



goldaward

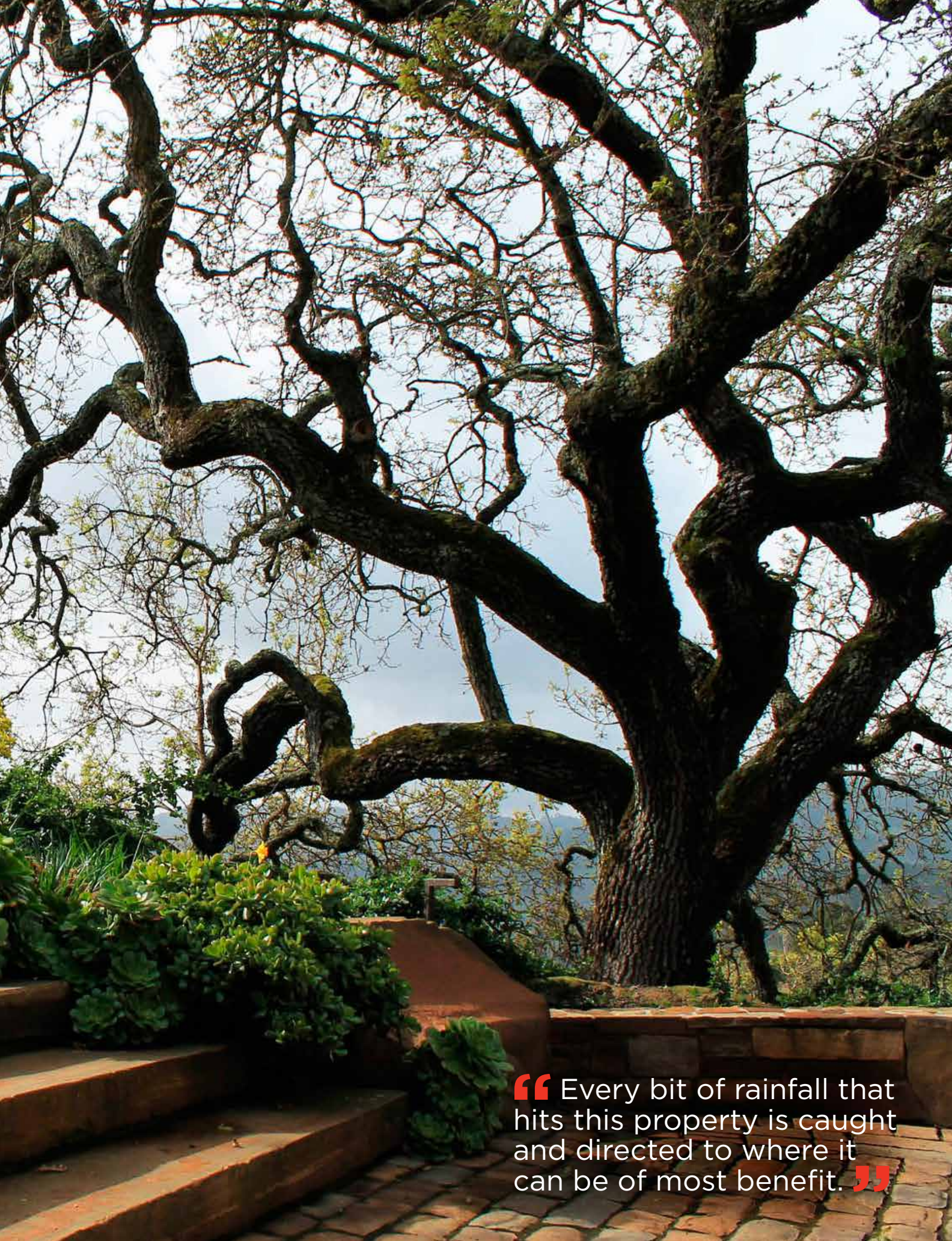
RESIDENTIAL DESIGN:
The Reclamation of Native Oak Ridge,
Lafayette, CA

David Thorne

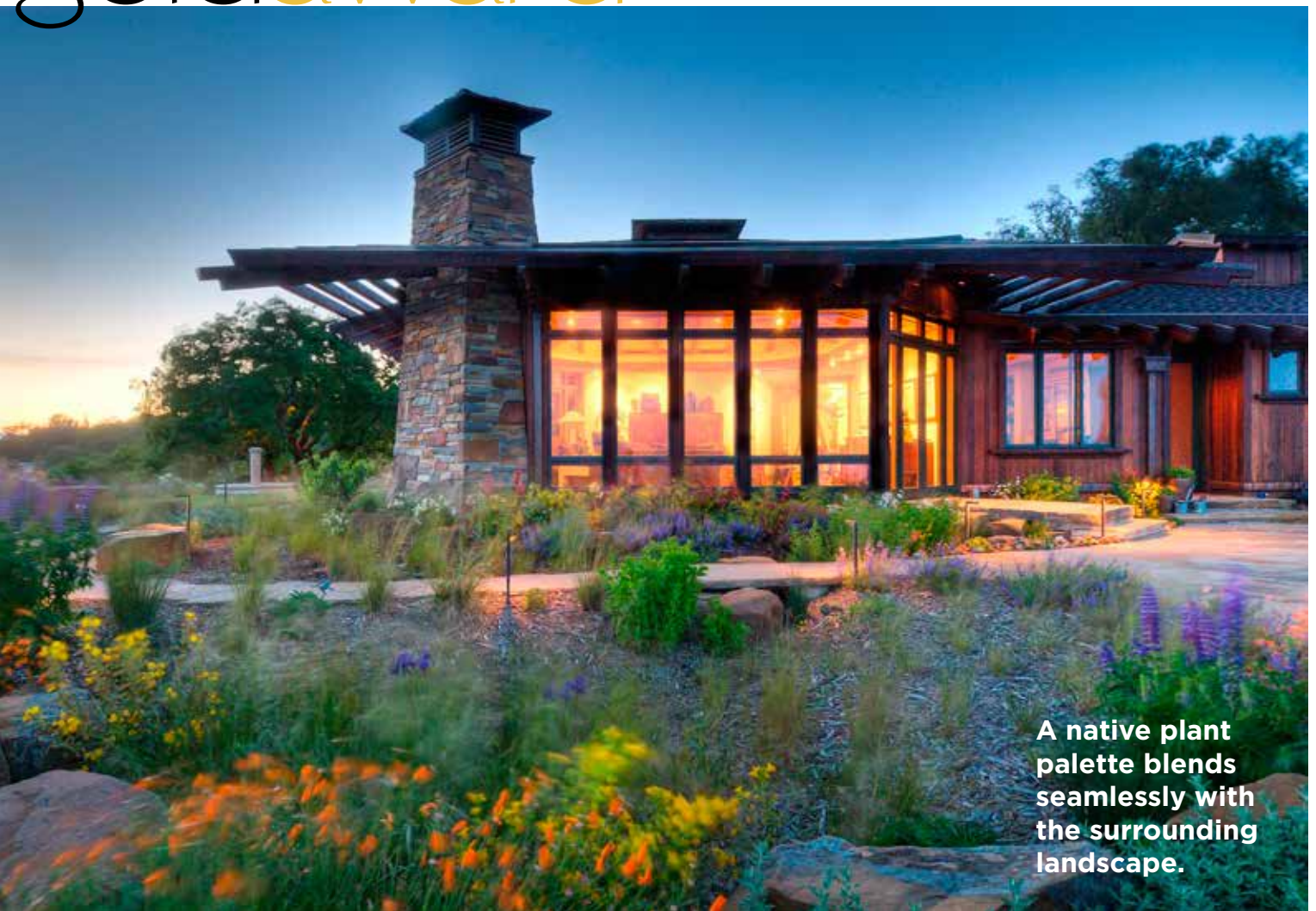
FIRM: David Thorne Landscape Architect, Inc,
Oakland, CA

USDA ZONE: 9B

PHOTOGRAPH: SHARON DEBELL



“ Every bit of rainfall that hits this property is caught and directed to where it can be of most benefit. ”



A native plant palette blends seamlessly with the surrounding landscape.

With stunning views of Mount Diablo, this 10-acre property is on a ridgetop setting that had been badly damaged during the process of clearing the site. Left behind was a scarred and barren pad of soil and several prominent oaks aging prematurely due to soil compaction and stress. Together with landscape architect David Thorne, the clients hoped to restore and repopulate the barren ridge-top with oaks and native grasses to create a transition from hillside to home that blurred the boundaries between the natural and built environment.

The live oaks dictated a planting palette that could withstand the hot summers with little supplemental water. Given that, Thorne chose a palette of native plants and brought them right up to the edge of the house, using large drifts to provide wildlife habitat and attract pollinating insects and birds. Native strawberry (*Fragaria* spp.), manzanita (*Arctostaphylos* spp.), and flowering currant (*Ribes* spp.) provide berries and seeds to feed the local birds. A blend of native grasses, California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*), sticky



monkey flower (*Mimulus aurantiacus*), and blue-flowered silver bush lupine (*Lupinus albifrons*) provide seeds and nectar. Watching and hearing the birds and buzzing pollinators attracted by this diverse blend of regionally appropriate plants allows the homeowners to feel in tune with their mesmerizing surroundings.

In addition to using water-wise native plants, every bit of rainfall that hits this property is caught and directed to where it can be of most benefit. Thorne designed most areas of the landscape to be permeable, and water is routed throughout the landscape to percolate back into the soil. The few impervious areas are graded towards convenient swales, which direct water to the planting beds. Roof runoff is collected in a series of rockeries and bioswales planted with seasonal grasses that filter rain before replenishing the groundwater supply.

Generous pathways and patios of Arizona flagstone have a similar warm tone to the native California grassland in the natural landscape, and these comfortable areas create a landscape that unfolds with small surprises as you make your way through it. Along one pathway, a single stone bowl fountain that Thorne found at a local stone yard has a small piece of copper tubing feeding the fountain with a periodic slow drip, to keep the fountain full and the water fresh.

“People love this little fountain,” says Thorne. “Birds and animals come and drink here, and the little circular ripples created as each drip falls to the water has a magical effect.”

As the afternoon goes on, the sculptural branching of the native oaks casts dramatic shadows throughout the landscape. California live oak (*Quercus*

Arizona flagstone pathways reflect the warmth of the surrounding hills.





agrifolia), California valley oak (*Quercus lobata*), and a scattering of blue oak (*Quercus douglasii*) have a majestic appearance due to their age and regal form. To create a natural succession that would have occurred had the site not been cleared, Thorne specified that 40 new oaks be planted around the hillside to take the place of the mature oaks as they inevitably decline over time. Minimal use of low-wattage lighting allows the homeowners to enjoy the garden in the evening, while minimizing the negative effects of light pollution on wildlife. 🐾