



A birdhouse designed by Eric Solberg for Sassafras Nursery and Landscaping in Topanga; hydrangea detail; a galvanized watering can for Hiatt's many potted plants. Opposite: Santa Barbara daisies, baby's tears and passion vine blanket a grotto inspired by an old doorway in France.

N

ine years ago, Douglas Pierce Hiatt bought a good house with a bad yard in Beverly Hills. Cemented, heavily shaded and squeezed against a lofty hill, the little plot seemed hopeless. But instead of struggling with its faults, Hiatt, an interior designer, learned to work with them.

He disguised an ugly cinder-block retaining wall with vines, a stone grotto and a waterfall. He preserved an old cement patio but gave it character by peeling off some of its paint, adding redwood accents and growing moss around its edges. He became a connoisseur of shade plants—foxglove, gardenia, hydrangea, impatiens—which he grouped in pots along his deck, creating the lushness of flower borders. Just above, on the shaggy hill, he set topiary animals—grazing deer, a fox and hounds—and elsewhere, blooming birdhouses and a topiary tea party. “A lot of little scenes can make a small landscape seem larger,” says Hiatt, who has gardened since childhood and traveled widely in Europe visiting gardens.

His vine-clad grotto was inspired by a memory from the South of France: the doorway of an ancient house built into a mountainside. Another French touch is the bit of clipped box hedge that intermittently tops the wall above his patio. “The suggestion of formality—not for-

