Alice Waters in her garden in Berkeley, California.

ALICE WATERS ON NATURAL DESIGN

When Alice Waters opened Chez Panisse in Berkeley in 1971, she couldn't have known that she was about to spark a revolution in how Americans eat and produce food. We have the Californian to thank for everything from the boom in organic ingredients to the growth of kitchen gardens, including one at the White House. Waters is as much an activist as she is a restaurateur: Her nonprofit foundation, the Edible Schoolyard Project, teaches gardening and cooking skills to students across the country. Design plays a pivotal role. "If I weren't involved with food, I'd be working in architecture," Waters says. "Design is that critical to me." BY INGRID ABRAMOVITCH

The kitchen at Chez Panisse.

A steel nestal the Edible Schoolyard in Berkeley, used for growing kiwis.

Christopher Alexander's seminal book.

Waters's renovated home kitchen.

DESIGN MIND

• Architecture can make everyday living a pleasure. Just as people want real food, they hunger for real buildings. They don't have to be big, but they have to be made with the right intentions.

• We're coming back into balance. We're finding out which things are essential. People are using recycled materials in imaginative ways, thinking about ecology, and learning about land use. Don't build a big house that covers an entire property; have a smaller house and turn the land into a farm.

• Thomas Jefferson thought about all of these things. The restoration of the vegetable garden at Monticello is thrilling. It's a beautiful testimonial to our American heritage.

CHEZ PANISSE

• I used to teach at a Montessori school. The founder, Maria Montessori, wanted kids to smell, taste, listen, and see. She believed that the senses are the pathways into your mind. I used that idea in creating Chez Panisse: There are flowers on the table, warm lighting, and the room just smells like good food (even if I have to burn rosemary or sauté garlic to create those scents, which sometimes happens).

• I wanted people to come to the restaurant and feel at home, so I put it in a house. It was an old stucco building with no character except for a magnificent bunya bunya tree out front. In renovating, we were inspired by the houses of Bernard Maybeck and the Arts and Crafts style. It was all done piecemeal, like a patchwork quilt.

A PATTERN LANGUAGE

• The architect Christopher Alexander, who lived in Berkeley, wrote a book called *A Pattern Language* that influenced me big time. He wrote about how architecture can be used to convey universal values. After a fire in Chez Panisse's kitchen that burned down the wall between the kitchen and dining room, I decided not to put it back. For the first time, the light from the dining room flowed into the kitchen. The cooks and I could look out and see the sunset. For the diners, it demystified what was happening in the kitchen. It's been a revelation.

AT HOME

• The house I've lived in for the past 29 years was built in 1908. It's walking distance to the restaurant.

• For my home's 100th birthday, I did a remodel. I opened up the doorway between the dining room and kitchen and took down a wall between the kitchen and the room next to it, where I created a library. The house feels so airy.

• My kitchen has a wood-burning oven, a large worktable, and windows all around, including one above the sink. I think whoever is washing the dishes needs to have a lot of beauty around.

EDIBLE SCHOOLYARD

• Seventeen years ago I was quoted in a newspaper saying that the middle school I passed every day looked like nobody cared about it. The principal called and asked for help. We built a garden and, in an abandoned cafeteria, made a kitchen classroom where kids can learn about food. There are now Edible Schoolyard programs all over the country.

• Two local architecture firms built the kids a nest for growing kiwis. It's made out of rebar and done in a very whimsical way.

UP NEXT

• I'm writing a second volume to my book *The Art of Simple Food*. It's about having a kitchen garden and cooking from it.

• I've always wanted to do a restaurant in a museum. There are a couple of possibilities on the horizon. For now, that's all I can say.