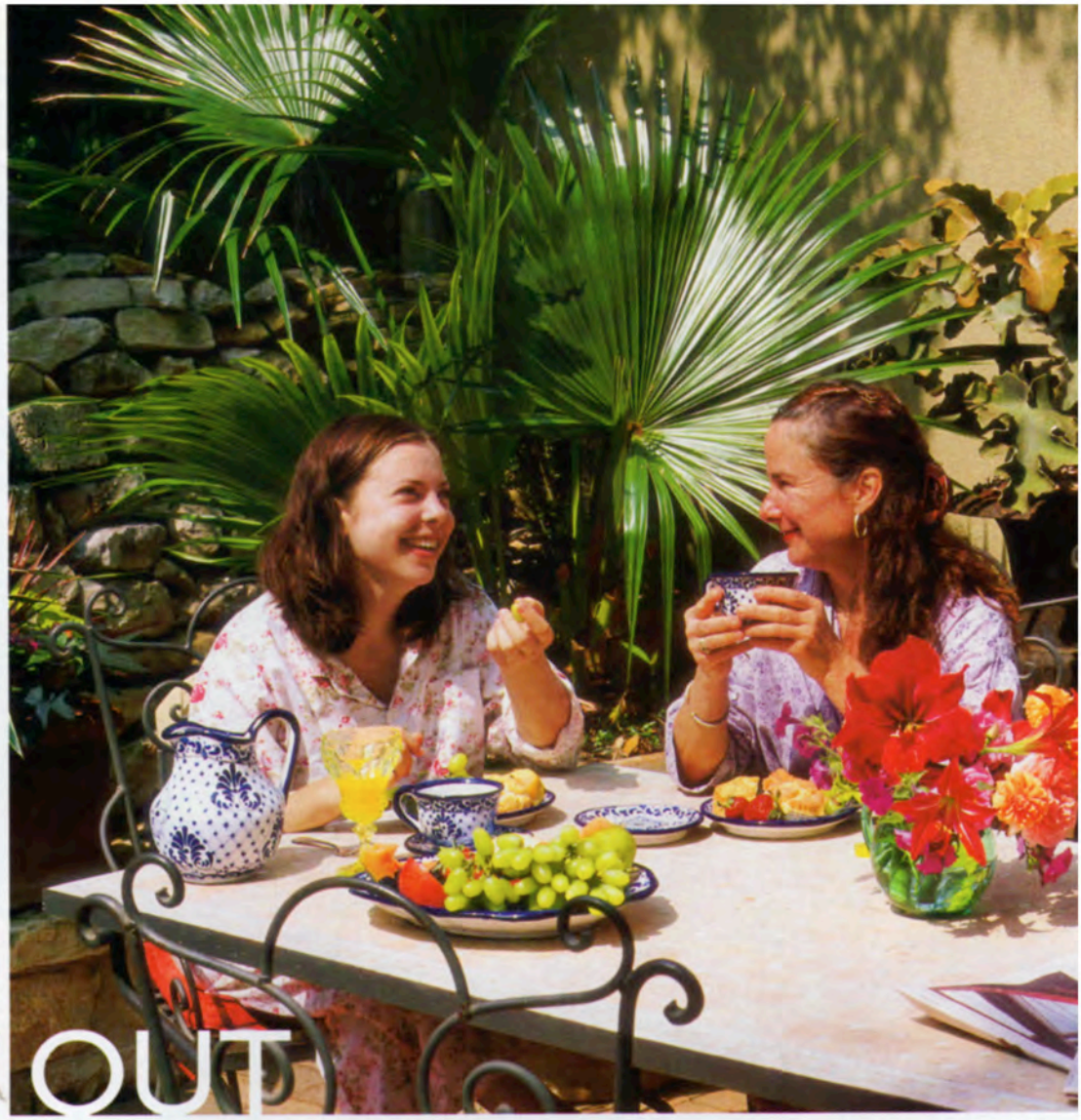
Jennifer Myers of Austin, Texas, puts a new twist on the concept of outdoor rooms in a garden with a bedroom under the stars and formal dining on a hillside balcony

MOVIN' OUT



Opposite page: Cobalt blue accents dramatize the 1879 limestone house. Containers and potted palms on either side of the entry create a fanfare. Above: 15-year-old Madeleine and Jennifer enjoy a mom-and-daughter moment in the outdoor dining room. Left: After work the Myers like to sip wine by the fireplace in their outdoor den surrounded by the light of the fire and tall candelabras. Hand-dyed cushions make the wooden chairs inviting.

BY LINDA LEHMUSVIRTA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KAREN BUSSOLINI

It's not unusual for Jennifer and Fred Myers to come home to find complete strangers piled onto their bed. Instead of calling the police, the Myers invite the interlopers to share a glass of iced tea and stroll the rest of the garden, since the bed is only one of many comfortable furnishings in their garden.

Events and serendipitous materials have fueled the garden's evolution. When they bought the property in 1992, designing a structured entry garden and a series of rooms around the house was not part of their vision. Though the grounds were dusty and weedy, the 1879 house demanded extensive work and became a priority.

Then, friends asked to be married at the Myers home: Jennifer agreed and had two weeks to conjure up a garden. She enlisted day labor to dig up the yard and lay paths of crushed granite and limestone to divide it into quadrants. Drawing on her background as an artist, she punctuated the axis from entrance gate to front door, planting an allée of 'Will Flemming' yaupons (*Ilex vomitoria* 'Will Flemming')—tall, narrow evergreens that echo the upright, limestone house. Along the front and sides, she flanked the antique cast-iron fence with old roses underplanted with perennials and bulbs.

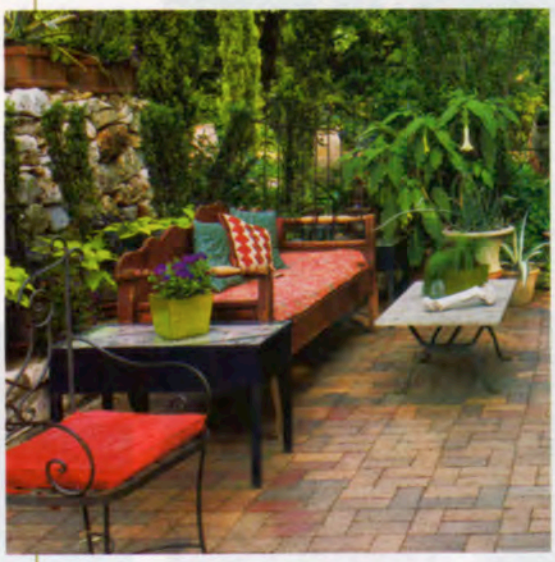
For five years Jennifer refined the plantings as new varieties caught her fancy. When she ran out of space, she considered expanding

Left: Strong lines of 'Will Flemming' yaupons and terra cotta urns formalize the entrance garden. Quadrants of lawn give way to crushed granite at the hot curbside, where drought-hardy agaves mingle with old roses, right.

color me texas

Jennifer Myers' plant choices are primarily driven by color and beauty, though she likes drought-hardy specimens that tolerate Austin's watering restrictions.

- **An artist who paints as she plants, she harmonizes a cascading apricot and pink 'Mutabilis' rose with white- and peach-striped amaryllis.**
- **Hot pink 'Laura Bush' petunias dance with their silvery partner, tower of jewels (*Echium wildpretii*).**
- **Inspired by the spiky outline of agaves, Myers made a new bed for them by replacing a thirsty strip of grass along the sun-beaten street with crushed granite. "The grass was all weeds anyway," she explains, "and I got tired of mowing it."**
- **For an exercise in contrast, old roses 'Emmie Gray' and 'Monsieur Tillier' intertwine pinkish blossoms with massive silver-gray *Agave scabra*. Spiky *Dasylirion wheeleri* sits side by side with China roses 'Martha Gonzales' and 'Old Blush'.**
- **The silver and pink theme is also picked up by French lavender (*Lavandula stoechas*), mingled with *Gaura lindheimeri* 'Siskiyou Pink'.**



Opposite: On the back terrace a primary red 'Blaze' rose in a pot climbs against sun-whitened limestone and the cobalt back door with the clarity of a folk-art primitive.
Top: Guests can gather around the Moroccan tile table that overlooks a lush hillside, while others settle on the sofa in the den (just above).

into the bordering strip beyond the driveway, but never hit upon the ideal scheme. Then a donation of limestone from a neighboring school under renovation sparked inspiration. Fred observed that the castoffs would make a great drystack wall to section off part of the driveway. Although he had never worked with stone, and until then was a hands-off garden spectator, he built a wall that suddenly created a new, private space.

The hidden nook behind the wall accidentally introduced the Myers to the notion of outdoor rooms, that guiding principle of garden designer parlance. During their daughter Madeleine's spring break in March 2000, Jennifer had an idea. Madeleine had spent her childhood in the garden, but at 13 had become intrigued with the computer screen. "Let's use this old bedstead and make a bedroom outside and make it yours," Jennifer suggested. They worked all week turning the driveway into a bedroom that was framed by an old gate and rock walls. Fred laid a flagstone floor while Jennifer fashioned an overhead lamp from a flowerpot. "It was hard work," she says, "but it got Madeleine off the computer and back outdoors."

Since the Myers' house is too small to

Left: In the bedroom, junk shop finds create a homey setting. The blazing, wood-filled chiminea and icicle lights cast a romantic glow. Above: The dining room mirror reflects the adjoining fireplace-warmed den.

accommodate the number of guests they entertain, they added an outdoor dining room. Fred selected brick flooring, and with limestone defined the room with his outdoor version of window seats. On a stucco wall facing a Moroccan tile table, Jennifer hung a large mirror, "because it's a dining room."

The mirror reflects an adjoining room they built when a lettuce bed went to seed. "We live outside, and we love the rock walls, so let's make it a living room," Jennifer said. She furnished it with a rustic wooden couch, brightly painted Mexican chairs and wrought-iron candelabras. End tables she designed from architectural stone pieces hold vases of her flower arrangements. These details speak to Jennifer's passion: color.

"I'm a visual person, so I balance and complement colors in the garden the way I would in a painting," she says. She also uses color to draw attention, like a spot of bright red that explodes against a wash of green. Splashes of cobalt blue throughout pull the picture together, leading eye and footstep from the front garden to house to the outdoor rooms.

When guests arrive, even the impromptu, they can find a niche that matches any mood. The Myers don't think of their garden rooms as extensions of the house. They are their house—in a different format. "Living outside is so wonderful," Jennifer says. "I've grown up camping and being outside. I'd like to live in the trees. Art and the outdoors are my passion." Through her garden, her passions can meet as one. ■