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PHOTO GALLERY:

A Hollywood Hills sanctuary with a hint of India

By Debra Prinzing

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Christine Cotter / *Los Angeles Times*

Mala Vasan wanted to transform her small yard in Hollywood. Tucked behind a 1924 Spanish bungalow and hemmed in by her own garage as well as her neighbor's, Vasan's yard was attractive "only to a family of skunks that used to walk across the space," she says. She turned to landscape designer Laura Morton, and in their conversations they eventually discussed a lush oasis influenced by the home's Spanish-style architecture, Mala's Indian American heritage and the two women's mutual love of travel.

"She showed me a file of imagery she'd been daydreaming about, including exotic pictures of India with elephants," Morton says. In the end, the 16-by-32-foot patio was re-imagined as a two-level courtyard that feels far away from Los Angeles. "Enclosed spaces instill a sense of intimacy," Morton says, "and within that your own sense of paradise is possible."

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Laura Morton

This "before" picture shows the courtyard before Morton's transformation. Morton cleverly masked the back wall—the neighbor's garage—with a triple arcade of antique wood arches from India, visible in the previous photo. The center arch is aligned on axes with the fountain and fire pit; twinkling lights and a fragrant jasmine vine now give the space new life.

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Laura Morton

Another “before” photo shows how a second side of Morton’s courtyard was hemmed in by her own garage. For the same view today, see the next photo.

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Christine Cotter / *L.A. Times*

Designer Morton, left, and homeowner Vasan sit in front of an antique Indian double-door from Rajasthan that transformed the front of Vasan’s one-car garage. The existing plumbago, jasmine and morning glory that once sprawled recklessly over a muddy, uneven driveway have been cut back. They’re now trained on framework to create a flowering wall along the property line, where a chain-link fence once stood. A new permeable floor of decomposed granite and chocolate sandstone slabs accommodate a custom tile bistro table. At night, amber and purple carnival lights crisscross the space overhead, while citrus trees, rosemary and scented pelargonium lend fragrance to the setting.

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Christine Cotter / *L.A. Times*

Blue marbles in a succulent planter echo the colors of Mala Vasan’s new outdoor room.

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Christine Cotter / *L.A. Times*

Morton designed two terraces: The upper garden has a raised reflecting pool that cascades toward the lower level, where built-in chaises provide abundant seating by an elevated natural gas fire pit.

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Christine Cotter / *L.A. Times*

The lower terrace at night: The pool spills down toward the fire pit, the source of the flames hidden beneath layers of crushed white glass.

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Laura Morton

A curtain of water spills down toward the fire.

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Christine Cotter / *L.A. Times*

“Small as it is, Mala’s garden is quite detailed,” says designer Morton, pictured here. “Like a little jewel box.” Her client Mala Vasan calls it her sanctuary, an antidote to the go-go schedule of everyday life. “When I’m at such a frenetic pace, this garden seems otherworldly to me,” Vasan says. “It’s somewhere I can come to be with my friends and a loved one and just relax. The word that comes to mind for me is ‘wonderment.’”

For a glimpse of the designer’s other work, go to Laura Morton’s website:

www.LauraMortonDesign.com



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