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# GARDEN DESIGN

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FRAGRANT  
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## The Art of the Outdoors

New materials, innovative designs, and  
inspiring ideas for gorgeous decks

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# Natural Beauties

**As more people expand their sense of home to include the great outdoors, deck designs reach breathtaking heights** By Daniel DiClerico

DECKS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN SEEN AS AN EXTENSION of the home, but it's how they can build off nature that truly inspires today's designers. Some float high in the air, offering majestic views, or are secreted by a canopy of trees. Others hug the contours of the land, incorporating its materials in a show of sustainable connectivity. Whatever the design, today's most elegant decks function as an organic bridge between interior and exterior spaces, rather than as a static and conspicuously man-made structure tacked slipshod onto the back of a house. "Gardens are becoming more about the native landscape, so it follows that decks would do the same," says Roderick Wyllie, a principal at the San Francisco landscape architecture firm Surfacedesign Inc. He describes a project in nearby Tiburon where the deck unfolds out from the house and follows the sharp rise of an adjacent hill. "Its form is quite sculptural," Wyllie says, "and it imitates the topography of the landscape." Thick ropes affixed by eyebolts to its steepest section create a



*On a Bel Air, California, terrace, linear continuity acts as a foil for nature's organic shapes.*

JACK COYIER

“It’s all about creating an experience with the deck instead of its being this passive space out back,” says New York–based designer Clodagh

de facto climbing wall for the family’s three young children.

The deck as play structure is an extreme example of how these outdoor spaces are serving broader functions in addition to taking on more naturalistic forms. “It’s all about creating an experience with the deck instead of its being this passive space out back,” says New York–based designer Clodagh. Case in point: the brownstone garden terrace she created in Manhattan that centers around a 30-foot table with a built-in barbecue. “The client entertains a lot, so this arrangement lets him engage with guests while he cooks,” Clodagh says.

Even in California, where the line between indoor and outdoor spaces has always been blurred, the demand for decks is increasing. “In the last five years, most of the architects we work with have wanted to integrate decks and terraces into their projects,” says Stephen Billings, senior associate with Pamela Burton & Company Landscape Architecture in Santa Monica. “There’s a growing understanding of how important it is that people not feel trapped inside. Plus, these spaces really help a building breathe.”

That point is made spectacularly clear at a Bel Air residence perched high above Stone Canyon Reservoir. Billings collaborated with Michael Palladino from Richard Meier & Partners Architects on multiple decks for the Mod-

ernist home, each with a discrete purpose and perspective. There’s the terrace beside the infinity-edge pool with its sweeping views of the reservoir; the trellis-topped deck off the kitchen, for informal dining; and the intimate terrace by the master bedroom that looks east to Los Angeles. “The effect is very cinematic, with each space providing a unique experience and level of privacy,” Billings says.

Somewhat ironically, the evolution of more organic deck designs has been aided by advances in technology. Clemens Jellema, president of Fine Decks in Owings, Maryland, explains: “Back in the dark ages, guys would use a pen and paper to draw a bird’s-eye view of the plan. Nowadays, we’re using computers to create 3-D drawings.” This allows clients to visualize—and revise—spatial relation issues and traffic flow before a single nail has been set.

Software programs also make it easier for designers to place the proposed deck in the context of its surroundings, which might include other structures, shifting elevations, and existing plants and trees. “We’re definitely seeing a preference for more natural prototypes,” says Daniel Winterbottom, associate professor of landscape architecture at the University of Washington. “There are no right angles in nature, so unless a deck will be part of a formal garden with geometric patterns, a curved or crenulated shape will best (continued on page 45)



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## Multiple Levels

**About the Deck** The terraces on this cliff-top abode in Bel Air, California, serve both the owners' high-octane Hollywood careers and their high-energy children. A ten-by-ten-foot terrace off the master bedroom doubles as a plein air yoga studio, shouldering up against a 22-foot bougainvillea and overlooking the family deck and infinity-edge pool (previous page). Landscape architect Stephen Billings used ipe decking throughout, staining it red to tie it to the warmed-toned wood floors inside the house.

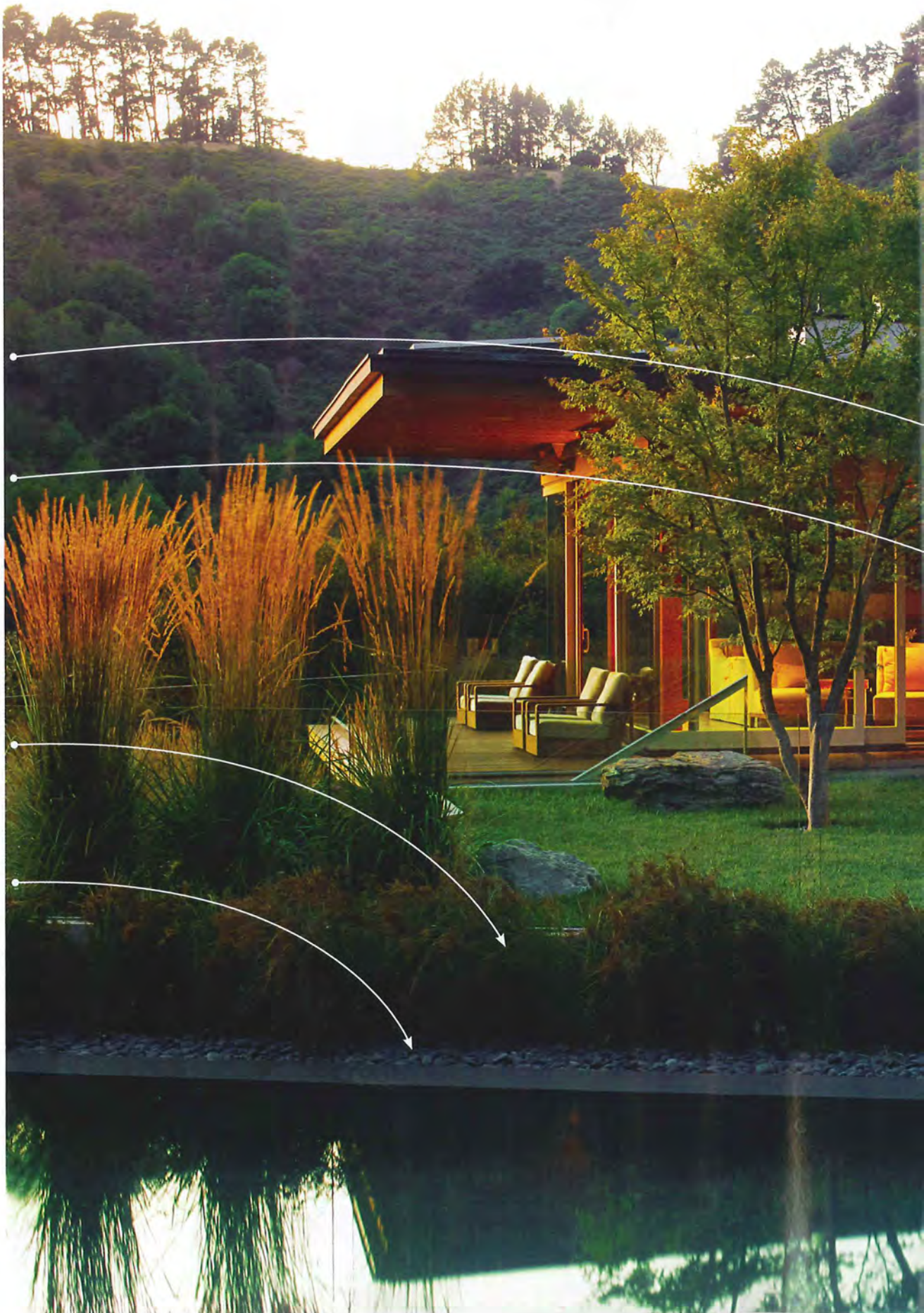
**Materials** A powder-coated aluminum trellis filters the sun just as the nearby tree canopy would, but at night, it also disperses light from the two LED fixtures mounted above it. To coincide with the house's sleek architecture, the elegant deck railing has a touch-friendly oiled-ipe handrail set above thin aluminum rods that don't obscure the view. Billings also uses Stepstone pavers (example below) as a decking surface. The tiles come in unusual sizes and can contain fly ash—a coal-burning by-product—which enables reuse of industrial waste.



## Seamless Transitions

**About the Deck** At this home near Oakland, California, designers at Bernard Trainor + Associates created an outdoor living area that relates to the house's strong linear architecture. They bridged the gap between the house and poolside decks with poured-concrete pavers, whose strong angles are softened by ribbons of grass that run between them. For child safety, a glass fence separates the play lawn from the water, but as shown here, it's a nearly invisible barrier, allowing the overall landscape to remain connected.

**Materials** Understated plantings include a punctuating ornamental grass (*Calamagrostis* 'Karl Foerster') and a poolside row of Japanese rush (*Juncus* 'Carmen's Japanese'). To extend the house's Japanese garden-meets-California aesthetic, the rushes' concrete planters were lined with Mexican beach stones that project manager David LeRoy likes for their "quiet." Ipe wood is used on every deck, including the bridge that leads to a large poolside terrace. LeRoy will also specify cedar decking (sample below) for some projects, which he selects for how it ages (weathering to a cool gray); its affordability; and, being that his firm orders from a supplier in Oregon, its fairly local origins.





reflect the landscape.”

The choice of material is a further opportunity to integrate the indoors with the outdoors. Blue-stone and concrete pavers can be carried through from a terrace into the kitchen or another adjoining interior space. Tropical hardwoods, meanwhile, play well with adjacent wood floors. South American ipe has been the deck darling in recent years, thanks to its rock-hard durability. The intense demand for the wood has raised concerns about over-cutting, so some designers look for responsibly sourced ipe, such as boards certified by the Forest Stewardship Council. (For information on alternative materials, see “What’s New in Decking,” page 75.)

How the decking is laid out should be considered as well. “Diagonal boards improve structural integrity, creating more stability than when the boards run parallel to the house,” says Bobby Parks, owner of Peachtree Decks and Porches in Alpharetta, Georgia. An angled board pattern can also accent architectural elements, such as the pitch of a gabled roof, or it can point to a feature in the garden. It’s even possible to run decking around existing waterways or trees, as noted landscape architect Thomas Church famously did at the Donnell Garden in Sonoma, California, completed in 1948. “Incorporating trees into the design provides a source of shade and shadow play on any deck,” says Bernard Trainor, a landscape architect based in Monterey, California. The technique is not recommended for amateur builders, however, since the frame must be constructed as to allow for the growth of the trees over time.

Preexisting trees aren’t the only things that can flourish around a well-designed deck. So can the pleasure and experiences of the people who use it. “As populations grow and living spaces get squeezed,” says Surfacedesign’s Wyllie, “the deck is functioning more as a release valve from the interior.” On the most naturalistically expressed decks, that release can include many a moment’s peace at one with the world. ⑥

LEFT TO RIGHT: MICHAEL KRAUS; MARION BRENNER



MARION BRENNER, OPPOSITE: MICHAEL KRAUS





## Going With the Flow

### About the Deck

When San Francisco's Surface Design group was asked to build a deck off a Tiburon, California, dining room flanked by two roll-up garage doors, they knew the client was open to some fun. Indeed, the initial 20-by-20-foot flat portion of deck made of ipe (sample below) soon morphs into a more fluid series of planes that conform to the changing topography. The deck breaks to allow a path from the parking area to the main entry, then picks up again to climb the hill, following such steep angles that it has become a climbing wall for the family's children.

### Materials

Despite its bold design, the deck is fairly understated, which complements the low-key plantings that surround it. These deciduous magnolias were already on the property and relocated to their current sentry positions. A meadowlike planting replaces lawn with *Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Little Bunny' and the Douglas iris, a California native. The face of the deck is oiled aluminum, and it appears to be floating thanks to the designers' decision to tuck its supports back from the edges.

