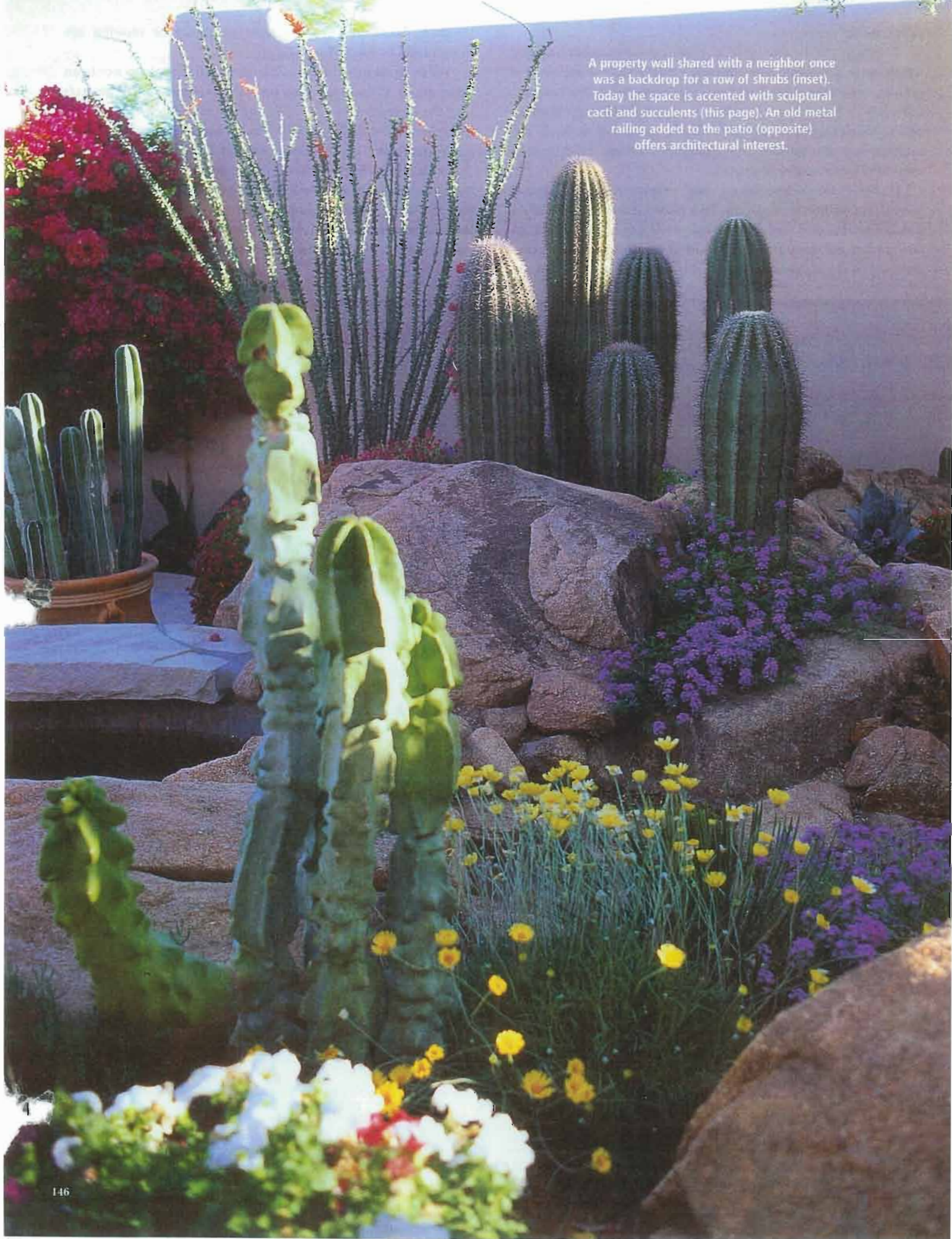


A property wall shared with a neighbor once was a backdrop for a row of shrubs (inset). Today the space is accented with sculptural cacti and succulents (this page). An old metal railing added to the patio (opposite) offers architectural interest.

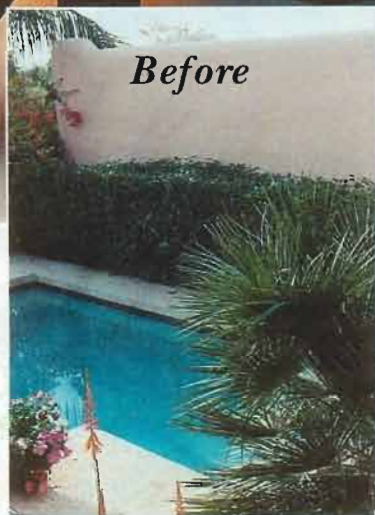




# A Small Stretch of Paradise

*Terraced spaces solve a hillside landscape design dilemma*

Text and photography by Nancy Christensen



*The minute you set foot in* John and Pat MacNeil's back yard, you understand why they were attracted to this small hillside property: It has scenic mountain vistas and absolutely nothing obstructing the magnificent view.

The couple, who live in Edina, Minn., part of the year, bought their Phoenix home in 1989. Its yard, while sprinkled with tropical plantings and quite lovely, was almost all pool and offered little usable space.

"We loved our spa, but because we weren't here in summer we rarely used the swimming pool," explains Pat. "We thought the yard could be put to better use without it." Two years ago she and her husband decided to make a change.

Inspired by the intuitiveness of Landscape Architect Chad Robert, who was working for Landscaping by André at the time, the MacNeils saw the possibilities unfold before them.

"The first thing Chad said to us was that we had a million-dollar view, but we weren't capitalizing on it," John recalls.

"He envisioned several seating areas, a water feature connected to the spa, and special nighttime lighting."

Because John and Pat like to entertain, Robert designed a sequence of terraced spaces, making better use of the horizontal

expanse that makes up the yard. Each area offers room for lounge chairs, as well as enough space for people to congregate. Robert also created a new entrance to a covered patio by repositioning a small set of steps, allowing better access to the rest of the yard.

The much-used but aging spa was replaced with a new one, and boulders were incorporated around its perimeter, playing off the mountain views. In addition, a small trickling waterfall and stream were installed so that all three water features appear to flow together.

Robert also decided to make use of a shared wall, but first some structural issues needed to be addressed. "Because John and



Pat live on a zero-lot-line property, the wall of their neighbor's house acts as a property border for their yard," he points out.

Landscaping by André president Steve Bollinger, whose company maintains the property twice a week, notes that drainage was a big concern with that wall. "Because there is such a big drop-off at the end of the site, and the house is on such a steep hill, we were concerned with seepage into the neighbor's house," he explains. Additional drainage was integrated into the landscape, including flagstone grates installed along the edge of the house to blend in with new flagstone decking.

Then the planting began. Because most of the specimens were mature in size, almost everything had to be craned over the couple's house. "When Chad told us he wanted to bring in an ironwood tree, I had something little in mind," John recalls. "When he brought in an 80- or 90-year-old ironwood that came in a 6-by-7-foot box, we couldn't believe it!"

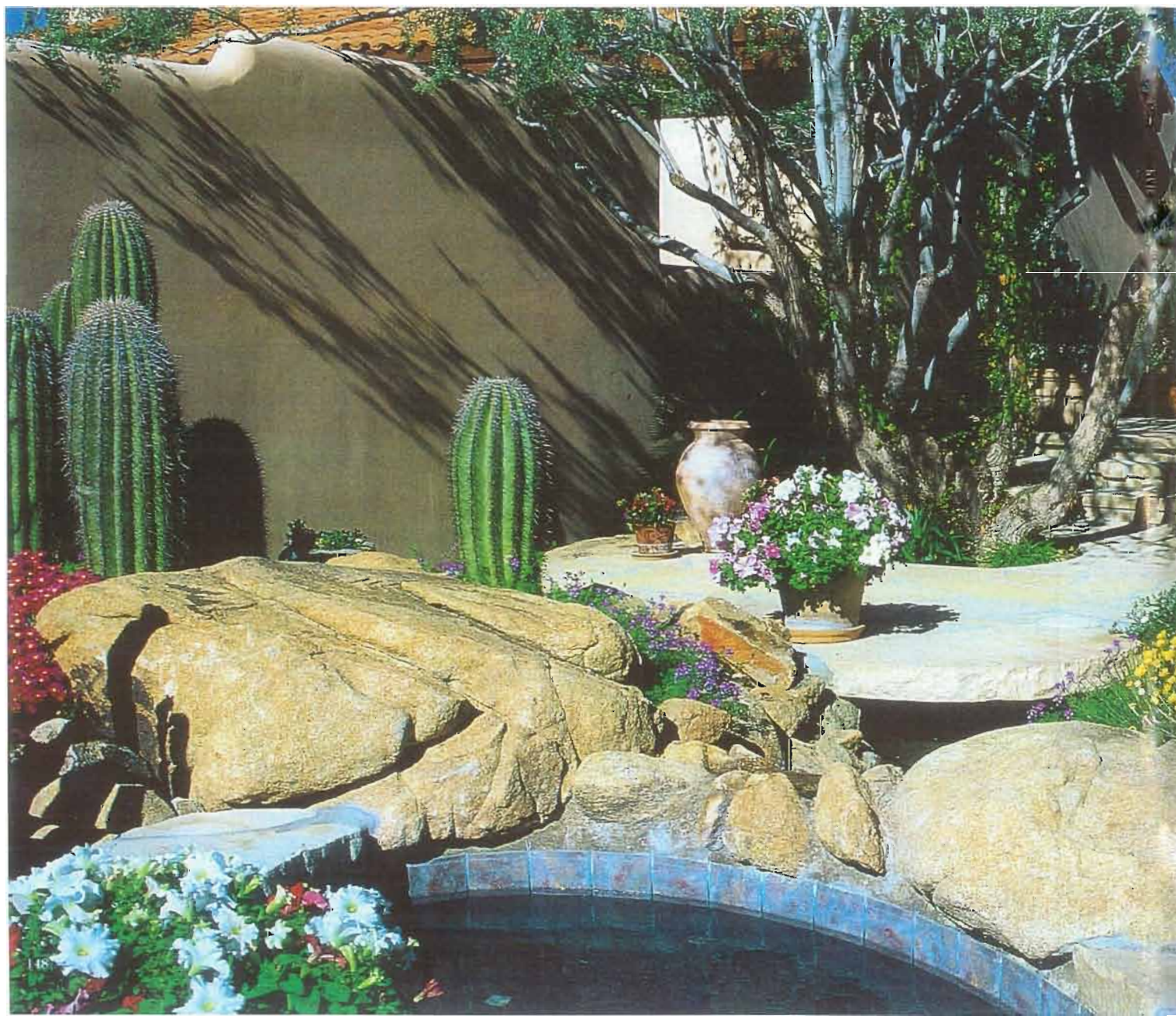
The majority of the specimens are native to the Sonoran Desert. Robert chose taller, more sculptural plants for the wall area, then added lighting. At night, the striking silhouettes of

ocotillo, saguaro, aloe and the ironwood tree play off a white wall. Planted around the water features and in-between boulders are barrel cacti, totem pole cacti, ice plants and queen's wreath. Potted annuals and perennials lend color and draw the eye toward the distant view.

According to the MacNeils, the renovation turned out better than they could have imagined. "We both had a mental image of where we were going with this project, then we left the rest to Chad," says John. And the couple literally left it in his hands, taking off for their Minnesota summer home and returning to Phoenix only once to pick out flower pots.

"When we came back at the end of summer the yard was finished, and we were thrilled to death," Pat remarks. Now the MacNeils open all their windows and doors to their new space, using it as an "outdoor hallway." It makes the walk from one end of the house to the other much more pleasant.

It's really the best of both worlds: an outdoor room that serves to open up the indoor space. Now Pat and John have a million-dollar view from the inside out. 🌵





Opposite: The MacNeils' small backyard, previously dominated by a swimming pool, has been renovated to make better use of the area. A new spa, a water feature and several sitting areas now occupy the elongated space.

Right: A natural-looking waterfall and stream have been integrated with the spa. Purple verbena and other desert plantings provide striking accents.

Below, right: A cascade of blooming ice plant, potted cacti and a mature ironwood tree accentuate the landscape's natural beauty.

