



Drought-tolerant masses of 'Veronica Lake' hebe, compact Mexican sage and lavender give a terrace in front of the vegetable garden a lush look at San Ysidro Ranch in Santa Barbara, California. Veiled in star jasmine and 'Autumn Sunset' roses, the rough-hewn eucalyptus pergola offers a shady place for guests to escape the afternoon heat.

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7 HOTELS whose gardens
alone are WORTH THE TRIP

STORY BY EMILY YOUNG



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Edged with local sandstone, the vegetable garden includes lettuce and basil for the restaurant as well as ground morning glory and Rozanne geranium to accent a birdbath. Opposite: One of many intimate paths winds past compact Mexican sage, Chiapas sage and Pride of Madeira on the way from the guest cottages to the communal spaces.





San Ysidro Ranch

SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA

North of Los Angeles in the oak-studded Montecito foothills, San Ysidro Ranch is often considered a glitzy celebrity hangout. John and Jacqueline Kennedy honeymooned there. Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh tied the knot there. Audrey Hepburn, Bing Crosby, Gwyneth Paltrow and Jennifer Lopez stayed there. But the real appeal of this historic 500-acre property just outside Santa Barbara owes more to its rustic roots as a one-time citrus ranch than its high-profile guest list. As part of a four-year renovation completed in 2007, L.A. landscape designers Laurie Lewis and Sally Paul reworked the 14 acres immediately surrounding the luxury retreat, giving the land the patina of its agricultural past. In revamping the public grounds and creating all-new private gardens for each of the 41 cottages, the designers coax guests out of their rooms by making the resort more pedestrian-friendly. Footpaths of decomposed granite crunch pleasantly underfoot. Terraces and orchards are set off by low walls of warm-colored local sandstone, and drought-tolerant native and Mediterranean plants such as lavender, rosemary, thyme, germander and hebe thrive in big sweeps. While a pond resembling an old livestock tank refreshes with the sound of burbling water and the sight of blooming water lilies, a pergola of cut eucalyptus branches offers respite from the sun. Most popular of all is the vegetable garden, where heirloom tomatoes, artichokes, chard and other fresh produce are harvested for the Stonehouse Restaurant, and where guests often stroll at sunset, a glass of wine in hand.

› WHEN TO GO:

Say the designers, there's something blooming all the time. In May and November, when the sun is lower in the sky, the light makes the hebe and lavender really stand out. During the fall, golden light floods the hills, making beautiful shadows and picking up the honey color of the local sandstone.

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One of Paul's favorite views is from the back of the entry hacienda, looking past the vegetable garden, the pergola and the lily pond, up to the hills.

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Lewis loves the creek-side cottages that are right on the water's edge with huge oaks hanging over. "Each cottage has its own private garden that is woody and riparian."