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Back Yard Bocce

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A French Drain, on the right, prevents drainage problems.

But selecting the correct materials and knowing where to save and where to splurge, has a dramatic affect on the bottom line. "Oyster shell materials are wickedly expensive," says McLane. "I used track fines—or "decomposed granite," which is the generic term—as the base material."

The fines, the sand-like material topping the Scanlin bocce court, is spread over compacted base rock. The border is a versalock block wall: a gravity wall system with no mortar. Decking material forms the inside frame, reducing the wear and tear on the bocce balls

There's no way McLane could "construct" the court's fabulous view of Mount Diablo. But a strategically placed gazebo offers spectators an unobstructed view of both the court and the sweeping vista.

Jeanne HuangLi and Nathan Ogle moved to Orinda in August of 2009. Their home, built by architect Paul Hamilton in 1951, is nestled in a nearly-vertical hillside just north of Highway 24. On approach, it's difficult to picture anything being flat, let alone the fine-tuned leveling a bocce court requires.

Looking down from the balcony, the back yard court extends away from the house. Unlike the Scanlins, the Huang Li-Ogle family's court was already in place when they purchased the home

"My first instinct was whether we could dig it up and make it a wading pool," HuangLi says. "But actually, it's been really popular."

The couple has discovered bocce adds to any gathering, from birthdays to the large alumni parties they host. HuangLi is the Senior Director of Development and Alumni Relations at the Haas School of Business in Berkeley. She's also the president of the University of Michigan's Bay area alumni chapter, boasting 15,000 members.

"We've hosted send-offs for new U of M students—all kinds of events. It's not