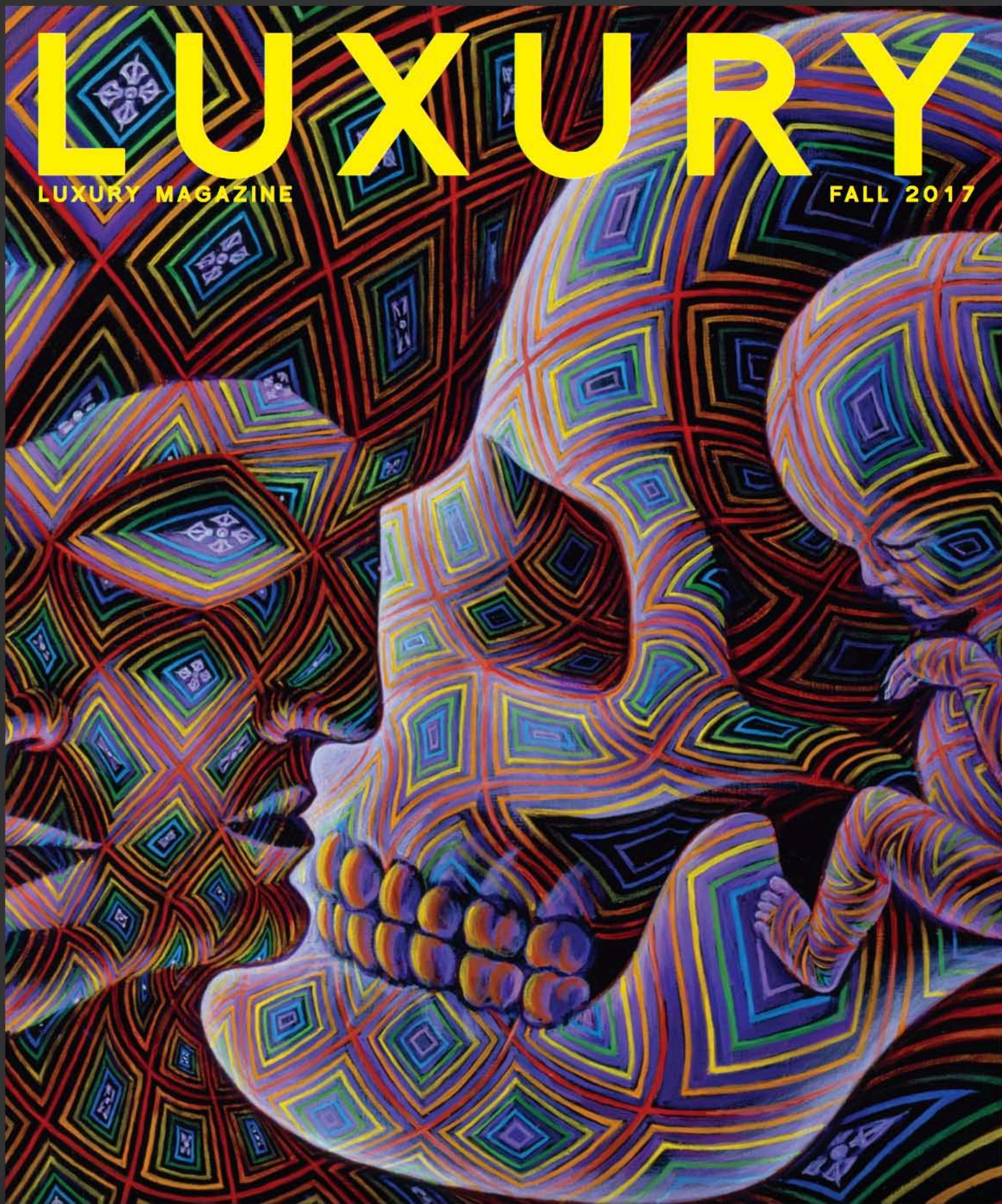


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Left, Eric Wollinger; right, Bonny Lee



SHIFTING GROUND

*The desire for a healthy, high-quality lifestyle feeds a contemporary fantasy for farm life. But not one that involves moving upstate. **MODERN FARMING** brings the experience to you, however you want it.*

by Alison Clare Steingold

These pages: Kyle and Katina Connaughton nurture the five acres of SingleThread Farms, located between the Russian River and San Lorenzo Ranch in Healdsburg.



INSPIRATION

For Kyle and Katina Connaughton, modern farming meant opening a farm, inn, and restaurant project as a meticulously crafted experience—think neo-kaiseki meets wine country. The couple's meditation on hospitality is **SingleThread Farms** (\$295 for 11-course tasting menus; rooms from \$800; singlethreadfarms.com) in Healdsburg, CA, opened in December 2016. Kyle is an accomplished chef and former director of R&D at Heston Blumenthal's Fat Duck in England; Katina is the head of culinary gardens and farm manager who spent 18 months developing a fallow piece of land into the enormous acreage of SingleThread Farms.

Japanese influence flows from cuisine format and philosophy and even to farming practices: "We follow the Japanese calendar of viewing the year as 72 five-day microseasons," says Katina. "This allows us to be very mindful of the subtle nuances in the natural world. We strive to harvest each crop at its *shun*: the peak of flavor within its season." Never the same meal twice.

Katina's day flows through harvesting, planning, planting and foraging, tending the rooftop, and arranging florals throughout. At the inn—from drying herbs and blossoms from the farm into bath salts for guest rooms to preparing surplus seeds, given as a keepsake for diners—the practice of farming is



deliberately considered and executed. Diners begin a SingleThread journey on the verdant rooftop, with a bird's-eye view of herbs, blossoms, and espaliered orchard fruits. They mingle with the butterflies, elderflower cordial and sweet potato drinking vinegar in hand, nibbling on fresh radishes with kumquat-kosho emulsion.

During dinner service, Katina runs a floral station to outfit custom Japanese pottery with foraged miscellany and prepares unusual *hassun* boards presented to each table. "We harvest moss from the farm and mindfully place flowers, herbs, and vines on the boards daily. The boards are really our way of bringing the outdoors into the dining room," she says of the planks, "and a base to place a series of small bites from the farm and the sea. This is a snapshot of this moment in time in Sonoma County. The florals on the boards are reflective of this sentiment." This daily ritual—the delicate layering of seasonal philosophy and sense of place into courses of beauty—is an unusual flavor of mindfulness. >



The "Goodbye, city life" vision of tractoring in a three-piece suit is firmly in the past. Turns out Eva Gabor can have her penthouse view and green acres, too. Modern farming is just one way to get closer to nature. It's not so much a dramatic act as it is an act of appreciation of the artistry of restaurant farming, the mindful practice of kitchen gardening, and the smart technology of tools.

All Eric Wolfinger except middle far left and bottom left, Jason Jaacks.



Clockwise: Landscaping by Edible Gardens LA; Shed in Healdsburg; and a self-watering Parrot Pot.

PRACTICE

The patience required to attend to the produce at SingleThread is not unlike realizing your own dreamy kitchen garden. But hang on before ripping out those boxwoods, says Lauri Kranz of **Edible Gardens LA** (ediblegardensla.com). "You don't have to choose between ornamental and edibles. It's more holistic than that. Integrate what you love to eat. For example, using strawberry guava shrubs and blueberry shrubs in the landscape makes delicious fruit and adds to the beauty of the land."

This master gardener has been a figurehead in LA's movement toward creating, building, and sustaining gardens for a stylish clientele of designers (Jenni Kayne, Ambre Dahan), tech figures, and chefs such as Suzanne Goin and David Lentz. Whether her clients are seeking a private refuge from the public eye or a quiet place to decompress after a day at the office, Kranz's mission is to tailor viable settings for them to connect with nature. "I work with clients to try and help

them find time twice a week to be in their gardens," she says. "It's not huge in terms of physical labor, but we do address harvesting and other important issues."

Ambitious lifestyle hubs like **Shed** (healdsburgshed.com) in Healdsburg also encourage a connection to nature by streamlining the cluttered world of garden supply, even making composting downright chic. It's hardly your average mulch joint: how-to, homegrown food, and hyper-curated housewares meet a



green setting practically beaming with golden wine-country light. Here, focus is on approachability without patronizing: learning how to forage wild nettles and juniper tips on one's own, or meeting the craftsmen of their various hand-built beehives. Owner Cindy Daniel's fall workshops will focus on beekeeping at her 16-acre HomeFarm. A new garden shed also accommodates a number of imported hand tools from Japan, and heirloom baskets from France. Much like a bread-rising *banneton* basket, the traditional willow pieces reflect generations-old design, each serving a specific purpose such as collecting berries and flowers. (When cutting blossoms in the early morning, drop them in the flat-bottom flower basket to ensure they spread out flat and that the blooms aren't crushed.)

Meanwhile, smart technology relieves the mental drain of daily plant keeping. Drip irrigation takes away the hassle of watering, and remote sensor systems like **Edyn** (\$100; edyn.com) monitor dryness and adjust via valve. Well suited to city dwellers, all-in-one **Parrot Pots** (\$80; parrot.com) offer self-watering herbs >

MATCH MAKERS

Without getting one's hands dirty, the fragrant charms of the garden now permeate the home thanks to a handsome array of garden candles in three unusual scents. In her latest design collaboration, Lauri Kranz of Edible Gardens LA and **Le Feu de L'Eau** artisan candlemakers Jo Strettell and Wendy Polish spent a year to perfect all the complexities of the natural plant perfumes. "The goal was for them to actually smell like the plants, not prefabricated scent," she says. There's mysterious African Basil ("the first thing I plant when I plan out a garden, whether hillside, canyon, or the flats"); and the spice-and-chaparral notes of Cardamom ("I had thought of it as a holiday scent ... but a piece of leaf broke off and released a scent I never knew before.") Finally, there's the delicate floral of Citrus Geranium, with its subtle bergamot nods to Earl Grey ("I rubbed the Citrus Geranium leaves and thought, 'I need this—in the garden, and in the candles.'") Candles are packaged in a minimalist glass vessel with a smooth white-oak top. \$60 each; lefeudeleau.com —A.C.S.



Top, Brian Ferry; opposite bottom, Eric Wollinger.



and plants. Thanks to the recent spate of futuristic-looking indoor gardening pods hitting the market by **Ava** (avagrows.com), hydroponic experts **Plantui** (plantui.com), and **Click & Grow**'s multi-shelved Wall Farm (from \$899; clickandgrow.com), even self-professed plant killers can grow anything from sorrel to chili peppers with success. And for whatever lawn is left, the **Husqvarna Automower 450x** (\$3,499; husqvarna.com), with built-in GPS, forces parents to find other chores for kids to earn their allowance.

Smart pots and carbon steel *hori-horis* (weeding knives) may have found their way into today's modern farm lexicon, but that doesn't mean they're essential. For some, the practice of garden keeping is precisely the draw. According to Kranz, one particularly appealing entry point is with what she calls garden houses. Lovely for sitting with a book and coffee, or for meditation, this kind of outbuilding is about the size of a greenhouse but, instead of glass, is screened-in, porch-style, so only air and beneficial bees and butterflies can wander in while meddlesome squirrels and deer who love to munch on edibles will stay out. "When

you spend time in that space, maybe sitting with the newspaper and coffee, you might pick at a yellow leaf, and then another and another," says Kranz of the effect of being in one's space. "Just get in and spend 30 minutes here and there. There's no set rule."

HARVEST

You don't have to do all the heavy lifting, of course, to reap the benefits of the farm; this lifestyle can manifest in and where you eat and travel. Case in point: Subscriptions for weekly Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) produce boxes are nothing new. But what about a box curated by the chef of a three-Michelin-starred restaurant? Never one to waste, Chef Michael Tusk of San Francisco's neighborhood beacons **Quince** (quincerestaurant.com) and **Cotogna** (cotognasf.com) offers his own cherry-picked goodie box to those in the know. Launched in July, the boxes are available at Cotogna's weekly Friday Farm Stand outside the restaurant.

Opposite: Top, Aya Bruckett; bottom, SuzanaMaurinkovic/Stock

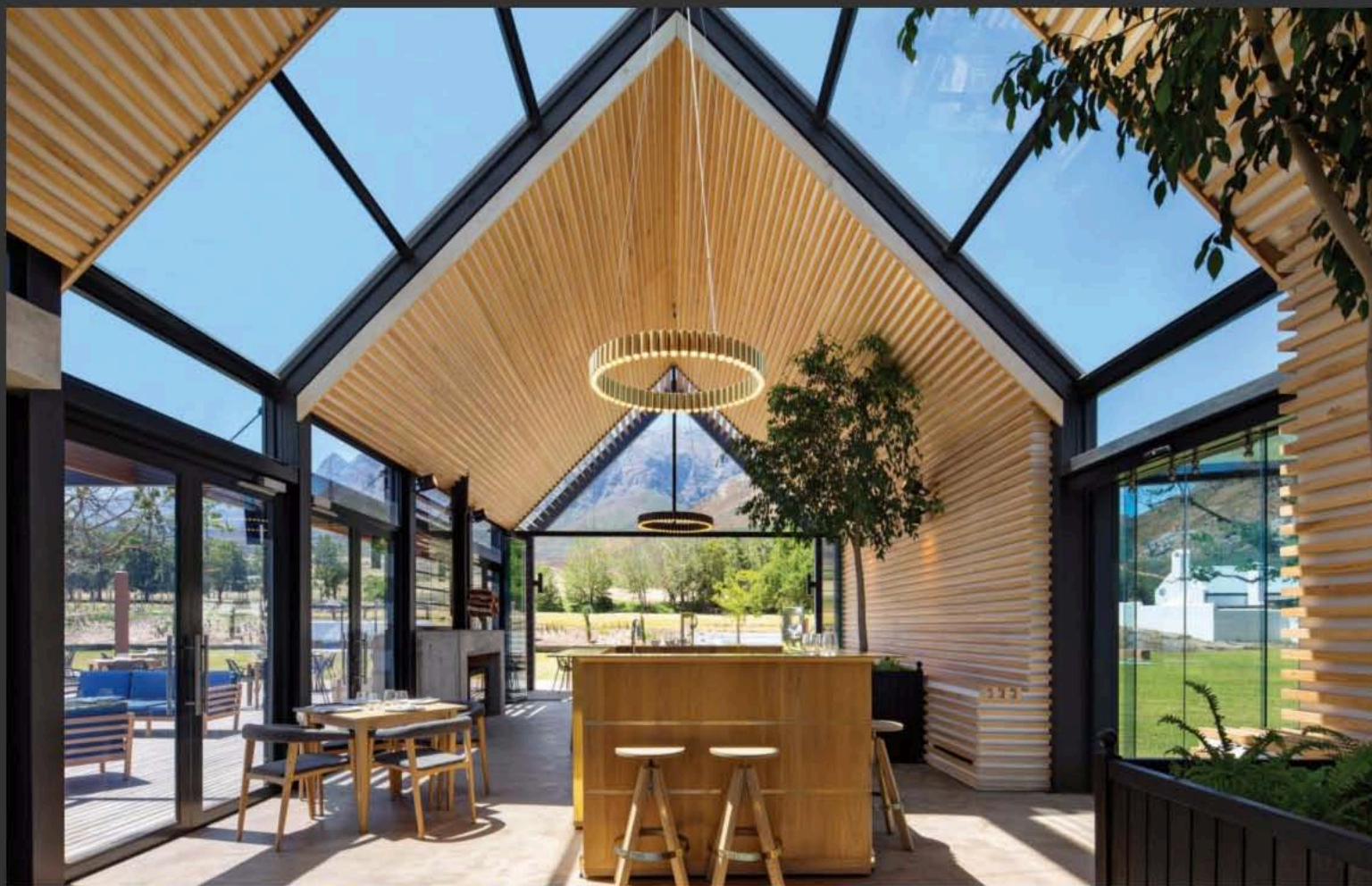


Clockwise from top left: A multi-shelved Wall Farm; a plate of caviar at Quince in San Francisco; a produce box; the robotic Husqvarna Automower 450x.

For Tusk, shaking hands on an exclusive relationship with Peter Martinelli of **Fresh Run Farm** meant access to the full yields of a 25-year industry pioneer on a 239-acre expanse in Bolinas, CA, West Marin. Tusk explains: "It's a situation I was never in before. At the start, we had 200 pounds of beans. It takes a lot to grow [them]. The labor is difficult; it's a coastal farm with winding roads. I have to do what's possible for people to eat what has been grown for us."

After selling off five-pound bags of beans at Cotogna's front, the restaurant began to save old boxes to load with vegetables for anyone who wanted a box or scheduled a regular pickup. Given the Bay Area's Indian summer, autumn boxes might include dry-farmed tomatoes and squash blossoms in addition to traditional fall root vegetables and Brussels sprouts. You might even find recipes and a little extruded pasta—"a lot of diversity for 20-odd dollars," Tusk adds. "[The box] is to take the load off somebody's week," says Tusk. "You're able to have a glass of wine or Negroni and pick up a box of vegetables, and talk to some of our cooks. A lot of times folks are wary of asking chefs how to make something. We're different than that." >





From top: Bosjes Kombuis restaurant in South Africa; Mukul Resort in Nicaragua.

Learning how to prep an ingredient is now part of the proverbial “haycation” as well. The varying levels of immersion can even look, well, tropical. You might discover how to milk a cow in nearby Colima, Mexico, at the colonial-era **Hacienda de San Antonio** (from \$697; haciendadesanantonio.com), where 90 percent of the menu, including coffee, comes from their biodynamically farmed El Jabali Ranch on-site. Or, opened in March, **Bosjes** (from \$175; bosjes.co.za) turned an 18th-century barn and stables into a five-room guesthouse and striking garden chapel in South Africa’s bountiful Western Cape—where even the olive oil is local. A Jeep ride will take you to the working farm for harvesting peaches and wine grapes.

Along Nicaragua’s Emerald coast, find a quiet respite from boating, surfing, and ash boarding on volcanoes. Opening later this year, adjacent **Mukul Resort** (from \$360; mukulresort.com) and residential community **Guacalito de la Isla**, a 12-acre farm will provide for a new slate of

food and beverage establishments for guests and homeowners. Philanthropist and developer Carlos Pellas’ vision of a sustainable community continues with hands-on experiences built around the local organic produce of Nicaragua. Homeowners can bike down from the main gates to pick fresh produce for their kitchens, while guests can plant a tree or take a workshop with chefs to select and prepare various perennials and exotic fruit. A bean-to-cup program for the coffee plantation is forthcoming. Come sundown, there’s no finer way to highlight that harvesting than a family-style dinner in the fields.

In whatever iteration, tapping into the farm ideal and all its benefits can be as simple as one of Quince’s boxes—removing the grocer from the equation—or a total yard makeover toward a raised-bed routine. Ultimately, such approaches are all after the same thing: taking the time to slow down, look around, and appreciate, quite literally, the fruits of one’s labor. ♦

