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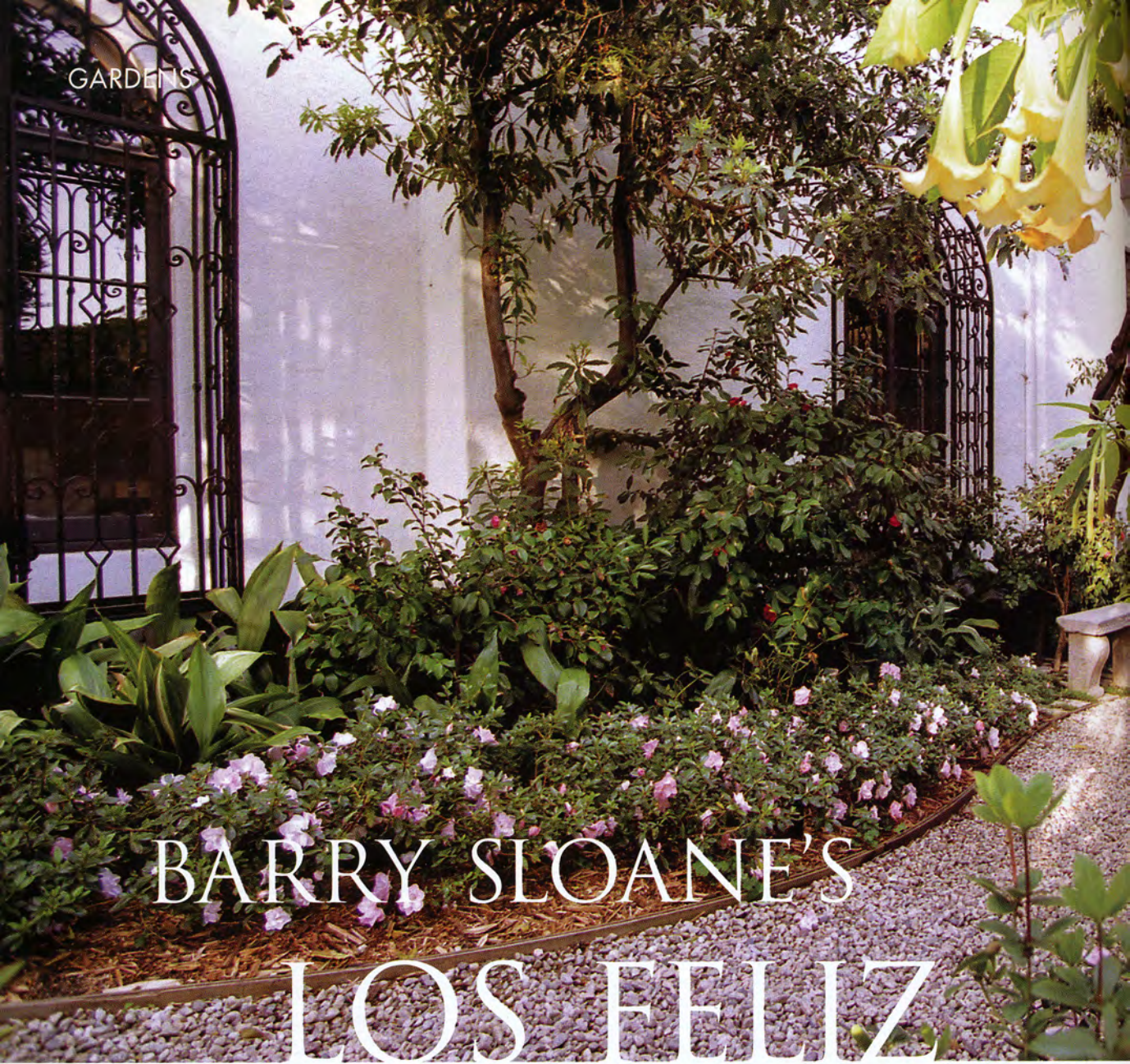
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BARRY SLOANE'S
LOS FELIZ
GARDEN

IS A SERIES OF REVEALS
AND SURPRISES

BY KAREN DARDICK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES MOLL



WHEN BARRY SLOANE PURCHASED A 7,000 square-foot house from actor Danny De Vito, he knew the house, situated on three-quarters of an acre in Los Feliz, was special. Designed in 1924 by famed architect Carleton Winslow, it was one of the first large houses built in the upscale Los Feliz region of Los Angeles. What he didn't know until he started an extensive landscape renovation was that it contained a long-lost hidden treasure. The original landscape, also designed in 1924, was by Paul Howard, and much of it remained intact to the present.

After Sloane acquired the house, he embarked on a major landscape renovation project to restore the overgrown trees and shrubs into a beautiful garden, adding flowering plants and enhancing the gardens overall. The mature gardens are ringed with tall trees that provide plenty of privacy in a densely populated urban area. In one area of the rear garden a canyon was filled with brush, tree limbs and assorted debris. While

Sloane supervised workmen clearing out the trash-strewn area, they discovered stone walls and indications that the canyon had at one time been landscaped. Fortunately, some of the workmen were from Honduras and had worked on pyramid excavations in Latin America. As tiles emerged from the midst of the debris, they carefully cleared the area. They found stone and concrete walls, a tiled wall fountain, and evidence that the sunken area at one time had been an elaborate garden. During this excavation, serendipity struck again. Sloane found a box of old papers left in the house. There, he discovered original landscape plans and yellowed newspaper clippings from the 1920s. They revealed that a large lake, filled with water lilies and other plants had once flourished where now a rubbish-strewn canyon remained. A little more research disclosed that the lake had extended into property that has since become part of a neighboring house.

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LOANE ENLISTED the help of landscape designer and contractor Michael Baer, owner of Greentree Landscaping in Westwood, specializing in creating and maintaining custom residential estates. A passionate designer and horticulturist who has traveled the world to study plants and designs of various cultures, Baer refashioned the canyon back into a place of beauty and also skillfully renovated the rest of the property. After four years and extensive costs, the result is a stunning landscape that Baer describes as “full of reveals and surprises.”

The greatest surprise is the transformation of the canyon into a woodland garden where a sun-drenched lake had been almost a century ago. Descending stone steps into a sun-dappled, aromatic area ringed by tall oak trees, visitors view the restored fountain rimmed by Talavera tiles imported from Pueblo, Mexico when the garden



was installed in 1920. Water spills over into a rill and stream. The surrounding slopes contain numerous Malaysian rhododendrons, New Zealand tree ferns, maidenhair ferns, acanthus, azaleas, and many other shade loving ornamental plants. (story continued on page 70)

PREVIOUS PAGE: Stone walls enclose a serene sunken garden that had been lost and forgotten until Sloane renovated his landscape. This surprise emerged when workers cleared the canyon of years of debris. TOP: A rustic stone bridge leads into this rediscovered space, where a wall fountain rimmed by Talavera tile marks the beginning of a stream meandering through the woodland garden. ABOVE: Another wall fountain is the focal point of a courtyard adjacent to the Spanish style house. It was designed and signed by artist Pedro Sanchez. LEFT: Mature carob, ficus, pittosporum and strawberry trees enclose the backyard and create a private retreat in the middle of a populous region. Citrus trees provide fruit and sweet fragrance.

JOVE WANG



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GARDENS

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Built-in stone benches offer quiet areas for contemplation and enjoyment of the secluded setting. Sloane collects antiques, including statuary, and has placed several in strategic locations. Concrete squirrels that once were part of the late actor Jack Webb's personal collection peek through green leaves. A bear statue from the 1920s stands sentinel at the woodland garden entrance to "keep out intruders," Sloane says. "And it works because we haven't had any."

Other garden sentinels stand tall and imposing at the house entrance. The entry garden consists of thorny cacti and massive aloes. These fierce plantings were installed when De Vito owned the house. It was his solution for creating a privacy barrier to discourage tourists from peering over the concrete wall (and yes, nosy people did). Large olive trees also add a privacy screen and also suit the Mediterranean landscape theme of the front entrance.

A soft side garden is filled with colorful flowers. Because this garden can be viewed from the living and dining rooms inside, Baer filled this section with colorful and fragrant flowers, including Angel's Trumpet, camellias, azaleas, variegated aspidistra and Australian lilies which thrive beneath towering palm trees. More colorful flowers fill pots and planters surrounding the swimming pool and outdoor entertainment area. A 1920s Talavera wall fountain designed and signed by artist Pedro Sanchez, is the major focal point in this outdoor room, entered through an imposing Spanish archway.

The rear garden is another space used for outdoor living. Enclosed by carob trees, tall pittosporum trees, strawberry trees and ficus trees, the space is surprisingly private in this densely populated area. Citrus trees provide sweet fragrance and fruit most of the year.

This classic California garden is a success story in how the past, including living plants, can be preserved and protected for future enjoyment and enrichment. ☼