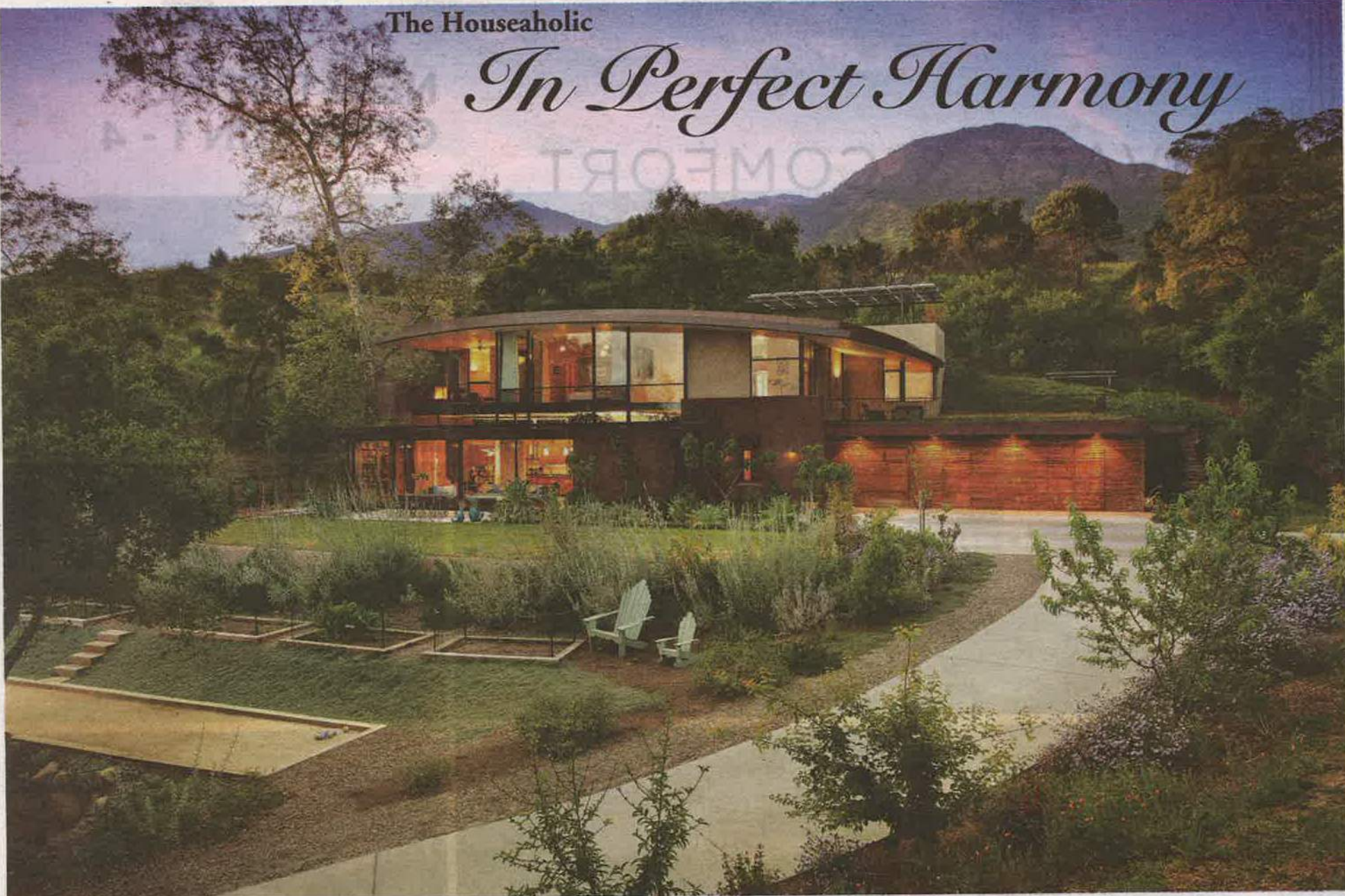


The Houseaholic

# In Perfect Harmony



By Andrea Cambern

The Coyote House, the Platinum LEED Certified home built for their family, by architect Ken Radtkey and landscape architect Susan Van Atta. Photos Courtesy Tyson Ellis

**“Hello, my name is Andrea and I’m a houseaholic...”**

Being obsessed with architecture doesn't stop with houses. No, I brake for great commercial buildings too! Case in point, that sexy stucco and steel building on the corner of Gutierrez and Garden. You know the one. It peeks over the underpass, revealing just enough of itself to intrigue. It's the home of Van Atta Associates (a landscape architecture firm) and Blackbird Architecture.

Turns out, the owners of the two firms not only built and share the office building, they share their life. A life immersed in sustainable design.

“We got together over twenty years ago,” says architect Ken Radtkey. “We both had our own firms before we met and although we collaborate a lot, the firms are separate.”

But one of the projects they collaborated on from conception to completion is the Coyote House. Named for the street and of course, its howling neighbors! The Platinum LEED certified home represents the ultimate in green living.

### One With Nature

Long before sustainability became a buzzword in landscape design, it was Susan Van Atta's mantra. Her commitment to environmentally appropriate landscape planning has been first and foremost since her career took root over 25 years ago. It came into play in every aspect of the Coyote House.

“I think my favorite thing about the house is that we had the wood from the Eucalyptus trees on the property made into



**The Veranda welcomes the outside in. An emphasis of the design was to blur the lines between the interior and exterior.**

lumber and used it for the stairs, garage door, trim and dining room table,” she says. And Van Atta tells me that wasn't the only locally harvested material used in the construction of the home. “The floors are sliced regional sandstone.”

There are green roofs, solar panels config-

ured as a pergola to provide shade for a viewing deck and an arched main roof that allows rainwater to collect in a series of cisterns. Rainwater is used to irrigate the terraced garden, vegetable garden and fruit trees.

Above and beyond its sustainability and water and energy saving features, the three-

bedroom house boasts the most inviting entrance to the outside. Large windows that open wide blur the lines between inside and out. Architect Radtkey says that connection to the

**IN PERFECT HARMONY**

Continued on page 32



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- 3. Simple and sustainable. Architect Ken Rattkey and landscape architect Susan Van Atta enjoy the second floor fireplace deck in their home.
- 4. Sliced sandstone, and eucalyptus lumber are among local materials used for interior finishes. Cabinets are bamboo.
- 5. Solar panels configured as a pergola provide a shady viewing deck that looks out onto a green roof which Van Atta planted with sedum and dudley.

**IN PERFECT HARMONY**  
Continued from page 28

outdoors is his favorite feature. "I feel like we really enjoy that connection on a day to day basis," he says. "From the big window in the shower I can see the canopy of a large oak tree. From the kitchen, look out and be connected to nature in three or four directions."

Of course, none of this happens by accident. The Coyote House represents a design collaboration that took years to complete. You would think relinquishing design decisions for a creative couple would be a tough task, but Rattkey says the pair took a pragmatic approach to their own project.

"The way we thought about it was I was

Susan's client for the landscape, and she was my client for the building."

It turns out the toughest challenge was finding time for their own house. It had to be squeezed between client commitments. "It was a case of the cobbler's children have no shoes!" says Rattkey.

In the end the married couple created an elegant yet understated living environment that so comfortably coexists with its natural surroundings. Van Atta says it's just what they do.

"We seek to sensitively interpret, accentuate and enhance the best aspects of a site and its surroundings to create a memorable sense of space.

Mission accomplished.

