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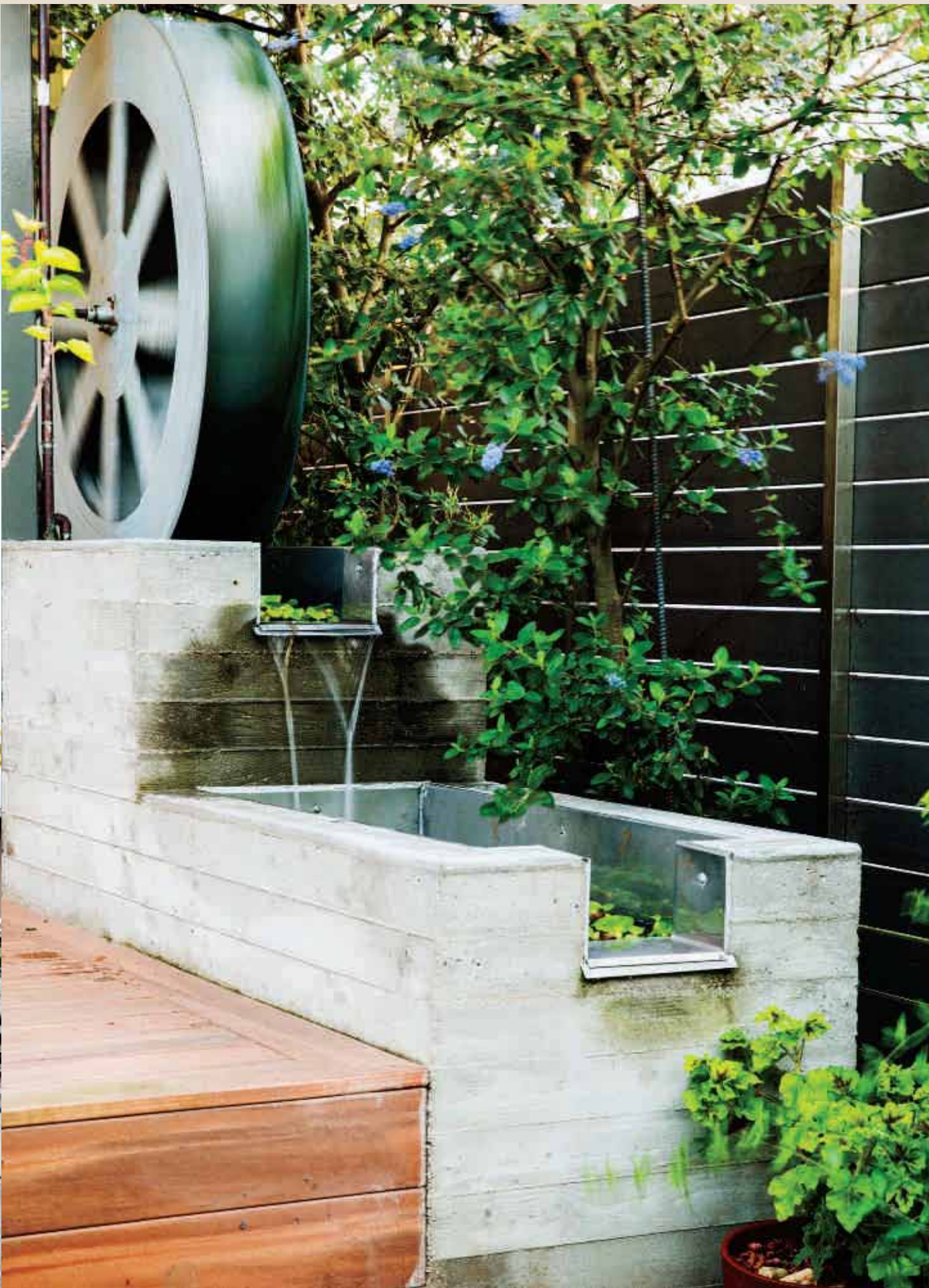
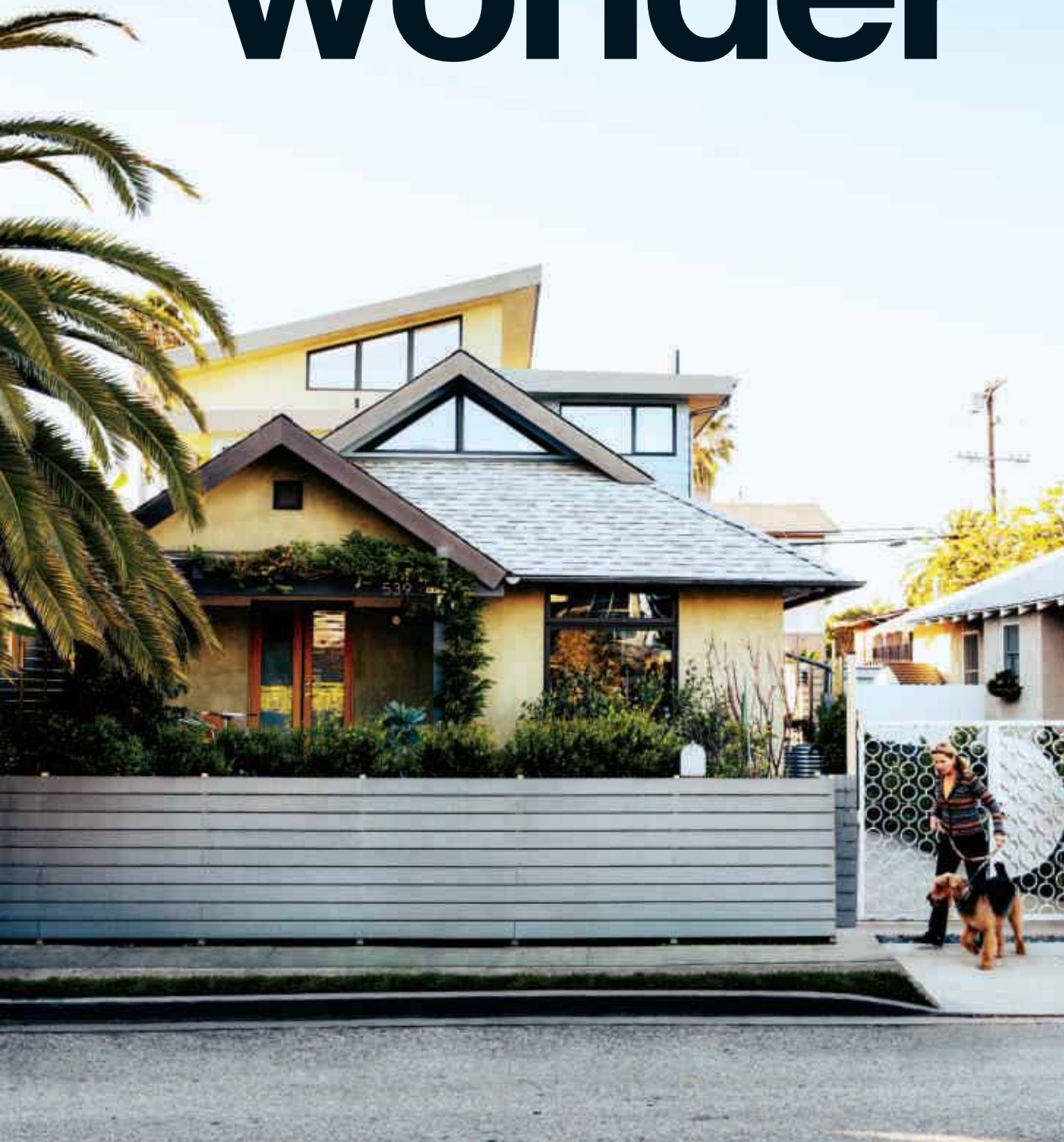
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# Small wonder



THE WAY  
WE LIVE  
NOW

Architect  
Isabelle  
Duvivier  
turned  
her little  
Venice  
bungalow  
into a  
water-  
saving  
power-  
house.

BY  
CHRISTINE LENNON

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
THOMAS J. STORY

PROP STYLING BY  
ROBIN TURK

# In a town

where multimillion-dollar homes are popping up where tiny cottages once stood, architect Isabelle Duvivier

didn't take the bait to build big. Instead, as she remodeled the 1912 bungalow where she lives with her husband, cinematographer John Tipton, and their 11-year-old son, Finn, her priority was to make the home both eco-friendly and in sync with the 100-year-old Venice, California, neighborhood. So as she drew up plans to renovate the 1,000-square-foot bungalow—adding a master suite, a bathroom and closet, and an open loft upstairs—she capped the new size at just under 1,700 square feet. “For three people, we didn’t need a gigantic house,” she says. “And if it were bigger, it really would have eliminated our garden space.”

Duvivier has been building environmentally conscious homes for others for years, and hers was no different. “It doesn’t have to be more expensive than building another way: It’s just about making certain decisions early on,” she says. The house is powered by solar panels—even after Duvivier charges her electric car, the family has surplus energy to give back to the city. Almost every surface contains recycled materials, from the concrete kitchen countertops to the insulation. Duvivier also repurposed the original Douglas fir wood from areas they demolished to build stair treads and a bookcase. Her plan almost went bust as she ran out of wood, until she struck up a



#### PREVIOUS PAGE, LEFT

Before the renovation, the bungalow had an aging stucco finish and an unfriendly chain-link fence. Duvivier maintained the modest exterior but made it more welcoming with a front-yard vegetable garden and a low fence.

#### PREVIOUS PAGE, RIGHT

With help from a pump during the dry season, a custom wheel circulates water from a pond stocked with fish to remove mosquitoes. When it rains, it's powered by runoff from the roof funneled through a downspout.

#### ABOVE

Duvivier built the kitchen island and cabinet doors (affixed to Ikea cabinet boxes) from repurposed Douglas fir, installed so the grain runs horizontally. The counters are made from recycled concrete, typically made from the rubble of demolished concrete structures.

#### RIGHT

The family uses this entrance on the side of the house as the front door. Outdoor shoe storage takes advantage of the mild climate.



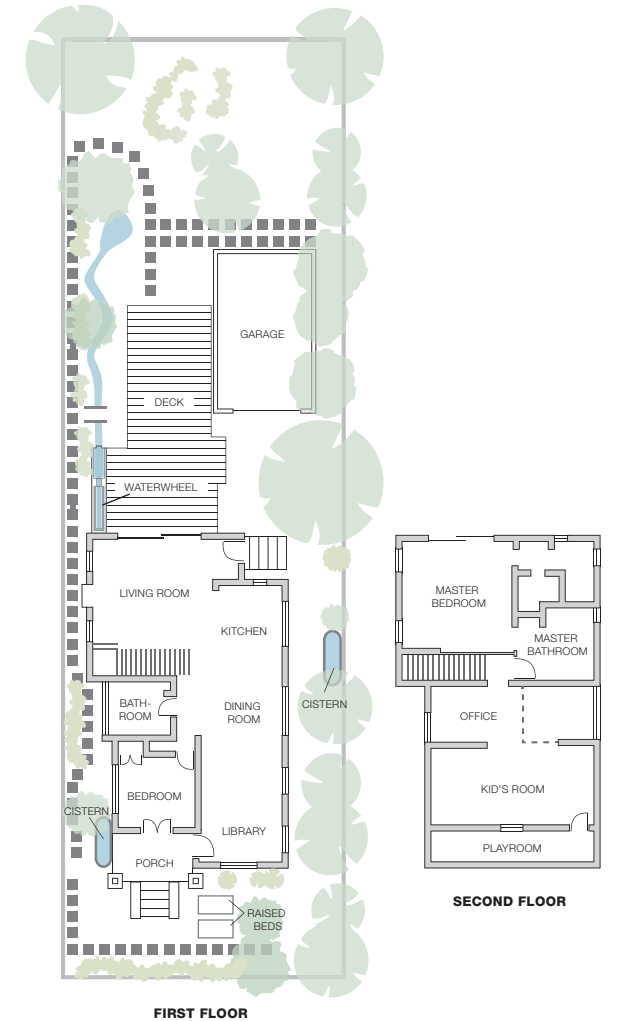


**ABOVE AND LEFT**  
Duvivier transformed a neglected attic space into a second-floor room for her son. Two trundle beds built into drawers in the walls on either side of the bed accommodate guests.



**RIGHT**  
The open stairwell design lets light travel through the house. "In a compact space, you can have light everywhere at the center of the house," Duvivier says.

**RIGHT AND NEXT PAGE, TOP**  
The living room opens completely to the back garden, and doubles the living space most of the year. The wooden floors are a combination of the home's original wood and wood purchased from a neighbor.



conversation with a neighbor. "He was storing some wood under his house after he remodeled," Duvivier says. "Our houses were built at the same time, so it might even be from the same forest."

Against the striking organic materials, Duvivier kept the furnishings simple, mostly classic midcentury shapes in black and white. The color comes from the rugs, the family's books, and the plants growing outside every door and window, which draw attention to the real highlight of the property: the garden.

The entire yard is watered exclusively by gray water and rainwater that's diverted as it runs off the roof, landing in two cisterns and flowing over a waterwheel. One of the cisterns is open, like a trough, and circulates water in a fish pond. It's so appealing that a white egret is a regular visitor. Gorgeous birds aside, the wheel is in many ways the centerpiece of the yard, spinning slowly

when the marine fog condenses and drips down, and turning much more quickly when it rains. “When it does rain here,” Duvivier says, “our house is a very exciting place.” The architect moved the front door to the side of the house so people would walk by the water features as they entered the home. “I wanted to make the water super visible as a reminder of how precious it is in the region,” she says.

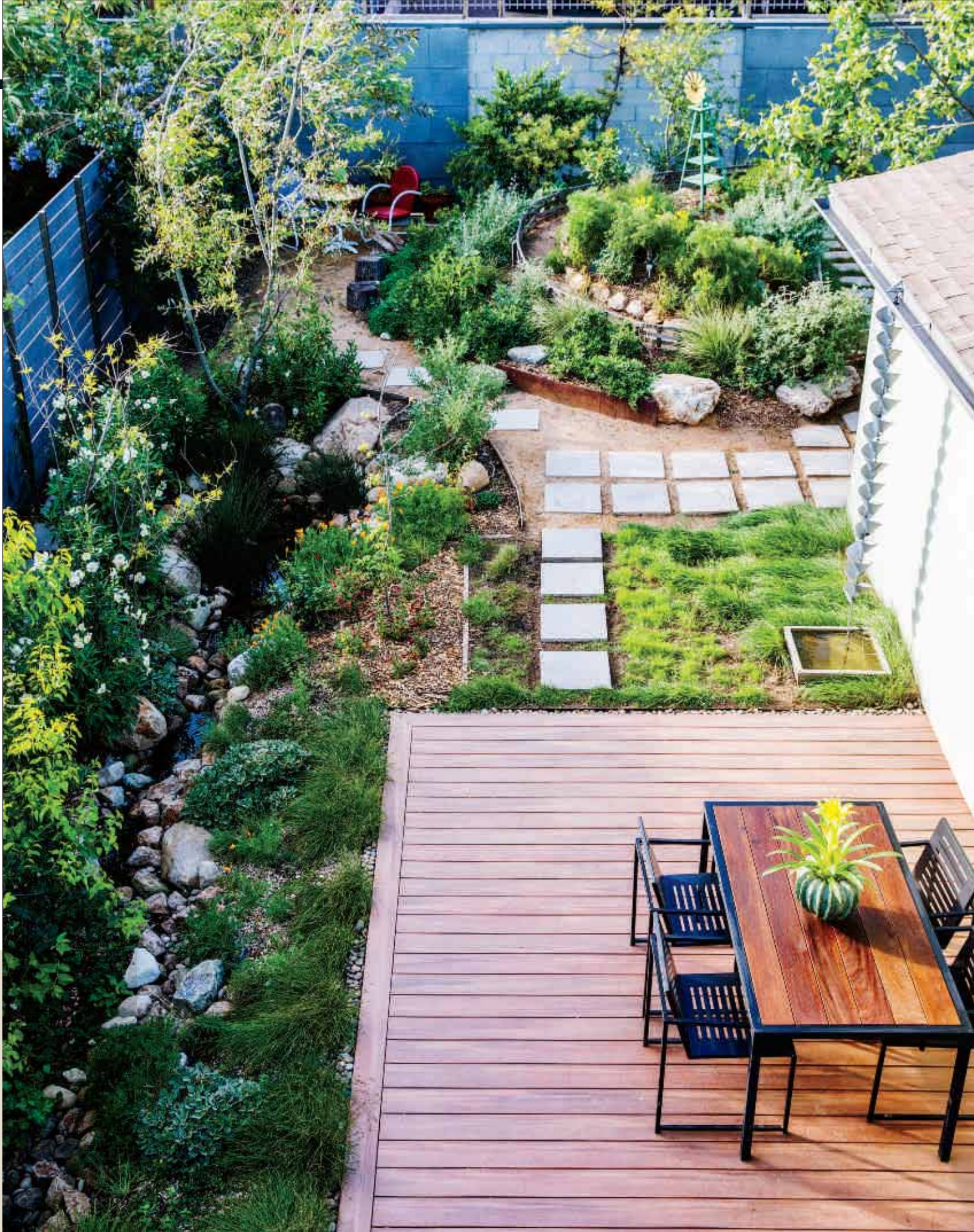
Inside, the water from showers, sinks, and the washing machine flows into a gray-water system that pumps it into the soil beneath some strategically positioned trees—a couple of cottonwoods, a sycamore, and a willow—and finishing in a banana bed and passion fruit vines. “Those native riparian trees, they’re used to having their feet wet,” Duvivier says. “They like it.”

The backyard is the family’s haven too, bringing with it a strong dose of neighborhood spirit. On weekends, they regularly move their big dining table outside and host parties, including an outdoor movie night for Finn’s birthday. “The kids are always playing tetherball, jumping on the trampoline, or climbing in the tree-house,” Duvivier says. Meanwhile, she’s swapping honey from her rooftop beehive for the plums, lemons, and oranges from her neighbors’ mature fruit trees. (Her own orchard is still young.)

The front yard is just as friendly. There, Duvivier installed a low fence and planted a vegetable garden that beckons the community—passersby can see the tomatoes, lettuces, and peas growing in the raised beds. It’s a far cry from some of the high-walled yards in other parts of town, but it’s another example of how the house is at one with its environment—and beautifully at that.

**DESIGN** Isabelle Duvivier, Venice, CA; [idarchitect.com](http://idarchitect.com).

**S** **DIGITAL BONUS** Learn how to lighten your footprint, from easy DIY tips to sustainable renovation ideas: [sunset.com/lowimpact](http://sunset.com/lowimpact).



**TOP**

The roofline is divided into three parts. One drains over the waterwheel into a rain garden, another drains into a cistern for storage and irrigation, and the last drains into an open cistern. These features helped the home earn LEED Platinum status.

**ABOVE**

Duvivier flipped the orientation of the lot, placing the entrance at the side of the house and the raised vegetable beds in the front. A beehive, located on top of the garage, helps to pollinate the garden and the neighbors’ citrus trees.

**RIGHT**

To address a drainage issue, Duvivier regraded the lot, creating slopes that lead to a dry creekbed that runs the length of the garden. The elevated planting area she calls “Sage Hill,” accented by a colorful windmill and California brittlebush, requires little water.