

# DOUBLE VISION

How two imaginative couples came together  
to create one charming backyard.

by catherine warmerdam | photography by create + gather

**WHEN GARY AND LISA** Ashley moved to Sacramento after having lived in Los Angeles and New York for the better part of two decades, finding a home with ample outdoor living space was paramount. “It was part of why we moved here, so that we could finally have a backyard,” says Lisa. “We saw a lot of potential with this house. We just needed to get a plan in place so that we could start making the yard livable.”

Enter Kele Dobrinski and Christina Valencia, who had also moved to Sacramento seeking a slice of the good life. After Lisa learned about the couple’s design firm, Colossus Mfg., and the top-to-bottom remodel of their Land Park home, she knew she wanted to hire the duo to transform their East Sacramento yard.

The couples both work in creative fields (the Ashleys run a professional photography business) and have young children, and they hit it off right away. “I think Lisa and I are kindred spirits in our eclectic, layered,

colorful lifestyle, and we also both love sunshine,” says Christina. “And because we also have kids, I felt like we could share what we learned about how to make the outdoor space work for their family.”

Midcentury design and the Mediterranean gardens of Southern California were major inspirations for the project. “Palm Springs is my happy place,” says Lisa, who gave Kele and Christina reference photos that “captured the aesthetic, the colors and the vibe we were hoping to achieve.”

The designers listened carefully to the couple’s wants and needs and asked questions to understand how they would use the yard. “We think of ourselves as storytellers through visual spaces,” explains Christina. “We wanted to get their story right and make sure they were using the outdoor space to maximum capacity.”

While Kele got to work on drawing up plans and staking out a 3-D modeling of the space so that the homeowners could get a sense of placement and scale, Gary put his

carpentry skills to work building the outdoor table, which was crafted from boards that were removed from the house next door during a remodel. “He stored the wood for two years knowing that he could build something amazing from it,” says Lisa.

The resulting oasis has everything the Ashley family needs: space for their son Ronan, 5, to have reading parties in his tent; a generous dining area that’s primed for the sort of laid-back entertaining that Lisa and Gary favor; and a comfortable patio where everyone can soak in the delights of being outdoors.

“We saved a lot of money and headaches and time by bringing in designers with a solid vision,” says Lisa. “With a good plan in place, we can build on the solid foundation that’s there and add to it over time if we want to.” Best of all, they did it with a couple they now consider friends. As Christina sums it up, “This was not just a project; it was about making a good connection. We had fun together.” 🍷





Gary and Lisa Ashley  
with their son, Ronan

Landscape Design: **Colossus Mfg.**





Decomposed granite, a favorite of Lisa Ashley's, dominates the backyard. A patch of artificial turf offers a defined play space. Gary Ashley made the dining table and benches from wood reclaimed from a home remodel next door.





## ELEMENTS OF AN EASY-CARE YARD

- The designers recommended installing a concrete patio instead of a wood deck. "It's a much easier surface to clean and maintain," says Christina.
- Decomposed granite, a favorite surface of Lisa's, adds to the low-maintenance hardscape without creating a monotonous sea of concrete.
- To cut down on yard work, the homeowners opted for artificial grass, which is kept tidy with the help of a leaf blower. "We like using it under trees where it's difficult to grow grass because of the heavy shade," explains Christina.
- Plant selection was limited to easy-care specimens. "Lisa told us they didn't want to spend all weekend maintaining her garden. They wanted to relax and enjoy it," says Christina.







*'Eating outdoors is  
the best thing in the  
world for me.'*

**LISA ASHLEY**





## TIPS FOR STYLING YOUR BACKYARD SPACE

**Use what you have.** “Lisa has great style, so there were lots of things already in her house that we could repurpose: blankets, baskets, pillows, pots,” says Christina. “The beauty of repurposing is that you don’t need to spend a ton of money on all new items, plus it helps tie together your indoor and outdoor spaces so that the style flows like it’s one big area.”

**Mix and match.** Your patio furniture needn’t all be part of one set. Opt instead for interesting pieces that complement one another. “I was determined to have individual pieces that just looked good together,” says Lisa. “It feels really organic, not like I just went out and bought everything at once.”

**Make it green.** “We added more greenery on the patio to make it feel lush,” says Christina. “The ferns on the wall make it almost like a living wall and help soften the space.”

**Light it up.** Different styles of lighting around the yard illuminate the space and add to the ambience. As Lisa puts it, “The lanterns above the table give it that beachy, Tulum vibe that makes you feel like you should be in a caftan drinking a cocktail.”