



# GARDEN AFFAIR

*A Cave Creek couple lovingly  
brings a piece of the desert to life*

Text by Suzanne Pickett Martinson • Photography by Charles Mann

When Valley resident Ron Moody began scouting for desert acreage five years ago, he found more than just a piece of property. He also met the woman who would become his wife.

"Ron and I met when he was looking for some land to build a home and store his landscaping and construction supplies," explains Carolyn Moody. "I was his real estate agent, and by the time he decided on this land we ended up buying it together. The rest, as they say, is history."

And an interesting history at that. The couple, who purchased a 5-acre parcel of Sonoran Desert in 1997, immediately went to work. They moved from grassy north central Phoenix into their newly built home in Cave Creek in December of that year, then excitedly tackled the front courtyard.

With the goal of creating a lush desert atmosphere within the space, the Moodys installed a water feature and pond as focal points. Small palms such as sago and *Phoenix roebelinii* were planted as a backdrop. A generous number of aloes was mixed







This photo: The entrance to Ron and Carolyn Moody's property is located just yards away from their nursery, allowing customers the opportunity to view mature plant specimens growing in a natural environment. • Left: In spring, brilliant red-orange blooms burst forth from an *Aloe ferox* plant.

in with century plants and octopus agaves that serve as the garden's evergreen vegetation. Fuchsia-color bougainvillea and orange trumpet vines climb the courtyard wall, while pink and lavender wildflowers, purple ruellia, orange and green canna lilies and other accent plants add sparks of color. Varying shades of specimen cacti, *euphorbia* and succulents—both planted and potted—lend character and dimension.

The couple salvaged two native foothills palo verde trees from the construction project and replanted them in their courtyard,

where they provide welcome shade. Flagstone patios at different elevations define walkways and paths. One favorite gathering spot is around a kiva fireplace. Designed to add a Southwestern element, it is painted with the same pattern of colorful birds and flowers as an entry arch near the front of the house.

"Ron has always been passionate about landscaping, and I caught the fire, too," admits Carolyn. "Soon I was spending more time in the yard than in real estate."

Ron's passion also took on renewed vigor. Initially, he had





planned to use the remaining 4 acres to grow trees and plants he uses frequently in his landscaping business. But at the same time the couple was creating their own garden spaces and experimenting with a wide variety of plants, Ron was creating a much larger garden on his remaining property. That area eventually turned into Dixileta Gardens Nursery.

"It just happened," Ron says. "We were getting so many comments from people about our landscaping that it was just a natural move to open the nursery. And with it being right next door, we can be, and are, completely immersed."

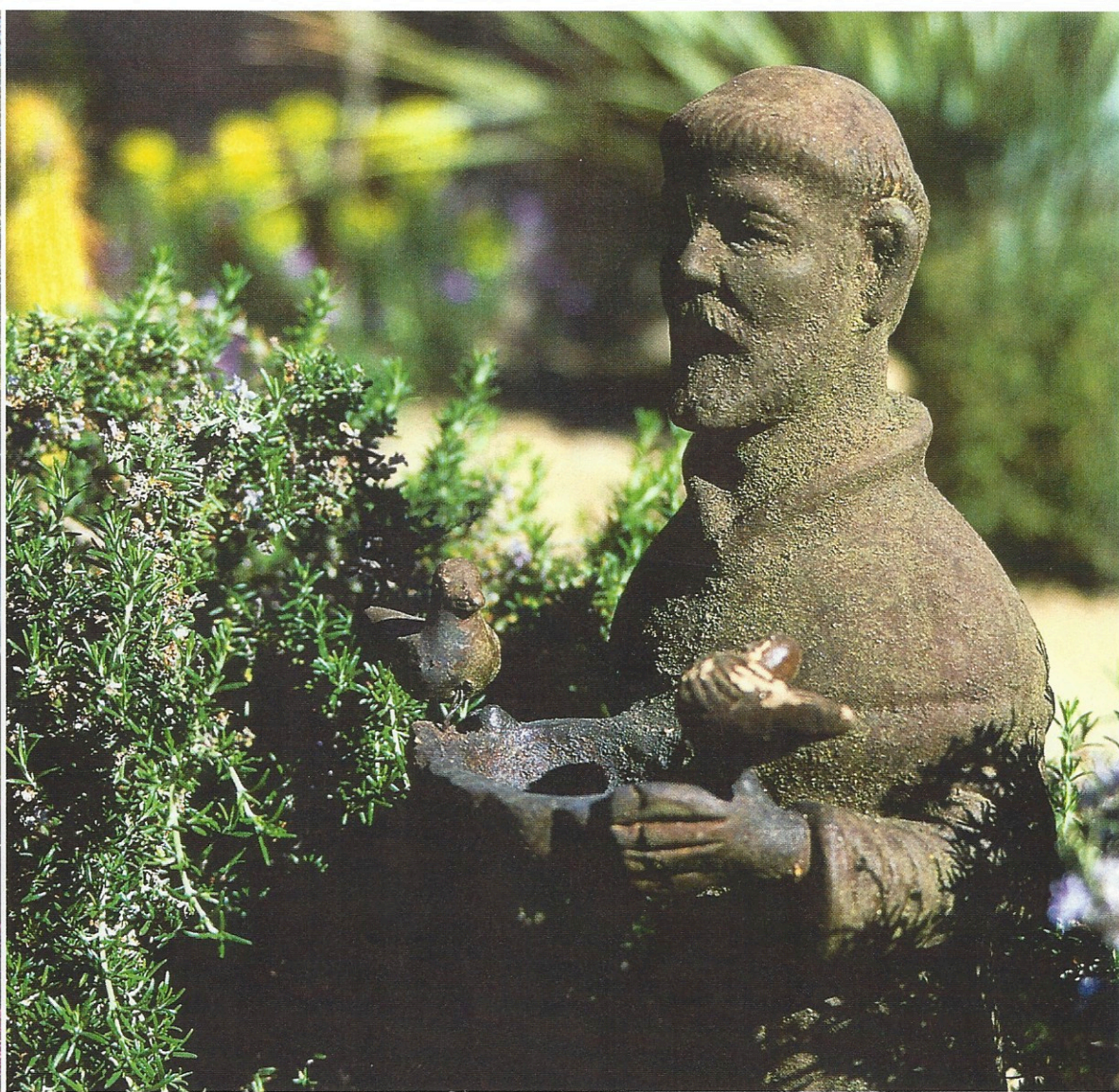
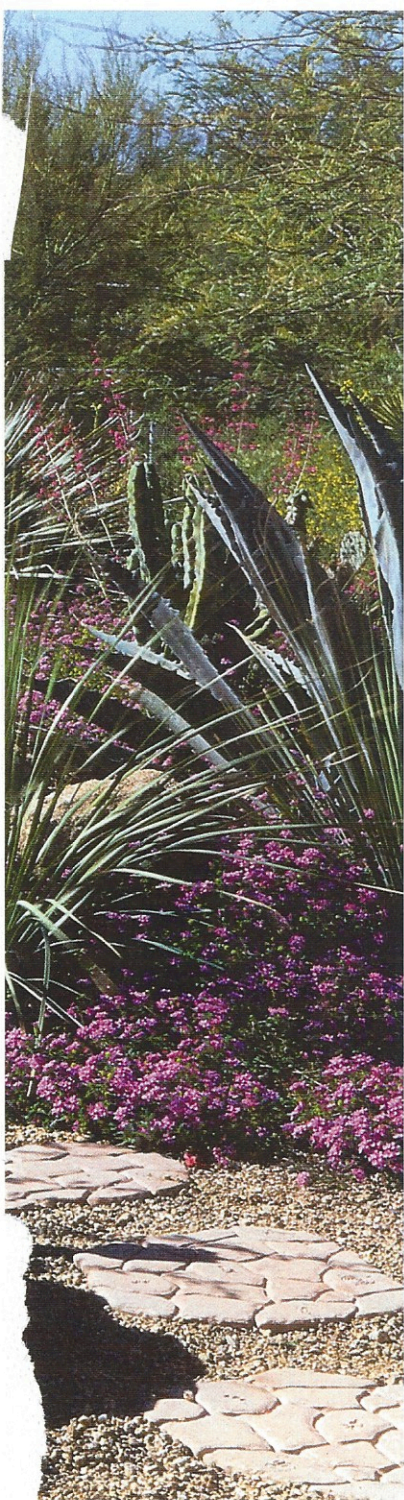
Another positive aspect of living next door is that people can personally view vegetation in a home setting, using the Moody garden as an example. "When choosing plants it is so important

to know what you are buying and how they will mature, particularly with desert plants," Ron comments. With enough water, desert plants will grow and grow big. Finding plants that you like and that are appropriate for your space is crucial."

The Moodys believe in drip irrigation, especially for desert plants. "Drip irrigation is essential, particularly with the kind of summers we have," advises Ron. "It also takes the guesswork out of watering requirements. Many people move to the desert from other states and other parts of the Valley and desire that lush look. You can have that kind of a look, but you just have to use a different palette of plants."

Ron also urges homeowners to take the time to create a good design for their landscapes, even if work will be done in phases.





Left: A flagstone deck in the back yard surrounds a beachfront-style pool and Jacuzzi spa on one level. A second deck covered in Saltillo tile contains a fire pit, kiva fireplace and outdoor barbecue. It is shady enough here even in summer to sit outside and enjoy the sights and sounds of a flourishing desert landscape, note the homeowners. • Above: A statue of St. Francis oversees a small section of the garden.

"That way, when it is complete, it will appear as if it was all part of the master plan," he adds.

The Moodys' master plan included separating their home from the adjacent nursery while maintaining open and friendly garden spaces for people to stroll through. To create that separation, *hardenbergia* (lilac vine) was planted along a fence. When it's in bloom, from January through March, the vine produces a spectacular show of brilliant purple flower clusters. The side yards are awash in a multihue portrait of orange trumpet, snail and potato vines, bougainvillea, orange jubilee, and yellow bells. Accenting the area are slipper plants, prickly pear, *euphorbia*, *cereus* cacti and creosote bush.

The couple's property has natural washes running throughout the front and back yards. Maintaining those washes usually is required per code, and the Moodys view this as an opportunity rather than a burden. To enhance their washes, they added

rocks, boulders, native plants and a wooden footbridge that blends in with the surroundings.

In the back yard a meandering pathway is defined by an extruded concrete border and is large enough for several people to walk side by side comfortably. Thirty mesquite and palo verde trees, both new and salvaged, are scattered throughout the yard, adding structure and character to the paths. An aloe garden thrives under branches of several mature palo verdes, soaking up the dappled sun as it streams through the tree branches. Hand-carved and painted wooden Mexican benches are placed in seating areas along the way.

Rabbits, birds, quail, javelinas, lizards, butterflies and even a ring-tail cat also enjoy the Moody garden. Traditional and solar-powered bird-feeders and water gardens are placed throughout the property to encourage wildlife. Carolyn notes that she and Ron hope to make their garden an animal sanctuary as well as a nature trail. "We love the wildlife, and we love to host visitors," she says.

Ron recently started working with iron, and his creations can





**Above:** The couple's front courtyard illustrates the diversity of desert plant material that can grow in an arid environment. Much of the vegetation stays green year-round. • **Opposite, top and bottom:** Garden statues tucked throughout the yard bring focus to quieter spaces and contrast nicely with native plantings.

be found nestled throughout the landscape. A large iron gate with coyote and cactus motifs is impressive in its concept and design. Whimsical yet functional iron bird-feeders tower up from the vegetation as if they had sprouted from seed. A new type of portable trellis, another of Ron's original designs, makes it easy to transport climbing plants from one area to another.

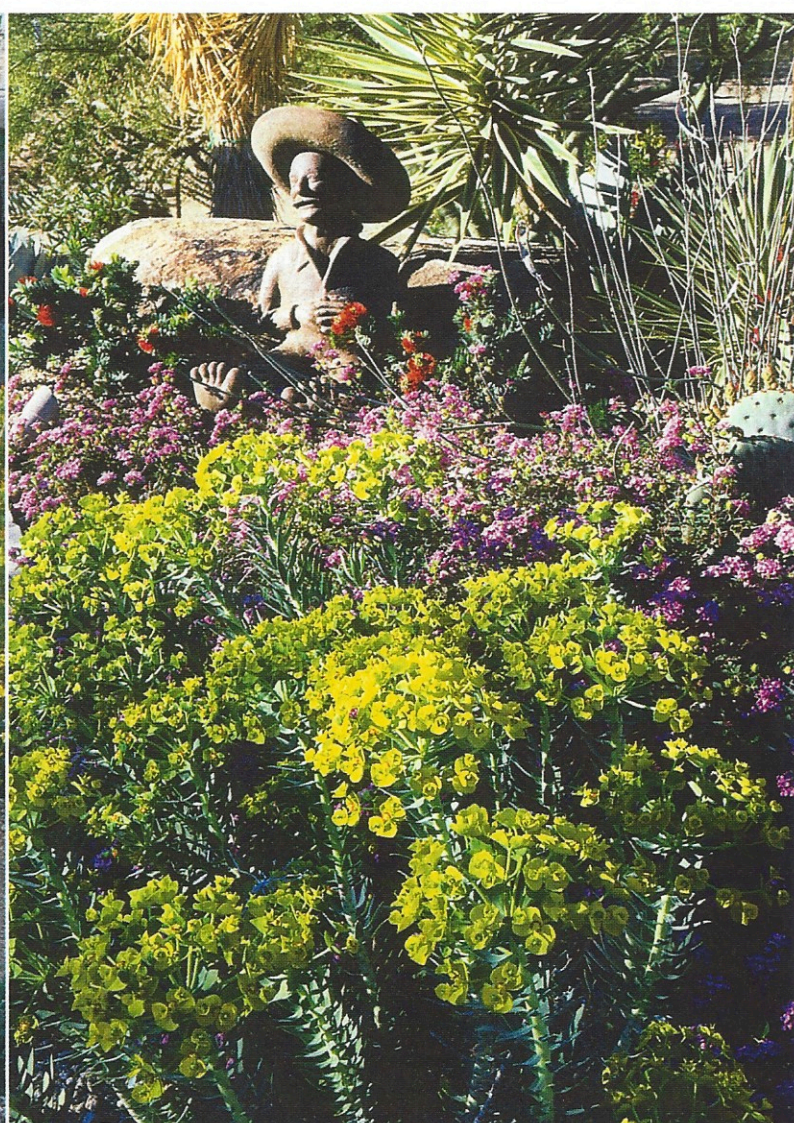
For Ron and Carolyn, creating interest and being interested in their gardens has become a goal in life. "You need to love what you do," says Ron. "We're lucky that we found what we love and found each other in the process."

*See Resource Guide.*

### *Tips From the Gardeners*

- Take the time to sightsee and do research. For example, spend time looking at display gardens to get a feel for what you like. Visit Desert Botanical Garden and its bookshop for ideas. Judy Mielke's *Native Plants for Southwestern Landscapes* is one of the best resources. Take this guide with you to nurseries, so you can identify plants and learn about their characteristics.
- Develop a master design for your landscape, and incorporate what you researched into that design. Include plans for drip irrigation, and learn about your plants' water requirements. Make sure your drip system is properly installed with quality





materials and controls.

- Include night lighting in your design to enhance your landscape while providing needed illumination.
- Don't be afraid to use succulents and cacti in pots as dramatic accents.
- Try to salvage plants and trees, and replant them whenever possible.
- Experiment with your favorite plants in different areas of your yard.
- Create seating spaces, so you can relax and enjoy the fruits of your labor. 🌵