

Lamorinda OUR HOMES

Lamorinda Weekly Volume 04 Issue 1 Wednesday, March 17, 2010

Bringing Back the Natives

Annual Garden Tour on May 2nd

By Sophie Braccini



Home Inspection for Sellers, page 8



The Mead-Reynolds garden features an antique lithograph press; in the foreground is California Gooseberry (*Ribes californicum*), behind the press grows a native grass, California Fescue (*Festuca californica*)
Photo Sophie Braccini

In 2006, Lois Reynolds and Terry Mead went on the “Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour.” The Orinda couple had always wanted to transform their side and back gardens from concrete and dirt to something more appealing and sustainable; it was not until they visited the garden of landscape architect Rick Alatorre during the tour that they decided to act. This season, the couple’s property will be fea-

tured in the 2010 tour which will take place on Sunday, May 2nd. This year’s tour will include two other Lamorinda gardens; Al Kyte’s native garden in Moraga, which has been growing for over 30 years making it one of the oldest in the area, and Barbara Leitner’s garden in Orinda, planted only with natives local to the San Pablo Creek watershed.

Reynolds and Mead asked Alatorre to help them

create their own native garden, and they are thrilled with the result. Reynolds (known to Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School students as art teacher Mrs Mead, who retired last year), says that her garden is part of her inspiration to develop her art in new directions.

... continued on page 4

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Lamorinda Home Sales recorded

LAFAYETTE	Last reported: 7
LOWEST AMOUNT:	\$560,000
HIGHEST AMOUNT:	\$1,350,000
MORAGA	Last reported: 4
LOWEST AMOUNT:	\$200,000
HIGHEST AMOUNT:	\$925,000
ORINDA	Last reported: 3
LOWEST AMOUNT:	\$718,000
HIGHEST AMOUNT:	\$1,125,000

Home sales are compiled by Cal REsource, an Oakland real estate information company. Sale prices are computed from the county transfer tax information shown on the deeds that record at close of escrow and are published five to eight weeks after such recording. This information is obtained from public county records and is provided to us by California REsource. Neither Cal REsource nor this publication are liable for errors or omissions.

LAFAYETTE

- 3223 Alta Lane, \$600,000, 3 Bdrms, 1410 SqFt, 1948 YrBlt, 2-11-10
- 24 Crest Road, \$1,350,000, 5 Bdrms, 3832 SqFt, 1950 YrBlt, 2-19-10
- 310 Denise Lane, \$625,000, 4 Bdrms, 2319 SqFt, 2000 YrBlt, 2-25-10
- 3415 Moraga Boulevard, \$822,000, 3 Bdrms, 1763 SqFt, 1941 YrBlt, 2-25-10
- 855 Mountain View Drive, \$560,000, 4 Bdrms, 1675 SqFt, 1959 YrBlt, 2-17-10
- 3286 Springhill Road, \$1,250,000, 5 Bdrms, 3691 SqFt, 2006 YrBlt, 2-18-10
- 3385 West Terrace, \$700,000, 3 Bdrms, 1301 SqFt, 1955 YrBlt, 2-19-10

MORAGA

- 1838 Joseph Drive, \$875,000, 4 Bdrms, 2371 SqFt, 1971 YrBlt, 2-19-10
- 4 Ketelsen Court, \$200,000, 4 Bdrms, 1988 SqFt, 1969 YrBlt, 2-17-10
- 98 Miramonte Drive, \$383,000, 2 Bdrms, 1514 SqFt, 1965 YrBlt, 2-19-10
- 45 Warfield Drive, \$925,000, 4 Bdrms, 2412 SqFt, 1965 YrBlt, 2-18-10

ORINDA

- 10 Albo Court, \$770,000, 3 Bdrms, 1690 SqFt, 1958 YrBlt, 2-22-10
- 31 Ivy Drive, \$718,000, 3 Bdrms, 1803 SqFt, 1953 YrBlt, 2-11-10
- 61 Bates Boulevard, \$1,125,000, 3 Bdrms, 2480 SqFt, 1962 YrBlt, 2-23-10

Lamorinda Foreclosures recorded

MORAGA

- 1965 Ascot Drive #12, 94556, American Home Mortgage, 02-24-10, \$332,445, 1130 sf, 2 bd
- 2 Via Barcelona, 94556, Citimortgage, 02-22-10, \$652,902, 1273 sf, 3 bd

ORINDA

- 105 Rheem Boulevard, 94563, Indymac Mortgage, 02-17-10, \$725,655, 1788 sf, 3 bd

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Bringing Back the Natives

... continued from page 1

“When we decided to completely re-do our garden I started making my first mosaic stepping stones in anticipation,” she says, “and I had them ready when he (Alatorre) started moving the dirt.” One of the things Reynolds appreciates about Alatorre is that he proposed a solution to integrate the old lithograph press, which her grandfather used for his own art, into the garden. “We designed the garden together, so you could walk down a path and discover a piece of art at a time.”

The garden needed the addition of copious quantities of dirt to create mounds for the plants, a new drainage system, and the installation of a drip irrigation structure that was used, especially during the first two years, to establish the natives. “After this first period we only have to water a bit at the peak of the dry season,” says Reynolds. Since she was never a gardener, Reynolds also appreciates the low maintenance needed to keep her garden beautiful. “The way native flowers reseed themselves is fantastic,” she says, “we just have to do a bit of weeding and the rest takes care of itself.”



San Francisco Wallflower

Photos Andy Scheck



Farewell-to-Spring 'Aurora'

Reynolds' next artistic project will be a mosaic table for the garden. “Each year I am inspired to do more,” she says, “somehow the garden and the art are symbiotic. The garden has also changed what I like and appreciate in flowers and plants. I used to like long-stemmed roses to make bouquets. Now, with my native flowers, I create very different flower arrangements that I like just as much, if not more.”

For Al Kyte, native gardening is a matter of vision and philosophy. A native gardener for 35 years, the Moraga resident is a local icon when it comes to native plant gardening. “To create a landscape exclusively of native plants is forward-looking in terms of water conservation,” explains Kyte, “it integrates with the surrounding areas, maintains the semi-rural feel, and can be beautiful and distinctive as well.” His garden is an absolute must-see with over 100 species of California natives, displaying an amazing array of colors and landscaping styles from a manzanita-based chaparral in front to a varied, open woodland with a twenty-five foot long stream in the back. Most of the established plants receive no summer water.

The gardens are excellent habitats for local wild life, an additional benefit of planting a native plant garden. Barbara Leitner, whose Orinda garden will be open to visitors this year, is very motivated by this aspect of native plants; or to be true to her pursuit, of local plants indigenous to our watersheds. “I have worked with the City of Orinda as a consultant about creek-friendly plants and stream-side planting that would provide wild life habitat,” says Leitner, “one of the recommendations was to use local plants because they fit better with the environment, and they will have no negative impact on the wild population in and outside



Lois Reynolds and a “Tranquilon Ridge” Pink Flowering Currant

the planting area.” To plant her garden, Leitner gave seeds she collected at salvage sites to a local nursery to grow. The garden is now three years old and has not required watering since its second year.

To register for the 2010 Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour, go to www.bringingbackthenatives.net.



Clarkia flower bouquet

Photo provided



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Catching the Rain

By Sophie Braccini



Gutter door Photo Andy Scheck

It is one of Deva Rajan's simple pleasures to collect rainwater from the gutters that have been cleaned by the winter showers, and to make tea with it. "What better use of the rain water can one make?" asks the Canyon resident. At the other end of the scale of rain catchment, Canyon Construction, the developer that restored the Moraga Barn, collects 15,000 gallons of rain water every winter in three concrete tanks buried on its premises, "that's enough to sustain 100% of our landscaping over the whole season," says Chris Avant, the company's president. And in the middle of the scale, residents like Andy Scheck, the publisher of the Lamorinda

Weekly, use home-made systems to make the best possible use of the water that falls from our skies.

"When I came here from Germany, I was very surprised to notice that no one was collecting water from their gutters," says Scheck, "there, it is standard to have an outlet where the gutter comes down. Not everybody uses it, but the possibility is always there." Scheck decided to construct his own gutter-door in order to catch the winter rain. He first made a paper model for the door and cut an opening in the gutter; he then built a door, which is now attached to the gutter, from a sheet of metal. "I have a piece of pipe that I attach to the door to fill a large can located on the side of the house," he says, "once the first can is full, another pipe conducts the water to the next can."

Scheck's system does not have the storage capacity to fully meet his landscape watering needs, but the collected water is used from September to April and it somewhat reduces his water bill for the whole year.

Suzanne Jones, on the other hand, has a 10,000 gallon storage tank that catches enough water to maintain her native plant garden year round. When we remodeled our house, we buried a stainless steel tank under the deck," says the Bollinger Canyon resident, "it is connected to half of our gutters." Jones was able to locate a Santa Rosa company that was ready to sell her the



Concrete tanks were buried by "The Barn" at the time of its renovation.

Photo courtesy Canyon Construction



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stainless steel tank, usually destined for wine storage, at a good price. "I wanted something recyclable and was glad to find this beautiful tank for only 10-20% more than a plastic tank." Jones plans to add a second tank in the future to sustain a vegetable garden. "When we re-did our plumbing system we made sure that it would be grey-water-recycling ready," adds Jones, "it will be easy to divert the water from our laundry to water our trees when we are ready to do so."

A do-it-yourself enthusiast, Scheck has also set in place a home-made grey-water recycling system. "It helps that the bathtub is set by a window," he says, "when the bath is over, we put the hose that sits outside the window in the tub and start a small pump." It takes five minutes to recover the water that is later used in the garden. "When the drought started last year it felt wrong to take baths," says Scheck's wife, Wendy, "this system is perfect and I enjoy my bath guilt-free."



Andy Scheck with his bathtub pump system Photo Sophie Braccini



Rain and grey water stored in barrels provide all the water for the Scheck's vegetable garden



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Moraga

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The Good Psychology of Inspections – For Sellers!

By Ken Ryerson

For both buyers and sellers, inspections rank as one of the cheapest kinds of insurance a housing consumer can purchase.

Inspections provide protection for both parties when participating in the largest financial transaction that most will ever make in their lifetime. Buyers receive assurance in knowing what they are getting BEFORE they commit to years of monetary responsibility. Likewise, sellers are safeguarded down the road against lawsuits about undisclosed problems in their former home.

The cost for this sound, piece of mind assurance, is modest. If you are buying a single-family detached home in the Lamorinda area, a thorough inspection of the home and property generally costs around \$1,500.

What are you getting for this expenditure? What should be tested as part of the inspection process? In my opinion, the answer is Everything. A complete general inspection should include an examination of the foundation, plumbing, roof, chimney and fireplace, windows and doors, electrical and heating systems, and drainage and soil condition. I also recommend that the inspection include a close look at anything unique or specific to the property.

There are many types of inspections that span across various forms of specialization and expertise. In the Lamorinda area, a pest inspection is at the top of the list. A pest report should always be completed by a licensed pest inspector, and will only cover the areas of the home that are readily accessible for inspecting.

In Northern California, a pest report primarily serves to identify what type of dry rot and fungus damage are present in a home. It is common for even the most immaculate home to have some amount of repair that is needed. For older properties, repair costs can run into the tens of thousands of dollars.

Pest reports generally discover some deficiencies in Bay Area homes therefore; they are customarily provided up front by the seller and at the



Dry rot on a roof beam

seller's expense. However, this is not always the case, and if for some reason a pest report has not been provided, I highly recommend that any buyer purchase one at their own expense. In the Lamorinda area, a typical pest report by a licensed inspector costs around \$300.

Other inspection services available include structural and engineering analysis, mold inspection, drainage, feng chi study, and landscaping or tree examination, but the list is endless and the choices need be commensurate with the house and the environment.

Why do I claim inspections rep-

resent good psychology? Couldn't an inspection reveal problems for a seller and scare off potential buyers? Today's real estate market is challenging enough when a home is void of problems; the last thing any seller needs in today's market are reports stating several problems with their home.

Contrary to the belief that buyer's will back away from purchasing a home due to issues brought to light from inspections, is the reality that buyers typically back out of a deal because of financing issues or psychological fears.

... continued on page 10

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Listed for \$779,500



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The Good Psychology of Inspections – For Sellers!

... continued from page 8

An inspection report, promotes trust and comfort which helps buyers overcome their fears.

When I sell my home—which I won't be for some time—I will document current problems, past problems, potential problems and especially issues that I don't see as a problem, but someone else may find to be a huge problem. I have found that the more information that is provided by the seller, the less concerned a buyer tends to be.

It is more often the case that a seller provides limited information and the buyer becomes fixated on

one or two items. And if it is the Buyer that uncovers the problem, psychology dictates that the undisclosed matter becomes the central issue. I've seen many deals collapse as a result of non-disclosure.

What about sellers? In the early 2000's some sellers provided a general home inspection report up front, knowing that eager buyers in that hot market would forego any inspections in an effort to secure a particular property. Today the tables are turned and it's the seller who may forego providing an inspection. This is a risky move and here is what I advise my Sellers:

"I am a firm believer that the best thing you can do in today's market is to encourage a Buyer to have any and all inspections of the home. From a liability perspective, the more complete due diligence performed by the Buyer, the less likely it is that an unknown problem will surface later. When a Buyer discovers problems after they have moved into the property, the recourse is more costly and time consuming."

Most sellers are very honest when disclosing known problems in their house. But problems can exist that a seller may not know about, especially for distressed properties that have not been maintained.

The most common suit stemming from a home purchase is when a Buyer sues the Seller for issues discovered after the close of escrow. This includes issues that the Seller was not aware of, and this is why inspections offer valuable liability protection.

As markets change, this protection is more important than ever. A Buyer who bought in a rush during the bull market may now be unhappy in this El Nino year to find that their garage fills with water during every heavy rain or that the roof leaks.

While most will consider the problem a lesson learned and engage a drainage specialist or roofer to fix the problem, some elect to sue the Seller. It's not surprising to learn that the number of such lawsuits increase when the market is sliding downward and home prices are falling.

In closing, my advice to a Seller is to disclose everything. As for Buyers, you should 'Inspect, Inspect, Inspect' (especially if you're looking at a bank-owned foreclosure property).

Whether a Seller or a Buyer, these policies are good psychology. Whether you are leaving the keys for the new owners or you are the new owners in possession of the keys, the condition of the home sold and bought is exactly what it was reported to be.

Ken Ryerson's Inspection Team

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Ken Ryerson lives in Moraga with his wife, Linda and their two children.

Ken is a Lamorinda Residential Real Estate Specialist with Pacific Union in Orinda. If you have any questions or comments, he can be reached at 925-878-9685 or via email at Ken@RyersonRealty.com

Isolated Moraga Needs to Get Organized for Effective Emergency Response

Submitted by Julie Lindemann, MNEP Steering Committee



Bruce Berman and Herb Lederman (green shirts) demonstrate the proper response to a gas line leak while Gary Borrelli, Frans Hoffman and Linda Borrelli observe. Photo provided

The recent catastrophes in Haiti and Chile are grim reminders of the dangers we face from earthquakes while living in the Bay Area. Our rational minds know we must prepare for the inevitable, but do we? Is your family ready for a disaster such as an earthquake or wildfire?

Moraga is especially vulnerable. The town is geographically isolated and there are few law enforcement and fire personnel on duty at any one time. Because Moraga residents could be isolated from outside aid agencies from 3 days to 2 weeks following a disaster, we must know how to take care of ourselves until help arrives. We must know how to rescue and give effective first aid to the injured, provide food and shelter to the homeless, and communicate our needs by radio, assuming there will be neither power nor cell phone coverage.

In the event of a disaster, a coordinated group response is more effective than disorganized individual efforts. Thus, good communications and cohesiveness within neighborhoods are vital tools for survival. The Moraga Neighborhood Emergency Preparedness (MNEP) committee is a group of the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) graduates, who have organized to meet the challenge of educating and organizing as many residents as possible. MNEP has received the endorsement of

the Moraga Police Department, the Moraga/Orinda Fire District and Lamorinda CERT.

During the second half of 2009, 10 neighborhood groups in Moraga began their organizing activities with the help of MNEP. To date 29 CERT graduates have volunteered to serve as trainers and facilitators. During 2010, MNEP's goal is to assist at least another 15 neighborhood groups to organize and receive basic training. Should you offer to host a meeting in your neighborhood, a MNEP facilitator will bring the necessary equipment and documentation to present a 45-minute program. The only responsibility of the host is to provide a meeting place and to invite approximately 20 consecutive homeowners. Twenty is the ideal number of households to make a cohesive neighborhood. At the end of the presentation, volunteers will be called upon to take the responsibility of Neighborhood Captain. MNEP is an on-going free resource for the neighborhood groups.

MNEP is also reaching out to community service organizations, homeowners associations and church groups to increase awareness of their goals and programs. Interested organizations can contact MNEP and request a free presentation for their next gathering.

The members of the MNEP Steering Committee are: Co-chairs Gary & Linda Borrelli, Bruce Berman, Frans Hoffman, Herb Lederman, Julie Lindemann, Cindy Petrini, Barbara Renz and Lonnie Treat.

You can get involved today by emailing the Steering Committee at MoragaNEP@gmail.com.

Neighborhood Hosts are needed as well as Neighborhood Captains. Donations are welcome.

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ORINDA



New Listing

49 Longridge Road

Fabulous refurbished home ready to go! Great open floor plan, 4bd + office, 3.5ba. Gourmet kitchen, lux mstr retreat. Lg decks, lawn area, peaceful views, close to town.

Offered at \$949,000

ORINDA



New Listing

70 Lost Valley Drive

Totally remodeled contemporary design w/open floor plan & top-of-the-line finishes. Gourmet "Cooks" kitchen & designer bathrooms. Near 12 yrs top Orinda schools!

Offered at \$985,000

ORINDA



New Price

25 Risa Court

Sweeping views of Orinda hills & privacy from almost 1 ac yard - walk to school & swim club. Attractive 4 bd beautifully remod w/hdwd flrs, new kitchen & baths.

Offered at \$999,000

ORINDA



New Listing

650 Kite Hill Road

Fabulous Orindawoods 2940 sf 4bd/3ba sgl family home on lovely .4 ac w/deck, patio, gardens. Updated granite kitchen, hdwd floors, soaring ceilings, wonderful views!

Offered at \$1,328,000

ORINDA



411 Camino Sobrante

One of Orinda's most distinctive Country Club homes w/2875 sf of charm & exceptional character for ideal living/entertaining. Lovely outdoor areas.

Offered at \$1,595,000

ORINDA



New Listing

137 Rheem Boulevard

Newly constructed/remodeled 4300+ sf 5bd/4.5ba includes 1bd/1ba guest house, chef's kitchen, walnut flrs, 11' ceilings, wine room, 4 fireplaces, gated entry, beautiful views.

Offered at \$1,899,000

ORINDA



New Listing

17 Normandy Lane

New listing in Sleepy Hollow! Wonderful 3900 sf trad on 1/2 ac. Sensational lawns & gardens, soccer size bckyd. Fabulous mstr suite, updated kit. Walk to elem.

Offered at \$1,995,000

ORINDA



New Listing

239 Sundown Terrace

Beautiful trad 5bd/3ba 3498 sf on prem cul-de-sac lot w/cust details thruout. Lux mstr suite w/frplc; guest suite; chef's kit, fenced lvl back yd, patio & play areas.

Offered at \$2,100,000

MORAGA



136 Walford Drive

4 bedroom/2 bath, great floor plan, kitchen/family room opens to large private yard. Quiet street. Great bones, location.

Offered at \$899,000

MORAGA



Pending

54 Shuey Drive

Executive rancher w/amazing backyard & views. 4bd/2.5ba 2304 sf w/hdwd floors throughout. Terrific entertainer's home - the pool even has a slide! Top schools.

Offered at \$995,000

MORAGA



New Listing

160 Valley Hill Drive

Fabulously remod 4bd/4ba 2926 sf exec ranch home on over 5 ac of beautiful horse property. 3-stall barn & 4 pastures. Only 1.7 mi off St. Mary's Rd but a world away!

Offered at \$1,550,000

LAFAYETTE



New Price

911 Oak Street

Downtown location yet in a private, park-like setting w/spectacular views of Mt. Diablo. Updated 3bd/2ba single level home on over 1/3 acre.

Offered at \$789,000

LAFAYETTE



New Listing

616 Huntleigh Drive

Exquisite Burton Valley 3bd/2ba hm w/gorgeous view lot. Designer touches, crown molding & hardwood floors. Remod baths, lg backyard patio & sprawling lush lawns.

Offered at \$949,000

LAFAYETTE



1199 Monticello Road

Happy Valley Glen custom hm on beaut pvt .8 ac lot. Lrge fam rm w/kit. Has wall of glass doors that open to yard. Grt floorplan, grt neighborhood, close to bart

Offered at \$1,195,000

LAFAYETTE



New Listing

3498 Springhill Court

Charming 3000+ sf 4bd/3ba + 1bd/1ba/ kitchenette sep cottage on delightful pvt court walking distance to schools. Lush .5 ac lvl lot w/perfect entertaining areas.

Offered at \$1,498,000

LAFAYETTE



New Listing

3425 Shangri La Road

Unique, stunning property w/gated entry on lvl 1-ac lot. 5bd/3.5ba, hardwood floors, 4 fireplaces, panoramic views from every room. Lovely pool, full barn & riding arena.

Offered at \$2,198,000

THE VILLAGE ASSOCIATES:

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Click on **Sunday Open House**
 Friday after 5 PM for Open House listings

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