

A photograph of a terraced garden. In the background, a stone building with a balcony and a black metal railing is visible. A set of stone steps leads up a hillside. The garden is filled with various plants, including large green bushes with yellow flowers, smaller green plants, and blue flowers in the foreground. The scene is set against a backdrop of trees and a bright sun filtering through the leaves.

HILLSIDE DESIGN

# ROCK STAR

*Luscious plantings of Mediterranean flora  
soften rough outcrops of stone in this  
terraced garden, which has been artfully  
designed from scratch*

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**OPPOSITE** The lower steps, which lead down to the swimming pool, were created from large individual pieces of stone sourced from a local quarry.

**THIS PAGE** The bank of planting below the terrace and summer kitchen includes large drifts of yellow-green *Euphorbia characias*, pale yellow *Coronilla glauca* 'Citrina' and rosemary.



Sunk into a steep slope above the hilltop enclave of Châteauneuf in the south of France, there is an intriguing upside-down house almost hidden by magnificent banks of Mediterranean flora. One might think this is a natural landscape, but it is in fact only a few years old, created from scratch by its owner Thomas Jones.

Thomas, a yacht captain, saw the picturesque plot for sale 12 years ago and thought it was the perfect spot for him, his wife and three children. “It was fantastic; one of the locals had a vineyard there, which had been in his family for generations,” he explains. The Joneses then built a split-level house and moved in, but it bothered Thomas that the property’s stone and render walls did not blend with the landscape. The decided to work on the garden to give their home a sense of place.

Around that time, Thomas learned of garden designer James Basson, another Englishman living in the next village. James’s ethos of using low-maintenance native plants that need no water struck a chord with Thomas. “We could have put in an irrigation system,” he says, “but we made a dry garden that could look after itself.”

Initially, James recalls seeing an awful lot of mud around – a side effect of the house build and a recent landslide, so he began by putting in a retaining wall of hand-laid stone to prevent the slope from slipping any further. To make it easy to navigate, he inserted generous terraces and steps, and included the two features on Thomas’s wish list – a swimming pool and an area for entertaining.

The challenge, however, was to make it not seem like a series

of cliffs. To that end, James considered the planting scheme carefully, deciding to use a restricted palette of drought-tolerant herbaceous perennials and shrubs, such as Euphorbia and lavender, arranged in blocks to diminish the impact of the hard landscaping.

It took a team of six craftsmen two years to complete the work. Although much of the stone was sourced from a local quarry, there were some huge limestone rocks already on site, which they used to create focal points, such as a waterfall by the swimming pool.

Beside the pool, there was a level area that was a natural choice for a covered terrace. It is now furnished with a barbecue, pizza oven and a fully equipped kitchen, and Thomas and the family spend much of their time here beneath the pergola, cooking and eating meals.

Thomas’s favourite spot, though, is at the bottom of the slope, in the shade of centuries-old olive trees. The children’s playhouse and climbing frame are here, too, but Thomas says: “From there, I get the best aspect; I love how the planting softens everything.” The scheme is simple but bold, comprising big waves of plants like rosemary, with thinner waves, such as lavender, repeating in bands. Thomas is particularly happy that the garden is now full of bees and butterflies, and has colour and interest throughout the year. His favourite season is spring, when the lime-green flowers of *Euphorbia characias*, mustard-yellow *Bupleurum fruticosum* and lemon-hued *Coronilla glauca* ‘Citrina’ deliver a burst of freshness.

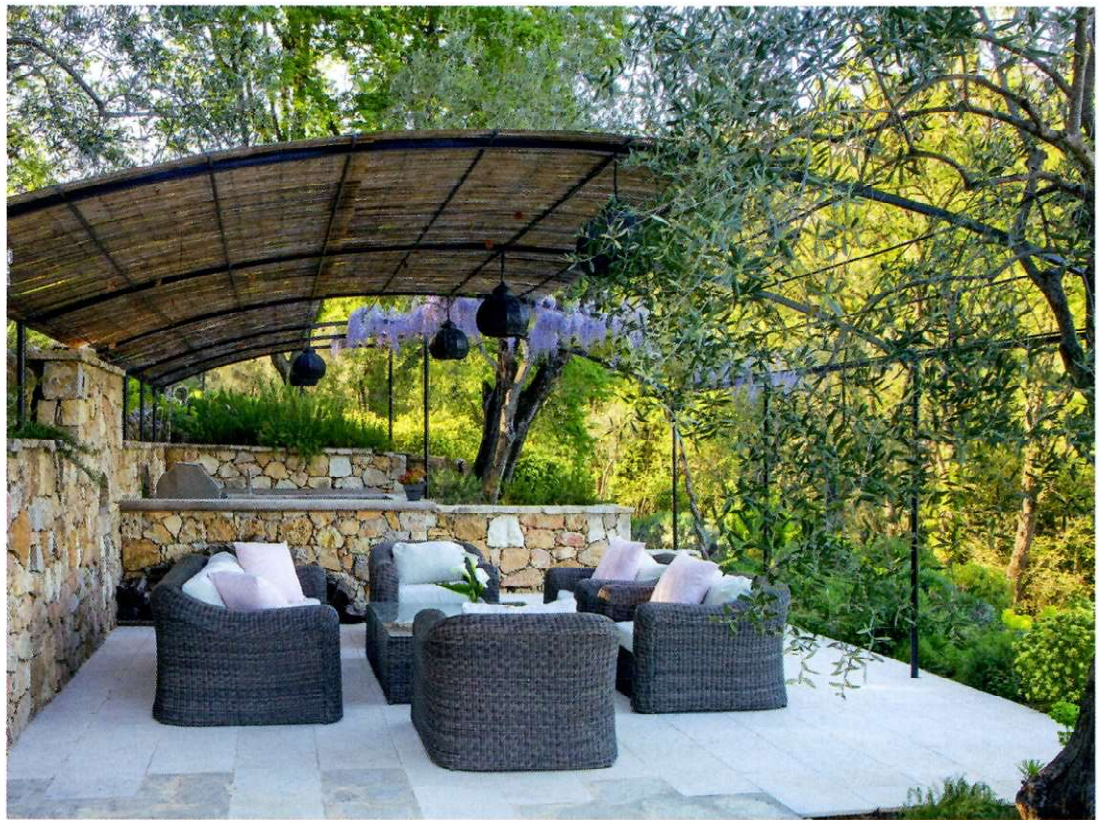
“My work is intense,” says Thomas, “so there’s nothing I like more than coming home, closing the gates, and going out into the garden.”

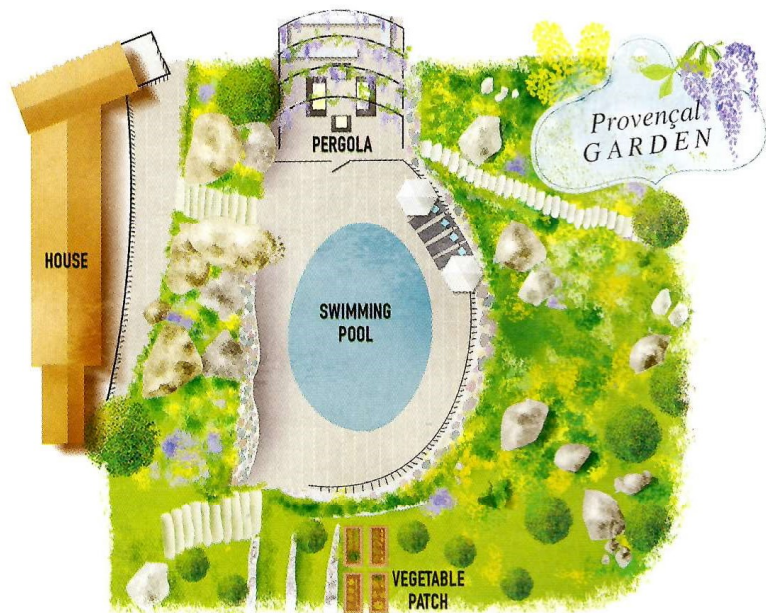


**ABOVE LEFT, AND RIGHT**

The terrace, which also houses a pizza oven and fully equipped kitchen, is shaded by a pergola festooned with flowering wisteria.

**ABOVE** The large pieces of rock that were already on site were turned into focal points, such as the water fall by the swimming pool. The pool itself was loosely designed in the shape of a teardrop by Thomas and his architect.





**ABOVE** The children like to grow salads, tomatoes, peppers and more in the raised beds that were specially created for them.

**LEFT** The split-level house is built into the rocky hillside, which is softened by plantings of drought-tolerant perennials that can look after themselves.

#### GARDEN GUIDE

**Orientation** South-east facing.

**Soil type** Clay with limestone rock deposits.

**Special features** Banks of drought-tolerant planting; swimming pool and kitchen; raised vegetable beds.

**Garden design** James Basson, 00377 97 971536, [scapedesign.com](http://scapedesign.com).