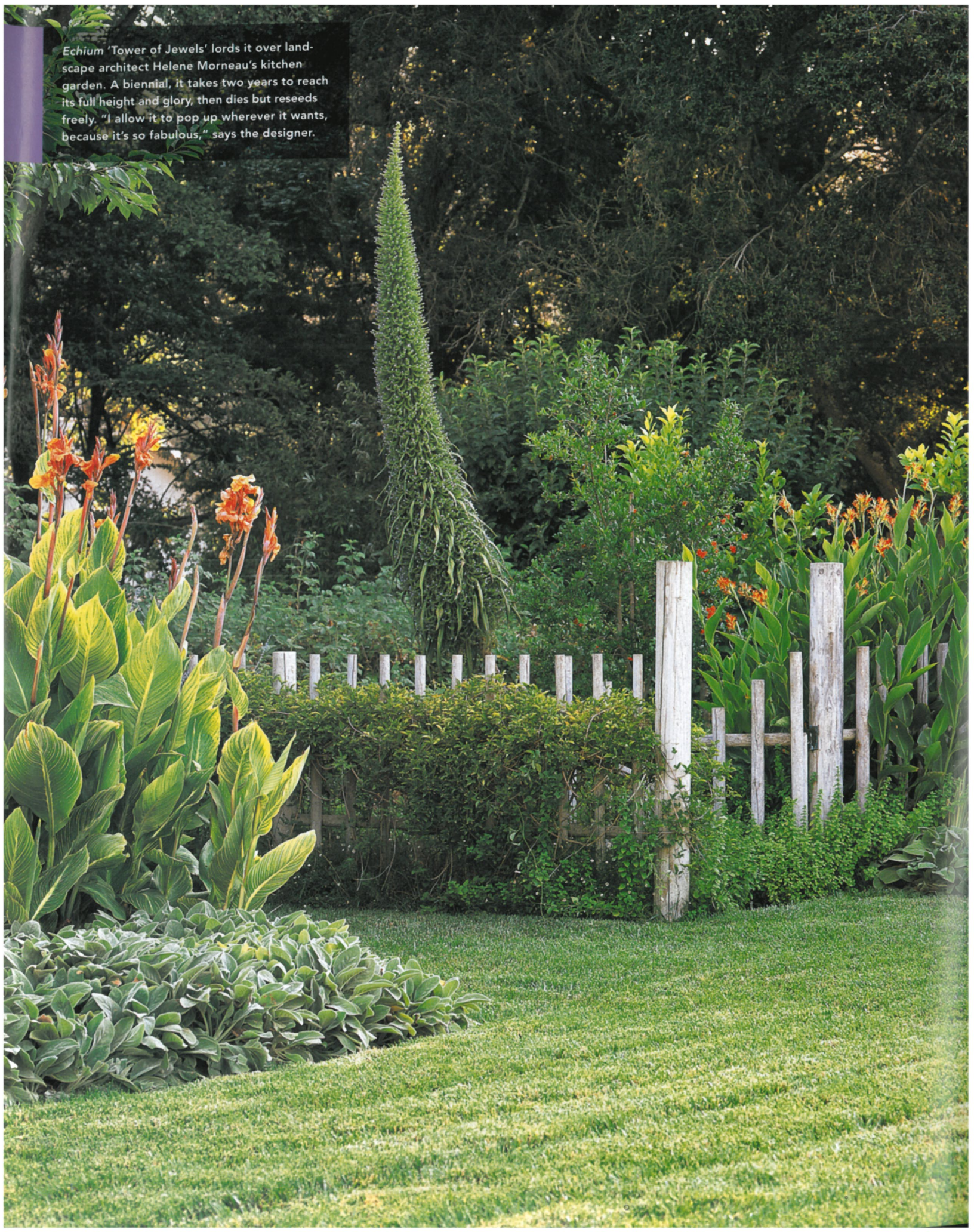


Echium 'Tower of Jewels' lords it over landscape architect Helene Morneau's kitchen garden. A biennial, it takes two years to reach its full height and glory, then dies but reseeds freely. "I allow it to pop up wherever it wants, because it's so fabulous," says the designer.





Rooms to Grow

Sonoma County's glorious weather inspired this gardener to start a new career—outdoors.

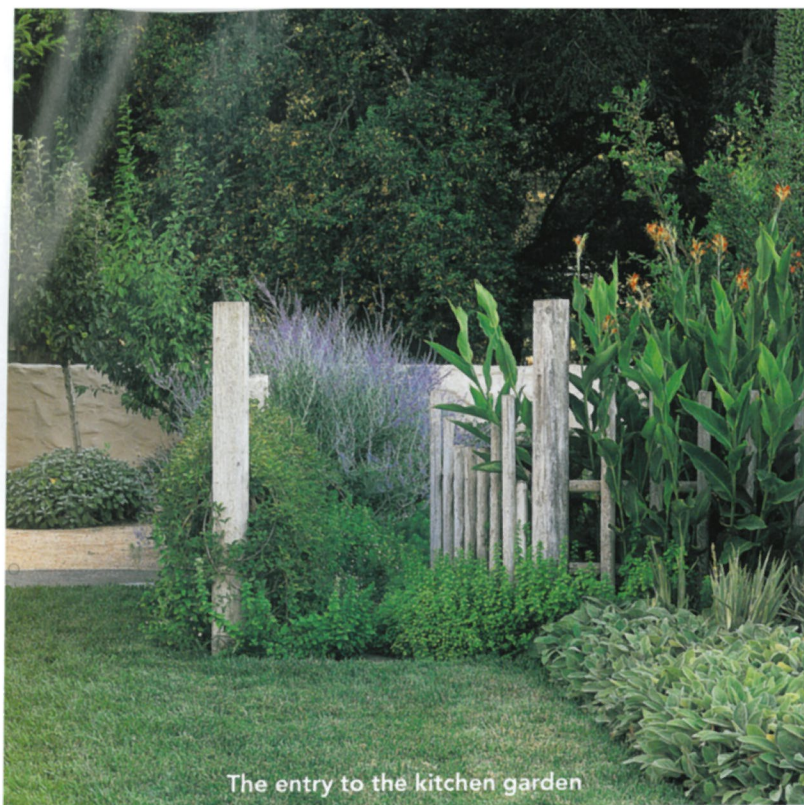
When Helene Morneau moved to California from Montreal 20 years ago, she sensed her teaching days were over. "In this climate, who could be inside all day?" she wondered. A former French instructor, Morneau began looking for a profession that would keep her outdoors. Horticulture classes soon led to a landscape architecture degree and then to her own business in landscape design, Exteriors.

Today, Morneau's own Sonoma County garden best illustrates her design approach, which welcomes serendipity but within a master plan. The three-acre property, purchased in 1988 with her partner, Bob Landman, was "big, barren and flat," with the soothing sound of a neighboring creek its best feature. "The challenge was how to divide the space so that it pulled you from one area to another," says the designer, a petite brunette with delicate features. To create allure, she envisioned the garden as a series of rooms, each one promising a discovery beyond.

"I laid it out like a house, with floor plans," says Morneau, "and as time and budget allowed, we added on."

The heart of the "house" is a 35-by-45-foot kitchen garden devoted to edibles and ornamentals that change with the season. A bed of spring tulips becomes the autumn squash patch. When the foxgloves fade, Mexican sunflowers take their spot. In the fall, spinach and chard replace the annual herbs, and the cut-flower border is planted with spring bulbs. In raised beds, Morneau grows two types of raspberries, providing fruit from June to November. Borders framing the beds house fragrant 'Casablanca' lilies, while golden oregano and dwarf euphorbia make relaxed ground covers that soften the crunchy gravel underfoot.

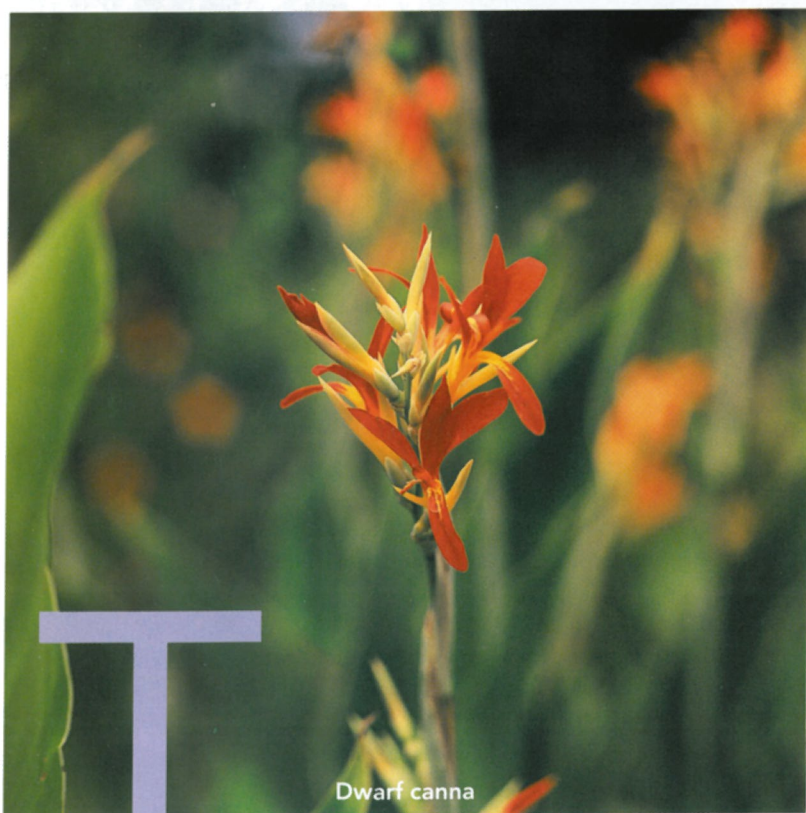
PRODUCED BY DIANE DORRANS SAEKS. PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARION BRENNER. WRITTEN BY JANET FLETCHER.



The entry to the kitchen garden



Hummingbird viewing post



Dwarf canna



Culinary herbs

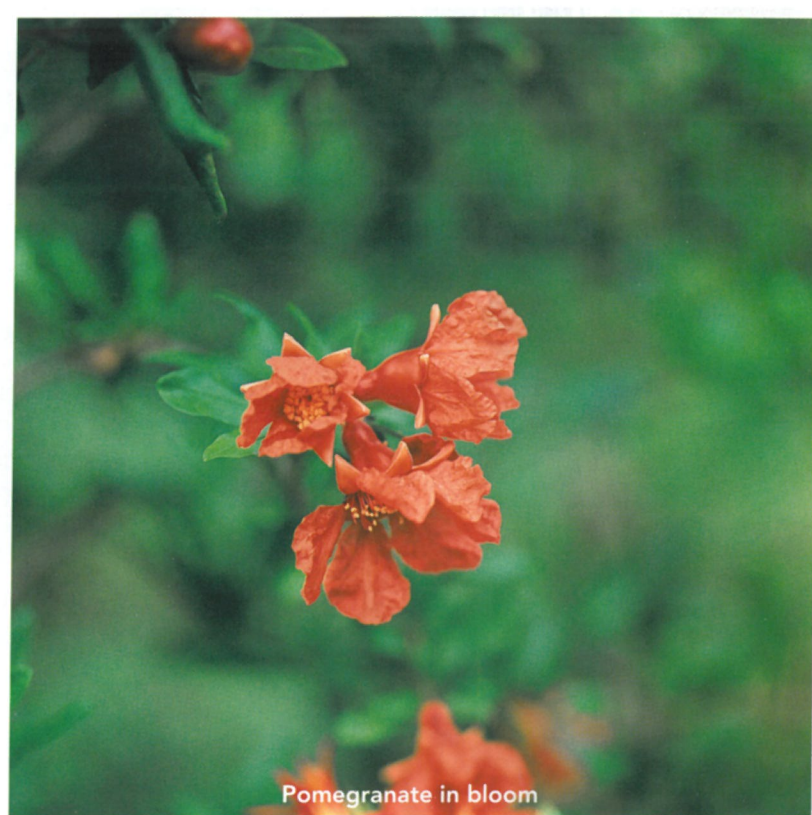
The garden “can feel a little wild, a little unruly,” says Morneau, but the many strongly shaped container plants anchor it. A water canna lives in a Tunisian copper pot while grasses sprout from an old milk jug. Year-round structure comes from terracotta planters filled with dwarf citrus, bay and boxwood.

“People always think plants will do it all,” says the designer, “but I encourage clients to spend time on the bones of their

garden. It’s the background elements—the walls and walkways—that are the exclamation points that enhance the plant material.” In her kitchen garden, the see-through fence defines the space—at least until summer, when fiery red cannas conceal it. To echo their splashy hue, Morneau planted a pomegranate nearby. Hummingbirds, attracted to red, visited both plants regularly, and the designer wanted a perch near the activity. Her choice—



Beyond the gate, a potting area and shed



Pomegranate in bloom



Purple germander and golden oregano



Water canna in an antique copper pot

an Adirondack chair painted to match the blossoms.

Morneau has made some missteps, like any gardener. "A lot of my mistakes have been with tropical plants," she admits. "I would love to grow bougainvillea—and to have bananas. But it's cold here in winter, and we can have frost until midafternoon. I keep thinking, This year will be different, but I've lost a lot of plants."

No garden is ever finished, least of all a professional's. In a grapevine-covered potting and propagation area, rosemary topiaries wait for the ideal setting. An antique marble sink is ready for installation in a planned nook for flower arranging. With her prolific garden and eye for color and form, there's no doubt Morneau's bouquets are going to be glorious. 🌿

See Resources, last pages.