

Cal Shakes Offers "Discovery" Program for Students



By Lou Fancher



"Bianca" - Alexandra Henrikson (back row, middle) - stopped to chat and pose for a photo with the JM drama class after the show. Photo L. Borrowman

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California Shakespeare Theater welcomed students from around the Bay Area, including a group from Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School, to its Discovery Matinee of *The Taming of the Shrew* on September 29th.

Under a bright sun and not a few bees, the kids received marching orders from Teaching Artist Clive Worsley.

"No electronics, no leaving the area without an adult supervisor," he barked.

Leading the pre-show discussion like a misguided Mad Lib page, he gave the synopsis of William Shakespeare's ambitious play about money, sex, and society's view of women.

"There's the daughter, Katherine, whose name was..." he prompted, leaving a pre-described blank for the kids to holler out, "Katherine!"

In two minutes, the students learn what it takes several scenes for Shakespeare to reveal: nobody can

marry the younger daughter until somebody marries the older one. But she's a shrew: a woman with a bad temper.

Worsley paces rapidly in front of the sleek, soft pink beams, then zig-zags under a blazing yellow second story floor. Backed by a splashy advertisement, the set is retro-hip, suggesting the past and the future.

The kids eat it up, especially when Worsley steps aside and the cast, arriving to a whistle blast worthy of a sailing vessel and a thumping, "Come on, boys" soundtrack, vamp in line and toss buxom beauty queens in yellow swim suits.

There's a sense of humor everywhere in Director Shana Coopers' interpretation.

From actor Alexandra Henrikson's blue suede spiked heels to a rapid undressing (down to briefs only) and re-dressing on stage to a Three Stooges-style exchange of hats, laughter keeps the kids engaged during wordy expository scenes.

But it's all aimed at learning, a purpose made evident throughout Cal Shake's extensive educational outreach programs.

The discovery matinees come with a package of optional workshops, a Q&A with the actors, and an extensive Teacher's Guide. The guide, offered online to classrooms, is impressive.

There are plot diagrams, historical context, actors' photos with adjacent character descriptions, Q&A's with the director, evaluations of things like physical comedy and how it was used in Shakespeare's time versus modern theater, classroom activities like Facebook pages for characters, and questions to answer for aspiring theatre critics.

"We discuss how placing Shakespeare's stories in contemporary times helps us to understand the story and characters," Worsley said, about the work he does with student groups. "[With *Shrew*], we ask kids how the gen-

der-based stereotypes in the play differ from our time or what ways they are similar."

Don Read brings one of his classes from Joaquin Moraga every year. ... continued on page B2

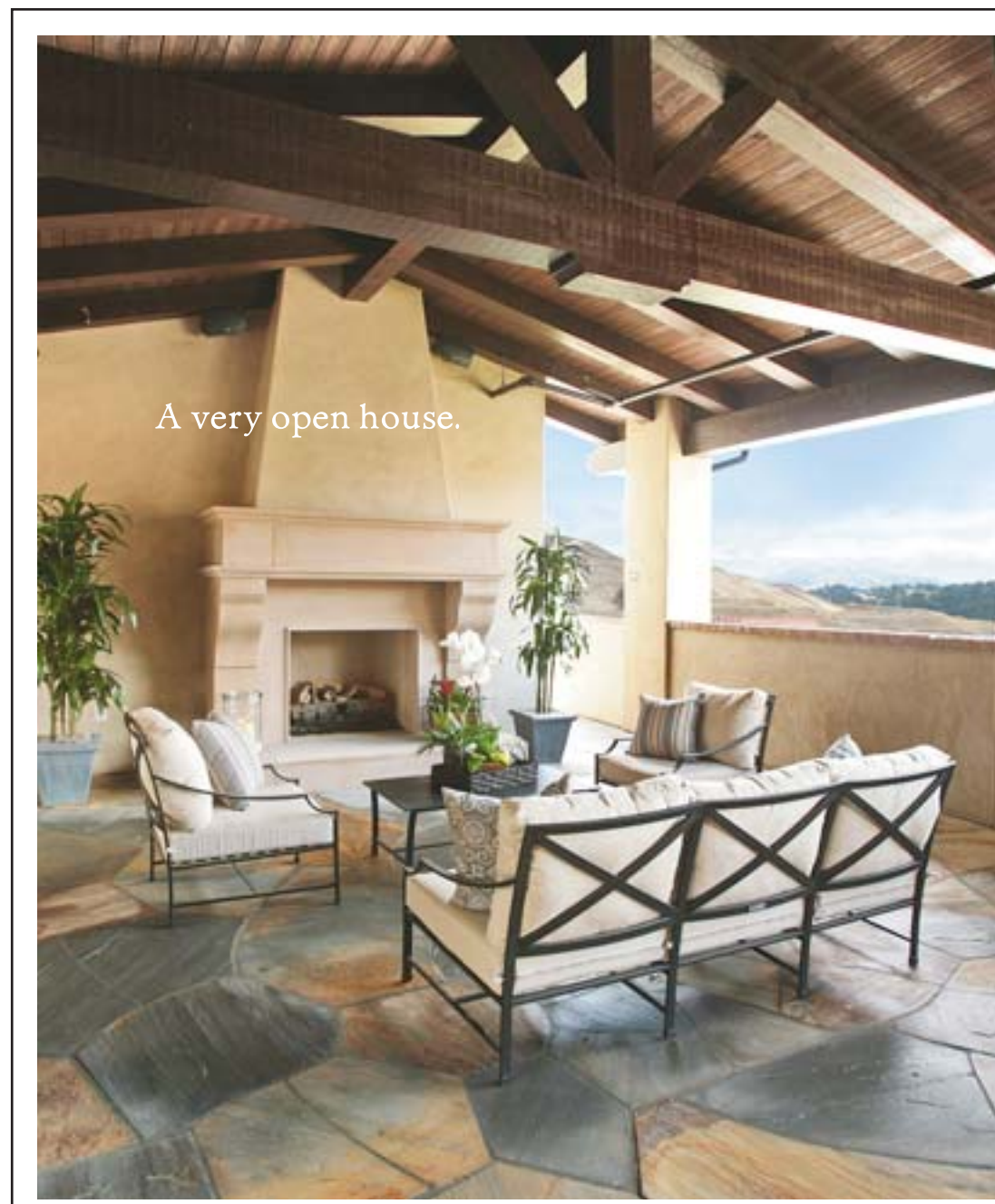
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