

HOUSE BEAUTIFUL

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THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL

BUILDING · FURNISHING · PLANTING



OJO DEL DESIERTO

*The Home of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas A. O'Donnell, in Southern California, of which
W. C. Tanner was the Architect*

BY MARY KELLOGG

FOR the ascent to 'Ojo del Desierto' the Professor started the car in low. This is the highest compliment which he can pay to a hill — although such a 'hill,' it must hastily be admitted, is not to be mentioned in the same breath with the smiling, dimpled, verdured slopes of our New England. This hill is a full-fledged California mountain. It rises as abruptly from the floor of the desert as doubt sometimes rises in a mind prepared for action.

It is also a sort of private mountain, since it is the magnificent site for one house only. And there is probably only one person alive who would have conceived the gorgeous idea of building a house here, half-way between heaven and earth, on a 'cloud-loved terrace beyond the world.' A terrace reached by as superb a stretch of roadway as even the United States Government could build for its armies, provided it possessed them. A roadway with a grade which caused even the Professor to pause, a thing he had not done from Vancouver to

Tia Juana, and begin the ascent in low. Even at that my eyes sought — just as Colonel Lindbergh's might, in a manner

not reflecting upon courage but crediting prudence — desirable landing places. Upon the car had slipped down a mountain backward.

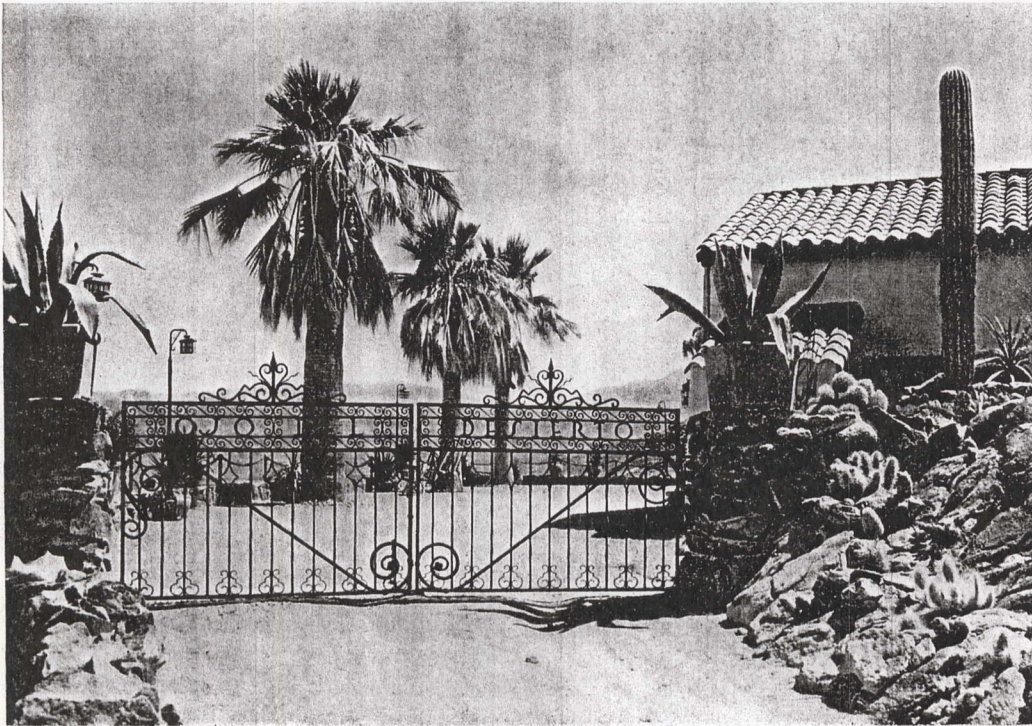
My opening paragraph will die without having lived if it has failed to convey an impression of the heights to which one goes in order to reach this almost unimaginable 'Eye of the Desert'; or of the sense of adventure and unreality which there attend one. The road, of course, is so carefully engineered and constructed that fears are futile. One cannot fail to reach with ease and safety the delicately wrought iron gates where the words 'Ojo del Desierto' are silhouetted against the sky.

Literally against the sky! Try to picture it, for otherwise no adequate conception of the peculiar loveliness of situation can be obtained. The



Photographs by George Haight

THE FLOOR OF THIS CACTUS GARDEN HAS LARGE FLAT STONES AND COBBLES LAID IN CEMENT IN THE SPANISH MANNER



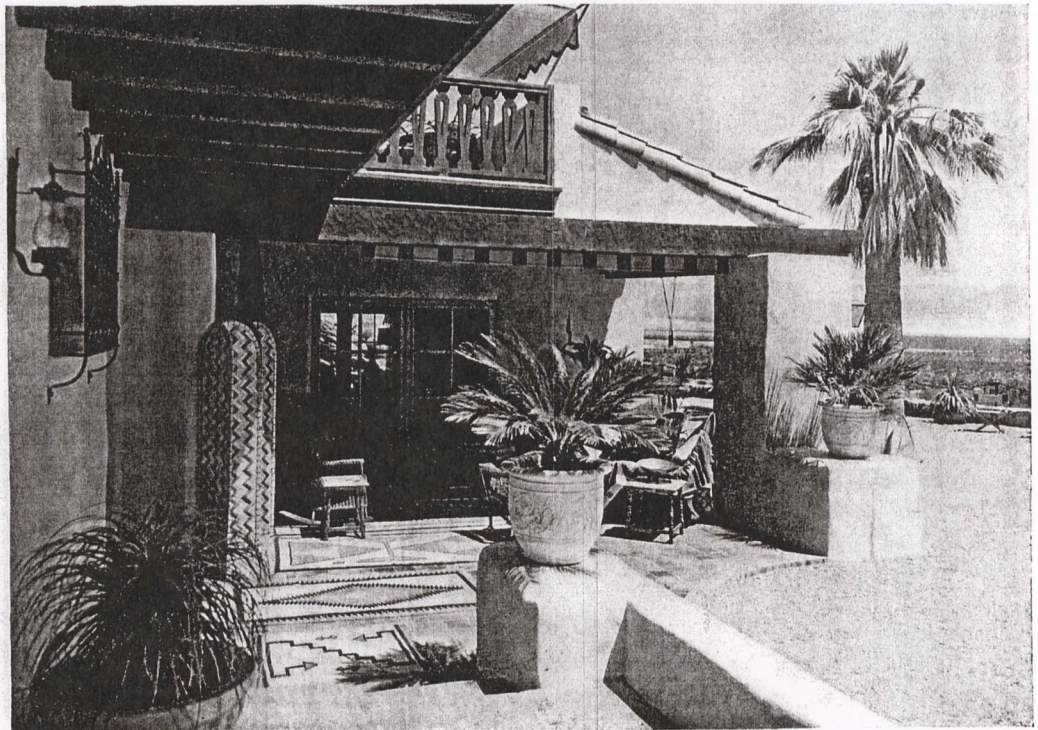
BY A ROAD THAT WINDS UP A SURPRISINGLY STEEP HILL WE FINALLY CAME TO A PAIR OF DELICATELY WROUGHT IRON GATES IN WHICH THE NAME 'OJO DEL DESIERTO' IS SILHOUETTED AGAINST THE SKY

OPENING FROM THE LIVING-ROOM IS THIS OPEN-AIR SPACE, HALF LIVING-ROOM AND HALF DINING-ROOM. DIRECTLY OPPOSITE TO THE DOORS OF THIS ROOM ARE DOORS TO THE CACTUS GARDEN

mountain rises, sheer, from the California Desert of the Colorado River, rubbing shoulders with San Jacinto of purple shadows and ermine snows. (No wonder the ancient kings decided upon velvet and ermine before mode-forecasting periodicals were invented and when Nature supplied the only fashion hints.) Below the mountain are deserts which are not always, but sometimes, dry. Deserts which in spring-time are violet oceans of verbenas, punctuated with yuccas of parchment white, Cactus blossoms of flaming coral, velvet spears of indigo bushes, misty smoketrees of pinkish pearl, and palos verdes of apple green.

In this fantastic scene of magnificent distances the desert groves of orange and grapefruit trees, featuring globes of gold in black-green setting, seem as prim as our New England cedars; while the drifts of luxuriant oleanders seem as chastely voluptuous as the warm-hued upholstery our Pilgrims chose for their churches.

The visitor to the desert must adopt a scale of new values. He must accept its strangeness as cheerfully as an unexpected legacy, must compare it with nothing, and enjoy it 'as the nymphs do.' Or, if possessing the means, the leisure, and the inspiration, he might set a house like this one under the stars and be content.

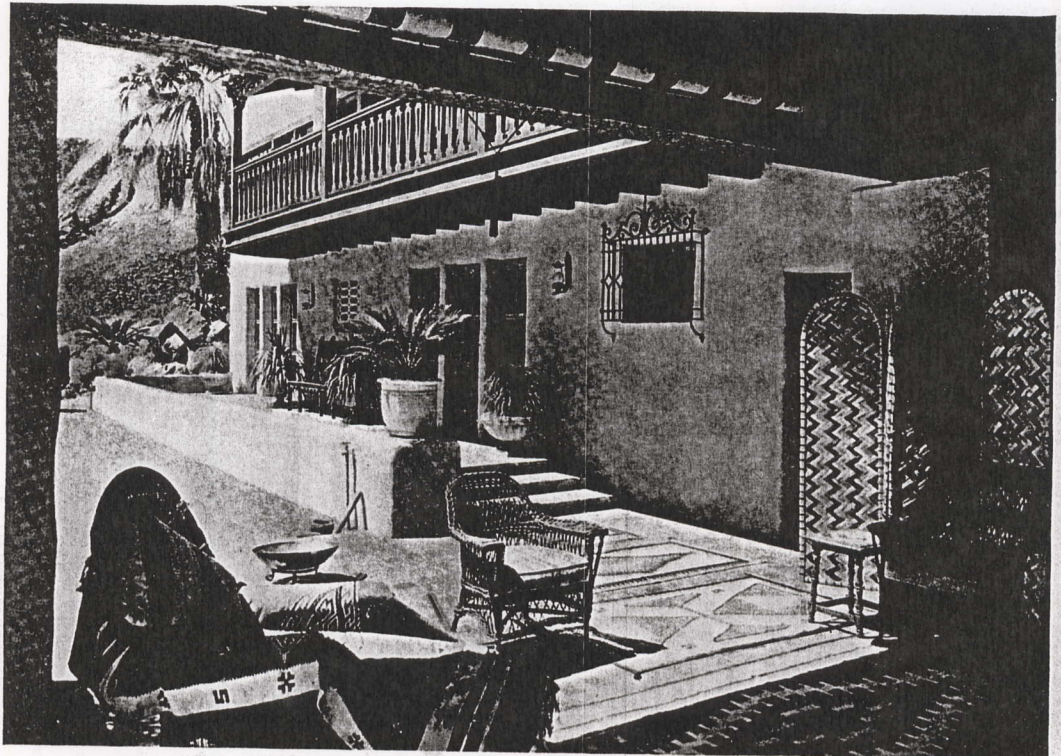


'Ojo del Desierto' has been so designed that it seems to settle into its mountain site without hurting the mountain, which is a good deal for a house to accomplish. The adobe walls have been colored a greenish gray to match the stony slopes, — this mountain has no verdure, — the woodwork has been blackened to match the shadows, and the tiles of the roof are stained pink to match the sunset glows. In fact, from the desert floor the structure seems to be as much a part of the craggy masses of rock

as the exquisitely turreted châteaux of mediæval France seem to belong to, and complement, their miniature mountain peaks.

The house is built as a desert resort, but it has architectural high lights which would glow equally well in other places and climes. These features are its outdoor dining-room, its tiled kitchen, its sun-bathing roof, and its division into one-story and two-story sections. This division is, in California, quite a common one, a division of endless combinations and possibilities. It allows such

LOOKING BACK FROM THE OUT-OF-DOOR ROOM. HERE ARE INDIAN RUGS, A WICKER SCREEN WITH ZIG-ZAG DESIGNS IN BLACK, AND FURNITURE UPHOLSTERED IN PALE YELLOW LINEN PIPED WITH BLACK



THE ADOBE WALLS OF THE HOUSE ARE A GREENISH GRAY TO MATCH THE STONY SLOPES, THE WOODWORK IS DARK TO MATCH THE SHADOWS, AND THE TILES HAVE THE PINKS OF THE SUNSET GLOWS



Such a manner of building is, naturally, more suited to tropic than to temperate zones. But even in the latter the 'unit' system of California can be utilized with satisfactory results. In other words, one part of the house may be unheated during the greatest cold, provided the owner's need of space will allow. That has been our way, the Professor's and mine, of accomplishing a house with a right angle. Hedge, arbor, and garden finish out our square. The right angle is not exactly a new idea, either, if compared with the old-fashioned ell. An ell built out at one side refuses to be a retiring creature like those built out at the rear, and boldly invests itself with a sort of rakish charm.

The Spanish living-room of 'Ojo del Desierto' is a two-storied apartment with exposed timbers. It is

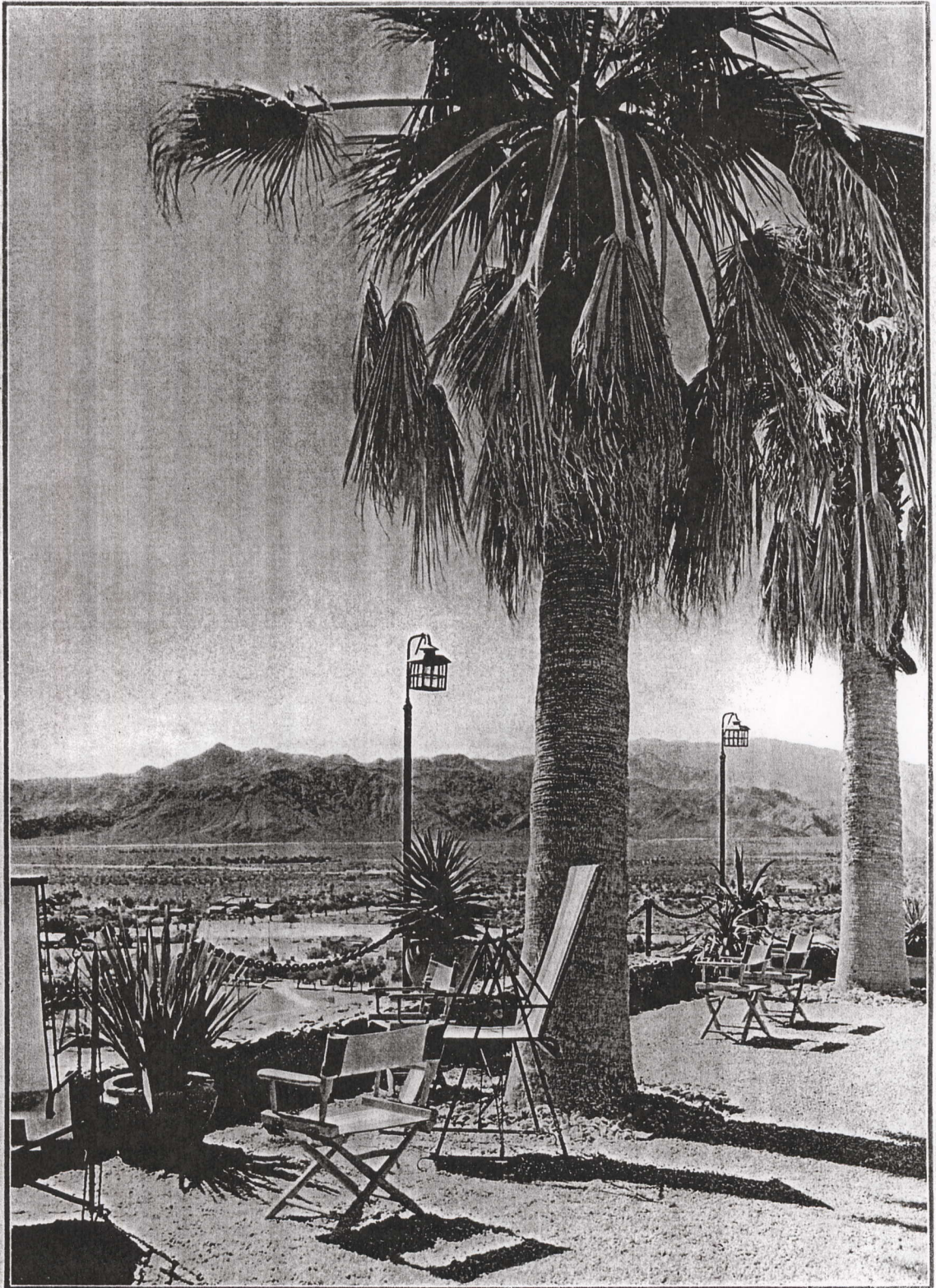
used for an evening room — the desert nights are unbelievably cold — or during the very few winter days of desert rain. There is a lofty, hooded fireplace, and an overhanging balcony. At one end, overlooking that part of the desert known as 'the playground of the winds,' a glistening pane of heavy glass has been set into the wall.

At the sides of this high window, and in perfect scale, are twin doors opening out to the terrace. In the side walls are two similar doors, exactly opposite each other. These

spaciousness in one quarter and such compactness in another as can be gained in no other way. We, the Professor and I, have just tried the plan with a New England farmhouse, and, simply done though it is, it gives results as satisfactory as these in California. Ours, however, is served with maples and forget-me-nots, not palms and oleanders. Less exotic, but more fully prepared to wage winning battles with ice and snow.

The living-room of 'Ojo del Desierto' is set

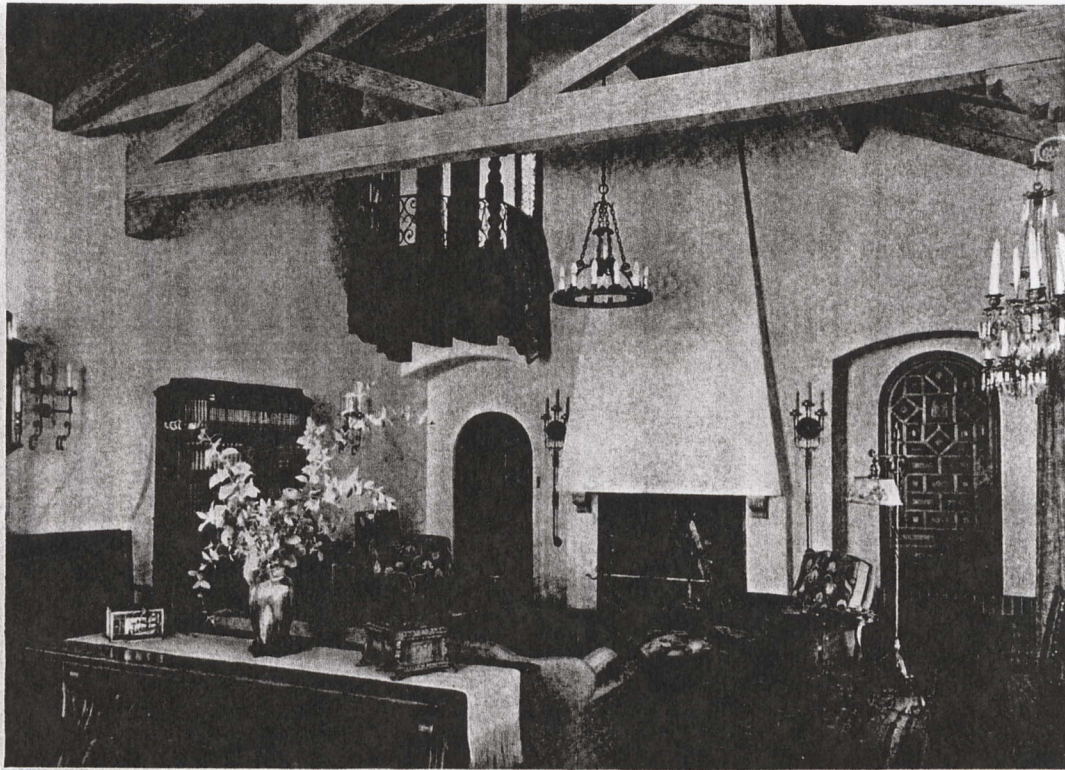
at right angles to the house. Is there any better way to gain a charming effect? Unless a house can be built around all four sides of a courtyard. That, to my mind, is the ideal way to build. To be able to sit in one's own rooms and look out at other walls which are one's own possessions, or, at evening, to see one's own lamps glowing hospitably across the way, is like eating one's cake and having it too. Or like enjoying a house both subjectively and objectively at one and the same time.



Photograph by George Haight

On a Mountain Overlooking a California Desert

In the spring the desert is aglow with violet verbenas, coral Cactus, and the pearl-pink of misty smoketrees, all punctured with white yucca. The terrace of 'Ojo del Desierto'



THE LIVING-ROOM IS TWO-STORIED, WITH EXPOSED TIMBERS, LOFTY HOODED FIREPLACE, AND CORNER BALCONY

open to the Cactus garden and outdoor dining-room. Thus, with open doors, living-room becomes terrace and terrace becomes living-room, till one can scarcely decide which 'dear charmer' to love. The apple greens and Gobelin blues of the splendid tapestries of the room, the flickering beams of tallow drips in priceless antique candelabra, seem to reduce, almost to the scale of lares and penates, the marvelous sunsets and star-lights of the desert.

The outdoor room — half living, half dining — is in sharpest contrast to the cathedral-like dimness of the other. Here, under the burning sunlight of winter days, are spread crude yellows, reds, and black, in stripes and squares and other geometrical designs which only a scientist could name or an Indian employ.

Elsewhere I have mentioned the value of having oriental chairs of wicker, upholstered in materials which nearly match them in color. This is done here, pale yellow linen being used and piped with black. The screen is of wicker with black designs. The Indian rugs are black and white and red and yellow. There is a corner fireplace. Could any other be more lovely? Or more practical, since the fanlike contour of enclosing walls projects the heat into the room?

Vivid strings of chilies limn themselves in broken vermilion lines on the adobe wall. A rattler has sacrificed its skin to make a background for a lily. This skin with its geometrical markings in grays and black suggests that the designs of the Hopi rugs have a background of natural history. Urns of color and of brightly burnished brass

hold Cacti and grasses of upright and drooping habit. While from the near-by canyons have been brought palms — the sentinels of the desert and the most northern native species — in order that the edge of the terrace may be magnificently defined. They have been carried up the steep ascent by heaven only knows what powerful tractors, and one wonders if ever in history such gigantic tropic plants have loomed in greater majesty against a more brilliant sky.

Now we must — as I once heard the presiding officer of a women's club say, after the featured speaker was through — 'come down to the mundane things of earth earthly and have a dish of tea.' In other words, descend from sky to service kitchen. But it is far from being a *descensus Averno* because of the Spanish tiles which decorate the way. A small door leads from the outdoor living-and-dining room to the serving-room, so disguised that only its architect would ever recognize it. To be perfectly honest, the first time I saw it I had no idea for what purpose it had been built! Just a lovely blue-tiled room, like a bathroom without fixtures. Doors and drawers and cupboards, however, conceal such a perfection of electrical equipment that one believes anything might be true, and that it is only necessary to drop an electrified hook and line out of the small grilled window to capture *grenouilles sautées à la bourgeoise*.

Inside stairs, outside ones too, lead to balconies and to sleeping-rooms having tiled bathrooms almost as delightful as the kitchen! Bathrooms which are dressing-rooms as well, with mirrors and cabinets

and oceans of drawers built into their walls. The doors of the bedrooms, opening out to balconies, convert them to sleeping porches at night, and back to rooms in the daytime. In colder climates this is not quite practical, but the general idea of small sleeping-rooms and large bathrooms and outside porches is good for all. The large sleeping-rooms which we of New England, for instance, are accustomed to build and to open out to the zero winter nights might much better be divided in half, one section designed to be cold at night and one to be warm in the morning!

The treasure of treasures is on the roof: a sun-bathing apartment. Frames of weathered, hand-adzed oak enclose and divide it. From these frames bright curtains are hung for protection, but, with only one residence to a mountain and in an enlightened corner of the country where sun baths are accepted as a desirable habit and not as a freakish whim, there is no fear of censorious neighbors. One need not, in the Southwest, sneak off to a sun bath as to 'the old swimmin' hole' of New England. One wonders if the baths of Caracalla ever dreamed of a rival in the sun!

The Cactus garden is so unique a feature that it must not be passed over in describing this house. It is in a rocky depression which adjoins the Spanish room. One of the long, grilled doorways leads out to it from that room and an exquisitely wrought iron gateway leads in to it from the drive. The floor is made of flat stones laid up in cement, and has sections, in the Spanish manner, of small cobblestones of different colors arranged in delicate curves. (Continued on page 76)



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OJO DEL DESIERTO

(Continued from page 32)

The Marshfield beach yields just such cobbles, small and in shades of violet, rose, green, or gray. So one need not go to California or Spain in order that stone terraces may be thus decorated.

The flora, however, are strictly desert blooms. Or, to be more exact, in some cases mere spiky spines. But spines of such interesting shape or color or habit that a desert lover aches to place them where they will throw themselves or other plants into relief.

All the plants of the desert protect themselves from the advances of such animals as would break their outward shells and deprive them of the tiny reservoirs of moisture so miraculously stored against periods of drought.

These coverings, however, which are of so cruel a nature, have—as may be noted in the photographs—an appearance of

softness such as entirely belies their purpose. It is just this delicate outline—catching the light in unimaginable ways, and combined with their curious forms—which gives them their value as domesticated plants. Moreover, their colors, of modest gray and misty green, are subtle and intriguing, while the blossoms which burst from their forbidding exteriors are of living flame and indigo, of glowing red and coral. Or of yellow as pallid as white. Or of white as pallid as parchment. These Cacti seem to epitomize all the mystery, all the beauty, all the cruelty incarnate, all the tragedy and haunting charm of desert places. Just as they epitomize the pervading sense of unreality which invests the lovely 'Eye of the Desert':—

On that cloud-loved terrace beyond
the world
Where earth is forgotten and time
lies dead.



A GARDEN THAT FRONTS THE SEA

(Continued from page 55)

of the Mimulus, scabiosa, and salpiglossis that I wanted to try sprinkled lightly among the zinnias, and the morning-glory, Quamoclit, and mignonette that I thought might be charming among the petunias, failed me. In fact, the situation became so desperate that I had to scurry round at the last minute and take what I could find to assure our July bloom. There were only a dozen purple petunias at the nurseryman's and a limited number of ageratum and rose Phlox drummondii. This phlox, however, was so brilliant that it livened the whole garden in a most amazing way during those difficult weeks, while it played for time for the other plants to get under way. In fact, the phlox kept on blooming and blooming until well into the fall. Its rose was the exact shade of the rose zinnia, but its effect was much more intense, because its little silken-petaled flowers grew in flat-topped clusters in unshaded light, while the velvety petals of the zinnias, ranged row upon row, are not only light-absorbing in themselves, but cast softening shadows upon the petals beneath them.

Of course, a garden should not be entirely dependent upon annuals. Its structure and outlines should be more definitely defined. From the first, the native wild

roses have been our hedging and have been most satisfactory, with their single pink roses late in June, with their clusters of small red hips and the charming reddish-brown tracery of their twigs and stems in autumn.

Black adlers, bayberries, and huckleberries, too, prefer the headlands to our location, so we have had to depend upon hollyhocks for the needed heights and tall structural accents. They grow as sentinels in the doorway gardens, in a thicket of their own that secludes us from the harbor road, and in the main garden, in tall clumps about the centre. There, on sunny days, their lovely light pink and rose-red flowers are silhouetted in a most fascinating way against the blue of the sea and sky. At the shore here in New England, their blooming season is very long and they are not just July flowers, as I have known them in gardens elsewhere, but stalks of continuing bloom, with their topmost buds sometimes waiting until late in the fall for their unfolding.

For the rows of taller flowers behind the zinnias, we started with cosmos that usually does well here, but the foliage was too filmy to give sufficient strength to the garden form. It also became scoured brown one day in August by a cold driving rainstorm that