

Life in LAMORINDA

Mysterious California: Book Discussion Series

By Sophie Braccini



Kirk Russell Photo courtesy of the author



Nadia Gordon Photo courtesy of the author



Nina Revoyr Photo courtesy of the author



Laurie King Photo courtesy of the author

Mystery books attract readers of all ages. The excitement of a well written mystery novel, the mind puzzle and the often colorful characters create a cocktail that's hard to resist. Lamorinda mystery fans are invited to step up to the bar; the Moraga library will offer the "Mysterious California book discussion series." The four month long program will feature 4 California authors who have set their mysteries in the Golden State.

The program starts on January 29th with the screening of a documentary introducing the writers and their work. The movie will be presented at both 1 p.m. and 7 p.m.; it invites readers on a visual journey through the California landscapes of the four crime novels and on an exploration of universal themes: the love of land, the importance of knowing personal and social history, the desire for truth and justice, and the power of place to inspire story.

"The four mysteries chosen for this program represent a cross-section of crime fiction spawned by California's locales," says librarian Nancy Herrera, who is coordinating the program in Moraga, "the writers and novels in the new program cover a large terrain geographically, historically, and culturally."

The first featured author is a San Francisco favorite, Laurie King, and her selected mystery is "The Art of Detection."

Next up is Kirk Russell, author of "Shell Games," a mystery staged along the

Northern Coast of California. "My novel, Shell Games, that's part of the library program is set largely along the north coast with an abalone poaching angle," says Russell, "I knew I wanted to write the land into the story and when I heard about Fish and Game's undercover team the idea of writing a fictional patrol lieutenant running that unit seemed a perfect fit." Russell grew up in Orinda and spent a lot of time outdoors. His other two novels also revolve around poaching plots; one is set in the Sierras and the other in the delta.

The third author featured at the library is Nina Revoyr, Southern California author for her novel "Southland." The Japanese-American author pictures love and murder in the 40, 60 and 90's in this riveting L.A. tale. The last author is Nadia Gordon, who situates her mystery "Sharpshooter" in the Napa Valley.

"We are not sure yet that all the authors will be able to come to our book discussions," says Herrera, "they will be featured the 3rd Thursday of the month, starting on February 19th with The Art of Detection." As with the introductory movie, the discussions will be held twice, in the afternoon at 1 p.m., and in the evening at 7 p.m.

Both Kirk Russell and Nadia Gordon confirmed that they would be coming for their book discussion. The library has already ordered many copies of the first novel and they will be available shortly.

SMC Students Study Ways to Close Sustainability Loop

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These include changing light bulbs to CFLs, switching to tank-less water heaters, buying hybrid vehicles, and participating in city-wide composting efforts.

Lafayette resident Bart Carr and his family began traditional composting and worm composting at his home, while Jodie Howe started buying her family's produce through a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, where families pay local farmers up front for each season's vegetables, which are boxed in bulk and delivered locally to be separated by participants. Many other Lamorinda residents have started their own vegetable gardens and are planting fruit trees instead of ornamentals.

"The simplest thing people can do is to start growing their own food, even if it's just one thing: a fruit tree, lettuce, tomatoes, something," Sbrogna says. "When a number of people in a community are growing food then it's easy to start a neighborhood home-grown foodshare program or collaborative. You can't get much more local than raspberries from your own yard or eggs from your neighbor's chickens."

The goal is to create a closed-loop system.

"This concept seems so cutting edge, yet every traditional culture and native people have been growing food forever," Sbrogna added. "People are so divorced from their food. The permaculture concept takes this most basic need and gives people this power."

Moraga resident Deva Rajan gave the students a tour of the Moraga Community Gardens, which has been providing a bounty for local residents for years. Bill Durkin of Sustain-

able Moraga plans to give students a tour of the Orinda City offices and the Moraga Barn (both of which are "green" certified by the Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design Green Building Rating System).

Sbrogna's goal is for the students to develop their own understanding of permaculture as it relates to their immediate lives and surroundings. By applying the principles of permaculture to resource management on local and global levels, Sbrogna hopes students will envision new design possibilities for their dorms, communities and cities.

"Permaculture works to mimic patterns and designs found in nature rather than work against it," Sbrogna says.

For example, with proper design placement of shade plants or placement of windows to bring in sunlight during the winter months, homes would not need as much energy to heat or cool during peak seasons. Sbrogna says most Americans work against nature, and thus find themselves scrambling for resources.

It makes no sense that our driveways and rain gutters divert water, and then we import water into our homes," she says.

Some simple permaculture concepts can be utilized, explained Sbrogna. Add a greywater system (which collects wastewater from bathtubs, shower drains, sinks, washing machines, and dishwashers) to homes or substitute a green lawn with edible plants, a garden, or native fauna.

"America is somewhat lawn obsessed," she says. "It would be great if people could change what we consider to be beautiful."

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