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Beyond the Garden Gate

By Cathy Dausman



Cozy cooking: Graceful pillars, elevated carriage lights and even the standing heat lamp vertically extend the Sitzmann's garden skyward. Photo Shari Sullivan, Enchanting Planting

watered that area.

"We lost a garden [due to the drought]," she said. So what's to see? An array of fruit trees - lime, lemon, peach, cherry, apricot, plum and nectarine, says Greg; a berry patch, a cutting garden, a raised garden set in oversized containers, roses with names like "hot chocolate," blueberries, strawberries, black raspberries and white raspberries; a chicken coop with five laying hens; and a 180-degree open vista sweeping from Mt. Diablo to Saint Mary's College and the Berkeley hills.

Orinda's Dixie Anderson readily admits she is not a gardener, but she certainly admires the extensive, long-term relandscaping project she and husband Chris undertook with professional guidance from Shari Sullivan at Orinda's Enchanting Planting. When they removed a large Monterey Pine and pulled the side yard fence forward it gave the couple what Dixie calls her "enchanted garden." Her yard, she says, is

currently "exploding" with roses. The Andersons removed an aging kidney -shaped back yard pool snuggled up against the house and pushed the new rectangular shaped pool back from the house, gaining level outdoor living space for their nicely updated 70s rancher. "We love to be outside," Dixie explains, as she ticks off their back yard events - casual morning coffee, barbeques with neighbors and family Easter parties. She uses words like "warm" and "inviting" and talks about how the landscape project has opened up an "awesome" view.

Moraga Junior Women's Club member Lena Cooper admits "this was a tough year" to recruit volunteers to show their home gardens. She blames the challenge on the rains falling in early 2016. But like new grass after the rain, the 11th annual Moraga Junior's Garden Tour on April 30 promises to be lush and colorful.

Proceeds from the fundraiser benefit Contra Costa County Shelter, Inc. this year. The self-guided tour features five Lamorinda gardens and offers an optional on-site luncheon. Here is a preview:

Heather Davis uses words like "whimsy" and "pretty magical" to describe the oversized lot with a view her family is lucky enough to inhabit in Moraga. The site is not flat, but "flat-ish," Davis said, and they've used that, and terracing, to their advantage.

"Families are a big deal to us," Davis said; she and husband Greg Davis have four children plus extended family nearby. The hillside was largely weeds when the family moved in four years ago, and an in-ground pool took up most of the flat backyard space. When the pool was removed it left a wide swath of grass where the sun and rain green it up. Davis explains that in deference to the drought, it has been nearly a year since they have

Technically Anderson is talking about the view from the top of their up slope yard, but in reality, the view from the house-level looking up is equally awesome. Fifteen years ago the space was juniper at the bottom and bare at the top. Now boulders create a living hillside wall, surrounded by flowers and plants. A serpentine hillside path, three weeks in the making, beckons children to run along its length while gently climbing the hill. A final stretch of as-yet under-realized space at the top, awash with California poppies, buffers the end of the Anderson property with their neighbor's lot.

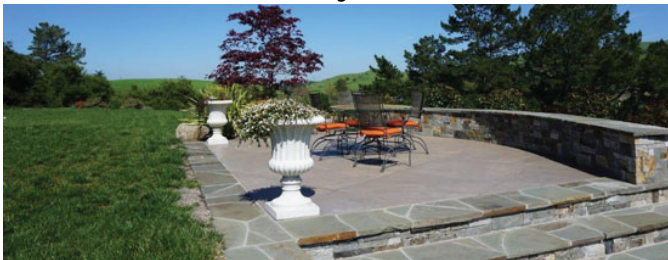
When it comes to beautiful gardens Lindy and Gary Sitzmann have something in common with the Andersons - both used Sullivan from Enchanting Planting as their landscape designer. Where the Anderson yard is larger, the Sitzmann's Orinda garden is jewel box in size; a space Sullivan rightfully calls "super beautiful."

The earlier concrete patio was at best nondescript when the parties sat down to talk about their wish list. The backyard spaces were disconnected, so Sullivan dropped the grade in one area to link the hardscape to a deck off the dining and living room. Their outdoor space includes the nearly requisite lounge area, barbeque, fireplace, arbor and view of neighboring hills, but if you're lucky enough to enter the outdoors from the master bedroom, you'll find a pocket-sized Japanese garden. It might not be beyond the garden gate, but it's definitely worth seeing.

Beyond the Garden Gate, the 2016 Moraga Juniors Garden and Outdoor Living Tour, will be held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. April 30, rain or shine. Tickets are \$40, and available online at www.moragajuniors.org or at the following locations: Across the Way, Moraga; McDonnell Nursery, Orinda; and Orchard Nursery, Lafayette. A portion of each ticket is tax-deductible and lunch is available for an additional fee.



At the top of the yard the Anderson garden transitions from planned, formal space (Double Delight roses) to California wildflower poppies--for now. The couple says they may reinvent that space at a later date. Photos Cathy Dausman



Visitors feel on top of the world from patio at the highest part of the Davis' yard. ... continued on page D6



The Anderson's "Secret Garden" is a gem. Photo Cathy Dausman

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