



**ROCK STAR!**  
Award-winning landscape architect Ryan Prange of Falling Waters rests on a Coyote Gold boulder placed in the landscape at a midcentury in La Mesa. Prange refers to his style as "San Diego simple."

## Scape Artists

We've got the dirt on S.D.'s new crop of landscape architects.

| *By AnnaMaria Stephens* |  
| *Photography by Ethan Pines* |

Forget about manicured green lawns and lush tropical foliage, water-sucking standbys that once dominated San Diego gardens. The most in-demand local landscape architects and designers know exactly what thrives around here, and what fights to survive—not to mention what looks stunning.

"For most of the last 100 years, landscape design in our region was done as if rainfall here were the same as Hawaii," says Martin Poirier, a principal of celebrated local firm Spurlock Poirier. "Making design choices to acknowledge the fact that we live in a coastal-desert environment with little rainfall is yielding a much more authentic and sustainable landscape."

"The best landscapes are interwoven with the architecture," says Marcie Harris, who got her start with Spurlock Poirier before launching her own eponymous firm in 2004. "It looks like it could all have been done by the same person."

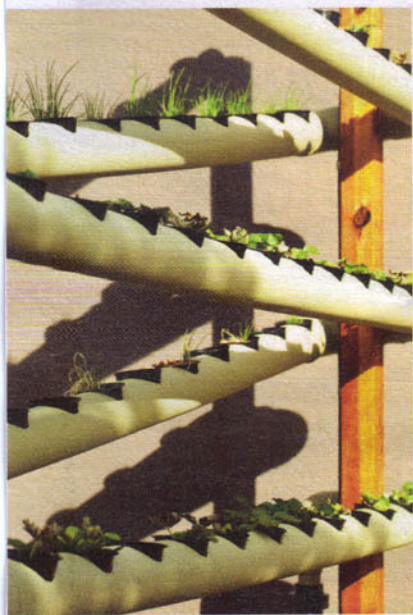
Harris, who has collaborated closely with starchitect Sebastian Mariscal, says prevailing trends have shifted even since she started. "Water conservation is huge. People bring up the issue of responsibility all on their own. [Old-school landscaping] is kind of like driving a Hummer. It used to be so cool, but now you'd just feel kind of silly."

Pools? Not a status symbol anymore, but sustainable water and fire features and defined, eco-friendly areas that encourage outdoor living are hipper than driving an electric.

CONTINUED...



“Old-school landscaping is kind of like driving a Hummer,” says Harris. “It used to be cool, but now you’d just feel kind of silly.”



**GOING UP?** Clockwise from above: Vista-based Vertical Earth Gardens caters to hot spots like L’Auberge Del Mar where Kitchen 1540 boasts a garden on the restaurant patio; a project by Falling Waters; landscape architect Marcie Harris at a recent La Jolla project where she created space to entertain.

...CONTINUED Harris favors flexible ground coverings like gravel and plenty of native and climate-adaptive plants. “A lot of clients have their minds set against succulents, not knowing how many varieties there are,” she says. “So I often don’t even mention them by name—I just show pictures.”

Before he hands over a single sketch to a client, architect Brett Farrow calls in one of his top green-thumb gurus. “Landscape architecture is the centerpiece of good design in Southern California,” Farrow explains. “We have this amazing climate and to make use of outdoor spaces is a rare opportunity that most regions don’t get.”

One of Farrow’s preferred talents is Ryan Prange, an award-winning landscape designer whose projects have appeared on HGTV’s *Bang for Your Buck*. Prange, whose firm Falling Waters Landscape, Inc. specializes mostly in boutique residential design, calls his style “San Diego simple.”

“One of our mottos is using conventional materials in unconventional ways,” says Prange. “As we’re designing, in our own micro-way, we’re driving what’s in style and what is considered beautiful.”

That doesn’t just mean cacti and other succulents, but a wide-ranging natural palette that is both drought-resistant and design-forward.

“We use a lot of architectural plants,” Prange explains. “Plants that have a purpose. A plant that stays more static and upright might be a focal point, while a grass that’s wispy adds some movement to the garden. We’ll use boulders, too, because they can be just as effective as a specimen plant.”



Probably the hottest item on homeowners’ wish lists right now is edible landscaping, which is seasonal and can be seriously high-maintenance. One local firm, Vertical Earth Gardens, has stepped up with hydroponic gardens that look as good as the tasty veggies they turn out.

“Our gardens save about 80 percent more water than traditional gardens of the same size,” says co-owner Michael Tarzian. “But there are a lot of hydroponic options out there. Our main goal was aesthetics. We wanted to make sure people enjoyed looking at our gardens—they’re like art.”

Vertical Earth Gardens caters to residential clients, schools, and trendy restaurants like JSix, Lockwood Table Café, and Kitchen 1540 at L’Auberge, whose chefs wanted fresh-grown goods on the premises for a truly just-steps-to-the-table experience.

“I hope we’ve developed a new worldview,” concludes Farrow, the architect. “Our plants should give back, whether promoting wildlife and pollinators, framing a place to hang out, or providing us food to eat.” **R**