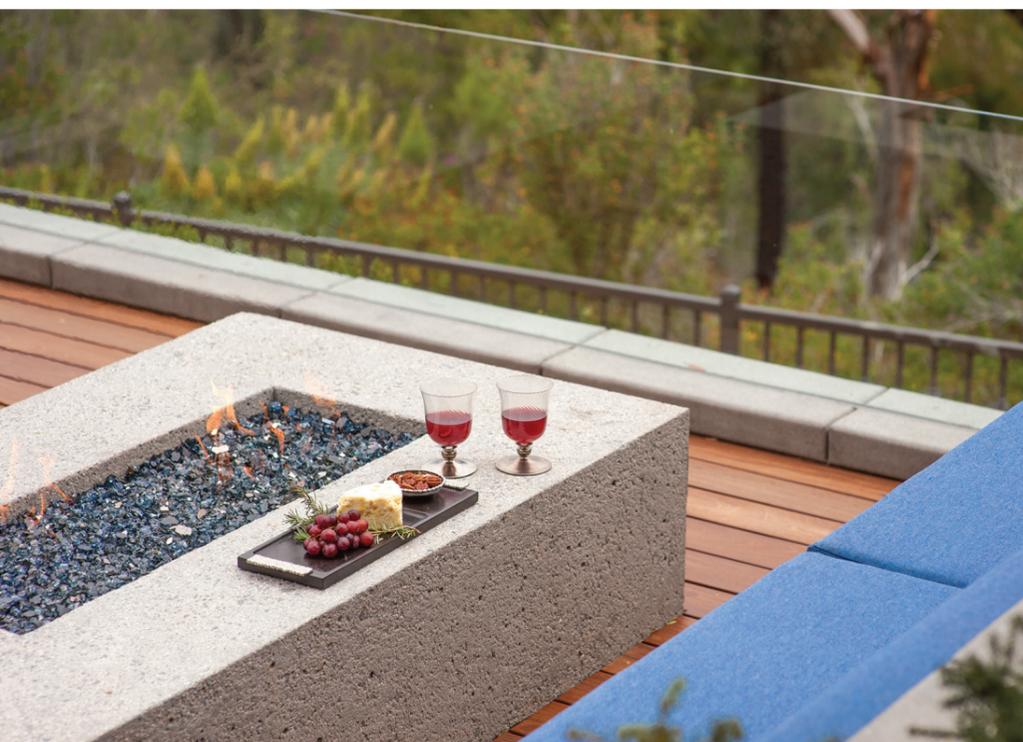
"Using fewer materials in repetition is more powerful than many materials in one setting," judge Sara Bendrick noted in her Gardens of the Year review. Judge Ciro Delgadillo was impressed by the combination of clean design, material selection and "great execution."

Alan takes the dogs for a walk along a lower-terraced, decomposed-granite pathway running the length of the back yard and edged with pumela vine along a metal fence.

"We planted California natives 5 feet on the other side of the fence to blend with the native open space — and to attract hummingbirds," Greg says.

Along a switchback maze of stairs leading back up to the yard, Greg planted white shrub roses, grevillea and false agave. This side of the yard also serves as headquarters for four citrus trees: clementine, lemon, lime and Valencia orange.

As with the deck in the courtyard, ipe serves as flooring on a backyard deck near the house (top) and for a fire pit (bottom) steps down from the pool/spa level (facing page). The sandblasted concrete of the fire pit matches blocks in the design of the courtyard fountain and barbecue area (shown on page 82).





Closer to the house but off to the side lies the relocated barbecue area. Though convenient in its former spot outside the kitchen door, Mary disapproved of its visual impact. “It wasn’t very feng shui,” she says.

In the new setup, the grill sits on a cantilevered block of Virginia Black granite. The sandblasted-concrete wall on which it is mounted conceals the grill from the back deck. Behind the grill are a CORTEX wall and concrete bench that provides the chef a sitting place with a backyard view.

Judge Jason Jarvis, who especially loved the barbecue and courtyard fountain, honed in on the “great concrete work” throughout.

The previously existing bench that served as inspiration for the landscaping sits between the barbecue area and the ipe deck. On one side is a flagstone patio with a container planting of *Draecena marginata* (requested by Mary). On the other side of the bench are a CORTEX-wrapped planting bed with a carrotwood tree and *Podocarpus alpinus* ‘Blue Gem’ and a smaller bed of agave ‘Blue Glow,’ *Aloe elegans* and firecracker plant.

“I love to come out and sit and talk on the phone,” Mary says. “The fire pit is our downtime, because it’s just so peaceful. It’s so nice being elevated from the golf course. You see it but don’t hear noise from it.”

Mary considers her new surroundings more usable than living on 4 acres.

“My kids are grown, so I don’t need the playground and the trampoline,” she says. “I don’t miss it at all. This is perfect. My husband is in heaven.” ❖

**Top:** A concrete wall conceals the barbecue grill mounted on a cantilevered block of granite. Behind the bench and farther down the side yard are CORTEX walls that provide privacy as well as a repeating design element.

**Bottom:** An existing concrete bench provided inspiration for the landscaping team. Beyond the carrotwood tree is a view of The Bridges at Rancho Santa Fe clubhouse below.

**Facing page:** Echevaria hybrids and fishhook senecio fill a CORTEX planter at the home’s front entrance.

