

DESIGNED BY Fergus Garber Architects, this magical Bernard Maybeck-inspired home in Atherton was designed to feel like the oldest on the block. With that clear direction in motion, the homeowners engaged Christian Douglas Design to envision a landscape scheme that would complement the integrity of the architecture. “Our goal was to honor that spirit by adding to the existing oak and redwood population and settling the home into the landscape—an homage to Maybeck and the Northern California terrain,” says the firm’s founder Christian Douglas. “We all shared a unifying vision of

Old Soul

In Atherton, Christian Douglas Design demonstrates that living off the land is transcendent

By **LINDSEY SHOOK**

Photography by **CHRISTIAN DOUGLAS**

creating an engaging outdoor environment for a growing multigenerational family—a comforting space to host grandchildren, play, and gather and harvest food throughout the seasons.”

Known for cultivating environments that connect people more deeply to the land, Douglas and his team wanted to embrace elements

that would soften the masculine structure. “With abundant sunlight, the landscape became a canvas for both organized food production and spontaneous foraging—a blend of kitchen gardens, edible hedgerows and flowering species that support pollinators and wildlife within a formal framework,” Douglas says. “We reduced hardscape wherever possible, replacing it with plantings, including edible species along paths for casual foraging. The intention was to give the grandchildren places to explore, to find treasures in the landscape and to learn where food comes from through play.”

A layered mix of artichokes, native oaks and textured planting defines the entry experience, softening the architecture and grounding it in the Northern California landscape.



A radial reflecting pool edged with Juncus reeds and boulders becomes both an art piece and a water source, beneficial to wildlife; a serene welcome at the home’s entry.



A raised stylized potager with cedar obelisks provides months of seasonal produce and a perfect classroom for curious grandchildren to embrace the joy of growing food.



Canary palms, figs and citrus frame the central pool, while boxwood and no-mow fescue create a subtle play of texture and tone in the foreground.

From persimmons to mission figs, Pakistan mulberry, pomegranate, apricot and avocado along with blueberries, huckleberries and alpine strawberries sprinkled throughout, the approach of integrating edible plants doesn't always align with the concept of elegance. "Traditionally, formality relies on repetition—the rhythm of a few well-chosen species," he notes. "We wanted that same sense of order but layered with seasonal interest and variety. By organizing the layout through pathways, terraces and a clearly defined axis, we established a framework that allowed for freedom and expression within the planting."

"This project redefines what a formal garden can be," he proclaims. "Beneath its structured geometry lie layers of food, habitat and discovery." Douglas and his team assess the success of each project based on not just the clients' happiness but their level of engagement. From swimming to exploring the redwoods to tending the garden together, these homeowners and their family utilize every part. Douglas notes, "I'm told that gardening with their grandmother has become the children's most treasured pastime, and I've seen the photos to prove it. There's nothing more gratifying than knowing the garden has become the heartbeat of their family life."