



THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Salvage Chic

by Meg McConahey

TUB TIME Anne-Marie Allen relaxes in the bathtub she and her husband, Jeff, installed in the garden of their rural Santa Rosa home. Already a peaceful setting, the tub adds a touch of old-time elegance and creates a place to take in the natural beauty of the garden.

Shabby chic has gone al fresco. The same principles of thrift and imagination that flea market regulars and riders of the garage sale circuit have long applied to home décor, also can be used outdoors. Homeowners needn't spend

In a climate blessed with six months of warm weather, the garden room has become de rigueur.

In the mass exodus to move outside, nature-loving homeowners are building sitting rooms, dining rooms and even full service kitchens in their yards.

But Jeff and Anne-Marie Allen, professional landscaping partners and now newlyweds, have pushed the concept of the home without walls



hundreds, even thousands of dollars at boutique garden shops and antique stores to dress up their green spaces with whimsical sculpture, ornaments, planters and architectural elements. Go where the dealers go, and try to get there first. It's a cost-saving trick these Wine Country gardening couples discovered long ago, and have used time and again to develop enviable outdoor living spaces.

a giant step further. The Santa Rosa couple has added an outdoor bathroom to their garden living space.

And we're not talking Jacuzzi under gazebo with portable wine chiller. The Allens wanted to take a real bath, the bubbly kind in a low-tech tub with no jets, and hot and cold running water. A short walk from their door they created a bathing nook where they can soak under the stars



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in a misty rain, or bring down their temperature after a hot day on the job.

While others outfit their elaborate home spas with packaged potpourri and expensive oils that cost more than French perfume, the Allens bask in the natural aromatherapy from the osmosis, clematis, gardenia and jasmine that will eventually enclose their garden enclave.

And to think that the key fixture—an old bathtub—at one time was junk. One of hundreds, if not thousand, of old tubs that were reassigned to service as watering or feed troughs for farm animals. Once as ubiquitous as barns, rusty old bath tubs can still be found dotting the fields of Sonoma County like highway weeds. The Allens believe they've identified a perfect third life for them.

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—Anne-Marie Allen

Diehard salvagers who have almost completely outfitted their little Eden on Olivet Road with other people's trash and the castoffs from wealthier clients, they saw the potential in this untapped resource. They too the tub off a friend's property and immediately put it to practical use.

“The old bathtub came in handy. We used it for rinsing off tools, soaking stained clothes and keeping soft drinks cold during summer parties,” says Anne-Marie. “But boy, was it ugly. A ring of rust circled the dingy, white interior from years of neglect, its legs had disappeared long ago leaving it to slump to one side. We had it tucked behind a big rock and pines, hidden from view yet close enough for easy access.”

“After all,” says Anne-Marie, “What's better than a nice hot bath outside on an early spring morning?”

Jeff ran hot and cold water pipes from the hot water heater in the house to the tub. Part of the trench they dug for the pipes was converted into a dry stream to catch the water as it drains down like a babbling brook into pipes leading to the septic system.

“It's no more complicated than a hot tub,” says Jeff, who figures the demand for outdoor “bathrooms” will rise once people are introduced to the idea.

“It's more environmentally friendly than hot tubs. And you can be in hot water outside for a long while. Most people don't stay in a hot tub too much longer than a soaking. So you're not wasting all that energy and heat in a hot tub. And you're not dealing with any chemicals to keep it clean.”

Beside the tub is a salvaged metal table where they set biodegradable soaps and use for lighted candles in a secondhand holder.

“I don't know where we got it, but we don't buy anything,” says Jeff with a laugh.

The couple then defined the space with other elements. A curving stone pathway leads from the patio through a freestanding, wrought-iron gate—salvage of course—to the bathtub garden.