



UDY KAMEON IS THE DESIGN GENIUS," SOLER DIVULGES, "BUT LAURA COOPER AND NICK TAGGART LIVE PLANTS"

**A COLORFUL ENCOUNTER**, left, between Cooper and Taggart in the pink section of their hillside garden. Oenothera and geraniums bloom in the foreground; Cooper is surrounded by rock-rose and artemisia, and Taggart is obscured by a massive *Salvia canariensis*. Behind him, *Bougainvillea* 'California Gold' spills off the couple's dining arbor. Below: The entrance to the garden from the street.

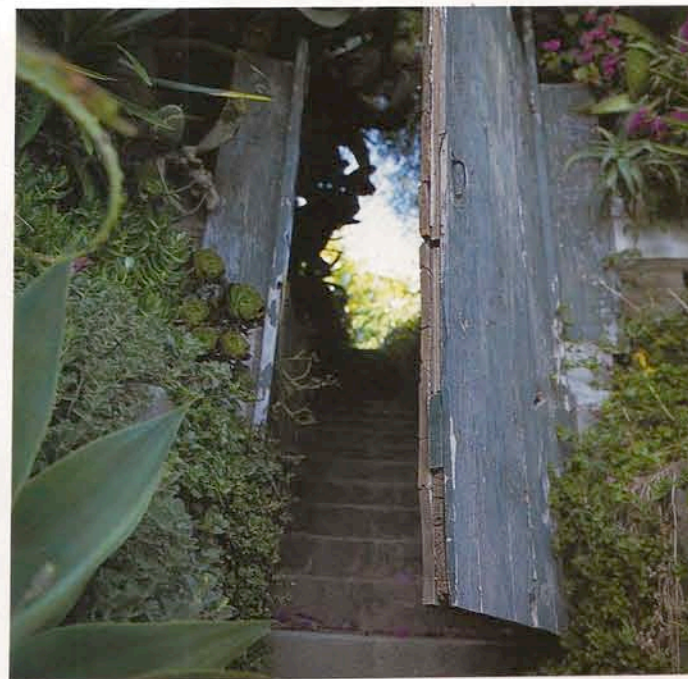
*tirucalli* 'Sticks on Fire' and pittosporum. Her yard, which she shares with her art critic boyfriend, Jan Tumlir, is often blighted by the effects of attention deficit disorder. The front garden, for instance, has never reached maturity. Last year it was gothic; now it's informed by a "cactus succulent aesthetic."

"I am the mad scientist of the group," Soler admits. She also named it (reserving the title *Germinatrix* for herself) and publishes its smart, witty—often muckraking—newsletter, which includes the devious comic strip *Petallica*. At any party, Soler is the one gesturing wildly, laughing loudly, unable to keep anything in. She'll tell you that she's jealous of garden designers **Laura Cooper** and **Nick Taggart**: "Judy's the design genius, but Laura and Nick live plants. We all wish we could make such loose, playful, exuberant gardens."

But 23 years ago, when Taggart, then single, moved from England to his ramshackle LA home, it was not the lush landscapes painted by fellow Brit David Hockney that inspired him. Rather, a Lucian Freud canvas of a man shadowed by a succulent led him to create a spare desert garden. Then, in 1989 Laura Cooper moved in and spilled color all over his minimalist background.

"The hillside naturally lends itself to smaller rooms," she says. Maybe so. But aside from a civilized area near the house—with an arbor, pond, bathtub, and patio—all the unenlightened visitor perceives is plants, plants, and more plants: morning-glories climbing a 30-foot century plant, a wall of 'Joseph's Coat' roses, bougainvillea that blots out the sky.

"She plants big and (continued on page 52)



**LAURA COOPER**  
**NICK TAGGART**  
ARTISTS, ART TEACHERS, GARDEN DESIGNERS

Taggart's work—precise insect sketches, ambiguous wax-on-oil renderings of plant roots (see *Undergrowth*, above bottom)—reflects nature. The collages Cooper made as a way of planning their garden (detail of *Red Garden*, above top) shape it. Although their approaches differ, many of their opinions are shared.

- **Favorite plant:** *Crotalaria agatiflora*
- **Pet peeve:** gophers
- **Favorite artist:** Tim Hawkinson (Taggart); Piplotti Rist (Cooper)
- **Best thing about our garden is** how hidden and faraway it feels.
- **Garden weakness:** planting too many things
- **If I died and came back as a plant, it would be** a cartoon, because they come back bigger each year (T); *Brugmansia* 'Charles Grimaldi'—it's intoxicatingly beautiful, yet witchy and dangerous (C).
- **The next hot landscaping trend is** gardening naked.
- **The landscaping trend that is so over is...** that never happens.
- **Favorite artistic mediums:** pencil and acrylic (T)
- **The difference between art and gardening is** not much.
- **The Getty garden is** complex.
- **Our garden is** evolving.