

A photograph of a private garden in Los Angeles. In the foreground, a swimming pool with blue water is visible. Behind the pool is a stone bench with three legs. The garden is filled with various plants, including large potted plants and a trellis covered in pink flowers. The title 'SECRET GARDENS OF HOLLYWOOD AND PRIVATE OASES IN LOS ANGELES' is overlaid on the image in white text.

SECRET GARDENS OF
HOLLYWOOD
AND PRIVATE OASES IN LOS ANGELES

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UNIVERSE



BARBARA DRAKE

Behind every good set is a production designer, someone who can conjure an entire world for an imaginary character to inhabit onscreen. "My job is to get inside a character's head and figure out what makes him or her tick," says production designer Barbara Drake, whose credits include *Full Metal Jacket*, *Diggstown*, and *Home for the Holidays*. "In the film business you create a fantasy that has to look like reality. Here, I had no director and I could write my own script."

"Here" is a 1930s Spanish-style house in the heart of Los Angeles that glows inside and out with vibrant colors. Five years ago it was a rundown house on a narrow, deep lot. Up front was a tired lawn. In back were cracked concrete floors, a brick patio with a corrugated plastic roof, and a garage with peeling plaster walls. Giant ficus trees blocked the sun and the view of palm trees behind the house.

The moment Drake and her partner Peter Huck saw the property, she knew exactly what she wanted—a secret, mysterious, holistic garden. She also knew from her travels that she would install an Arabian-inspired inner courtyard with a fountain.

Drake is used to the speed of film sets—put up a wall, change your mind, move it, tear it down. "I have no fear of change," she says. "I ripped the house and the garden apart at the same time because they needed to be treated as one entity." At the same time that she was tearing out the interiors, Drake was removing the tired lawn and replacing it with succulents and herbs—mint, oregano, thyme, and rosemary. "I wanted drought-tolerant and healing plants that smell wonderful and that we could cook with," she says.

Walls, fences, and garage were all treated as a backdrop canvas and painted in a pale pistachio green, mixed from a piece of glazed pottery she found in Morocco. Doors, window frames, and the reflecting pool sport a

"I love lap pools, they're so geometric," says Barbara Drake. She credits Mexican architect Luis Barragán for inspiring the back garden's startling combination of a soothing pistachio green with a striking cobalt blue.

spectacular shade of cobalt blue called azul anil. The concrete floor in the rear was painted like tiles that remind Drake of a De Chirico painting. “I move the plants around like giant chess pieces.”

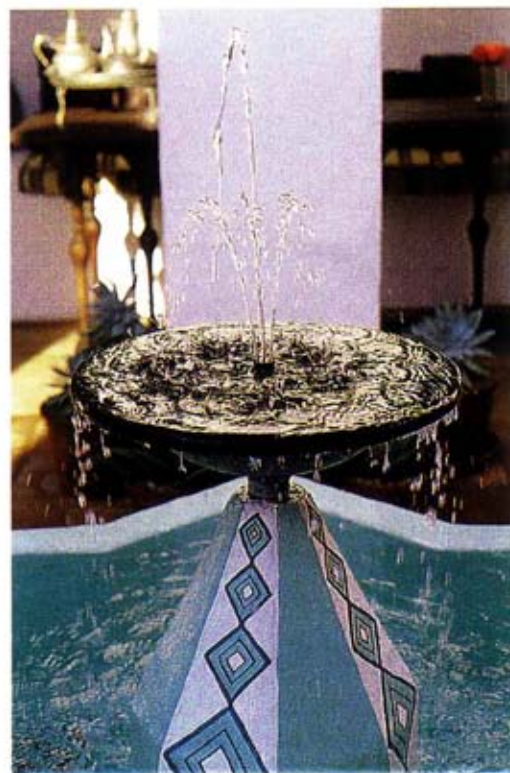
The front entrance courtyard, with its eight-sided Andalusian fountain and deep banquettes meant for reclining, sets the stage for a Mediterranean fantasy. “You never know where a camera will be on a film set, and the garden is structured the same way,” Drake says. “I tried to use every inch to the max. I have no favorite spots; wherever you sit, there’s something different to look at.

“The garden is all about shape, space, and color and how you work it all together to form designs,” Drake adds. Her main source of inspiration was Mexican architect Luis Barragán—his use of water structures and blocks of color, and way of manipulating light through a space. Everything else she absorbed by osmosis through travels to Mexico, India, Africa, Greece, and Morocco. “I’m drawn to the surreal, the dramatic, and the visually strong. I love the play of light and shadow.”

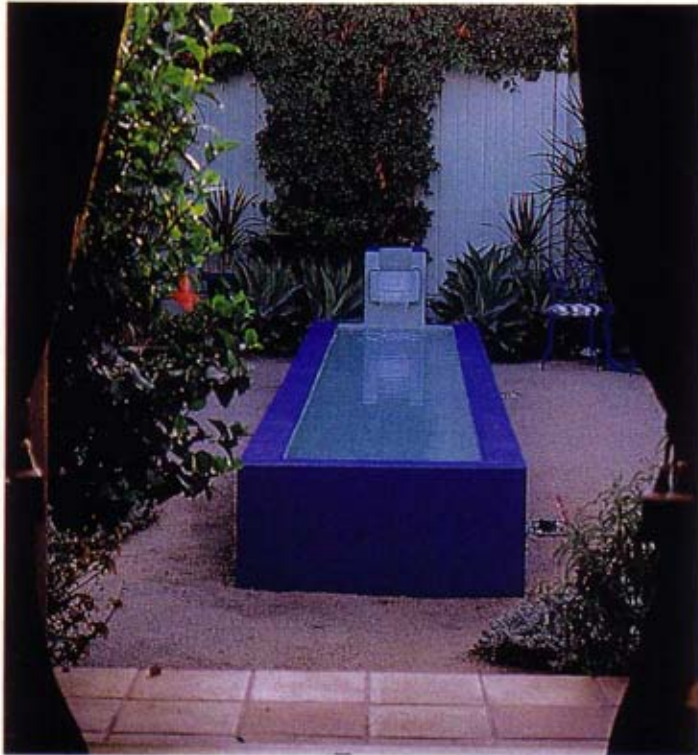
She planted organic produce—arugula, salad lettuces, beets—and put in Mexican sage and fuchsia to attract hummingbirds. Then she added roses, jasmine, geraniums, bougainvillea, and citrus trees (orange, lime, lemons) for color and fragrance. The rosemary, lavender, and plumbago are all clipped and sculpted. “I like creating shapes and believe in controlled growth,” Drake says. “Plants respond to being looked after.” Cactus and succulents, especially aloe, became strong sculptural elements in their own right.

It’s been a long and winding road from northern England, where she was born, via Kenya, where she lived as a child, to Los Angeles. Drake headed to Los Angeles ten years ago and felt an immediate kinship with the city’s multiethnic mix and geographic diversity. “Coming to Los Angeles meant I was able to rid myself of the constrictions of England’s rigid class system,” she says. “Living away from your own society frees you, particularly here. I was finally able to cut the umbilical cord to my roots and let myself sail free.”

“A courtyard with a fountain seems to touch deep in everyone’s soul,” Drake says. “It creates a feeling of well being and of protection. You’re in the sun and protected from it. It muffles street sounds and transports you to another place. You can leave the cares and craziness of the city behind. It’s a space to dream.”









The reflecting pool mirrors the width of the corridor inside the house, thus allowing the eye to continue outdoors with no sense of interruption. "I'm very influenced by the environment and how we impact it. I use no chemicals or sprays and do minimal watering," says Drake, who keeps her rosemary and lavender clipped and uses succulents as sculpture in their own right.