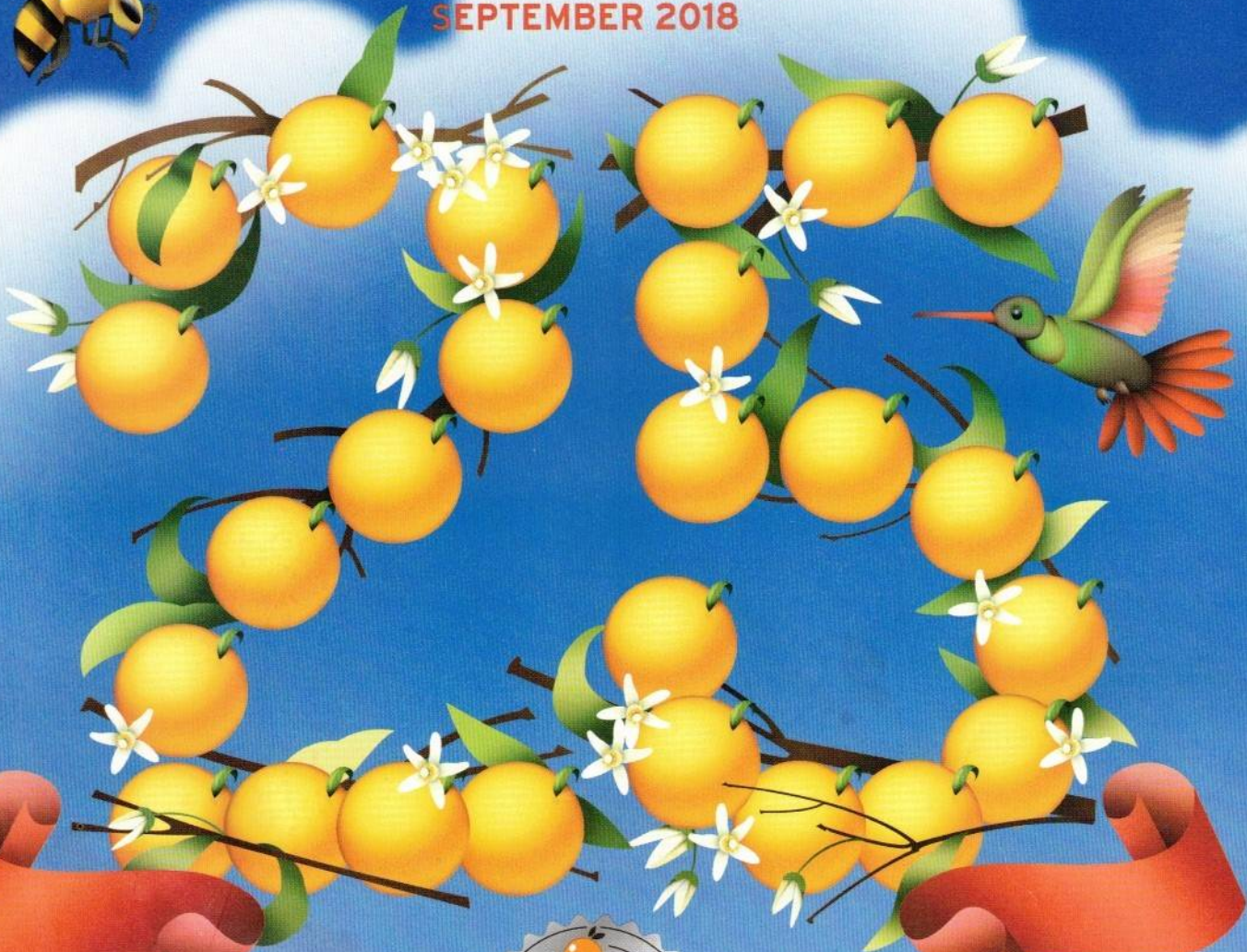


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SEPTEMBER 2018



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# HOME & GARDEN



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# More than prices have changed in O.C. neighborhoods

by PAM MARSHAK

**T**ravilla in Tustin Ranch is offering homes that boast wood-burning fireplaces, ceramic tile countertops and Whirlpool designer-white appliances. Prices are in the \$180,000s.

At Ravenna in Irvine, kitchens have cabinets with adjustable shelves and multifunction dishwashers; these new homes, with their oval tubs and recessed lighting, are available from the mid-\$230,000s.

Welcome to 1994 Orange County. In March of that year, the median price of a home was \$200,000 (according to DataQuick). Average rent was about \$812 a month (RealFacts).

If we could peek inside those houses, we'd find carved, dark wood cabinetry, terracotta tile and the gold-toned accents of Tuscan decor. Soffits and niches abound. Outside, backyards are divided into three distinct areas: an undersized patio, a swath of lawn and a perimeter of flowering plants.

There is nary a shiplap wall or bi-fold glass door in sight. Mid-century modern is a memory, not a trend. HGTV won't launch until the end of the year.

Fast-forward nearly 25 years. Homes in Travilla are selling from \$598,000 to \$699,900. There are no homes for sale in Ravenna in early June, but when there are, the median sale price is \$1,008,000 (neighborhoods.com). A tiny cottage in Laguna Beach is on the market for just shy of \$1 million.

Welcome to Orange County 2018. March saw a median home price of \$725,000, up a whopping 263 percent from March 1994. The market is in its seventh year of rising home prices. Rents average \$1,885 a month.

But surging prices aren't the only change. Our homes and gardens have a very different look and feel from their 1990s counterparts.

To navigate the decades, we've enlisted experts who have worked in the county since before Travilla opened. Meet interior designer Robin Strickland, who founded Design Works in 1991, and Tim Fiskin, general manager of landscape and lead designer at Roger's Gardens. They've seen it all.

Long gone are the rounded corners, Venetian plaster and fussy details of '90s home decor, Strickland explained. Today's trends include open floor plans, including big kitchens with two islands (one for prep, one for entertaining) and a red-knobbed Wolf range; master suites that could put

a luxury hotel room to shame (his and her bathrooms, coffee bar, beverage center, sitting room); flawless transitions to stunning outdoor rooms that extend living space and take advantage of SoCal's much-envied climate.

Our color palette has lightened and brightened. A coastal calm prevails; we're awash in white walls, breezy colors and a mix of natural textures and details.

The change is, in part, cyclical, Strickland said. But she doesn't discount the rise of HGTV (the fourth-most-watched cable channel in the country, according to Nielsen ratings) and social media.

Buyers used to want their homes to look like the model in their development, she said. Now, "everyone is an interior designer." Clients come to her with piles of research — and a very unrealistic idea of how long a remodel takes. "Less is more," Strickland explained, always glad to have the input, which she translates into contemporary, personalized design statements.

In his three-plus decades of landscape design, Fiskin has seen lawns edited down or downright eradicated, unused

front yards turned into charming courtyards and the rise of environmentally smart landscaping.

With outdoor square footage at a premium, it's being used, styled and cared for in ways that probably never entered the heads of 1990s homeowners as they mowed their yards.

Living areas spill harmoniously into outdoor rooms with kitchens, fire and water features and lots of seating. Gone are gardens with easy-to-categorize designs (Southwestern, cottage, tropical); in their places are blended, eclectic plantings not as thirsty or predictable as those they replaced. Concrete is back, prized for its affordability and simplicity. Seasonal color has been uprooted by foliage color, bold plant forms and water-wise landscaping controlled by smart systems that manage everything from irrigation to lighting.

"Clients are much more educated about and interested in the environmental aspects of landscaping," Fiskin said. Landscape architects, along with those savvy clients, are pairing refined design sensibilities with a more holistic approach to the area beyond those disappearing glass walls.

The result? Clean, modern interiors that blend seamlessly into sophisticated, eco-friendly outdoor living spaces — a perfect vantage point from which to see what the next 25 stylish years will bring.

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**Long gone are the rounded corners, Venetian plaster and fussy details of '90s home decor.**

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