

# Lamorinda OUR HOMES

Lamorinda Weekly Volume 05 Issue 2 Wednesday, March 30, 2011



*Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian ...read on page D4*

## Compost Fence or Gabion Art?

By Sophie Braccini

When Fred Strauss moved from Austin to Orinda last year, he arrived with years of landscaping experience and an adventurous spirit. Driving past his residence on Glorietta Boulevard, it's hard to miss the metal structure full of mulch and leaves that shields portions of his front yard. At first glance it appears to be a composting fence – a passive composting technique. But to Strauss, the structure is a vegetation version of the gabion walls he built in Texas.

“Four months ago a woman driving down Glorietta in the afternoon fell asleep at the wheel and crashed in the bushes in front of the house,” recounts Strauss, “I looked for an idea to replace the dead vegetation and came up with the fence, which

is a derivation of the gabions I built in Austin.” Strauss thought that some plants, such as epiphytes, would take root in the mulch-and-leaf fence; the rate of decomposition would be very slow since the fence contains only brown material.

According to the Seattle Times, “A composting fence attracts wrens and chickadees, and cuts down on the amount of woody waste that must be hauled off because most pruned branches can be cut to fit into the fence. Over time the green waste breaks down to feed the plants growing around it.” Strauss loves the way the light shines through the leaves in the morning sun and the different shades of brown that are created as the light changes.



*Fred Strauss with his compost fence*

*Photo Sophie Braccini*



*Building a gabion wall*

*Photo provided*

There's nothing to stop Strauss from calling his fence a gabion, from the Italian gabbione meaning “big cage,” – what counts is the cage that encloses the material. “If you look at what's done in the little artsy town of Marfa in Texas, you see very creative ways these walls have been used in public and private spaces,” he says. “I've used it for adding an interesting element of décor in my clients' gardens.” Strauss adds that gabion walls or fences can be filled with anything – mulch, wood chips, rock, seashells, leaves, even hay bales. The material used as fill must be larger than the openings in the mesh or welded wire panels; gabions may be fat, thin, tall, short, and may start and stop, turn corners, or curve any way desired. “All you need is a good steel man with welding skills and an artsy spirit,” he says.

One of Strauss's characteristics is to take advantage of a yard's natural circumstance to create something unexpected. “My job is imagining and creating beautiful gardens, with whatever resources might be available,” he says. “I can imagine quite a lot, very quickly, and I make a living out of doing that for people.” Strauss believes that there is no limit to what people can create between their shelter and the rest of the world if they are free-thinking and willing to garden the way no one has gardened before. “Garden life is never so good as when recycling and recreating bold integration of the natural environment and human-built elements of home,” he says.

Strauss' landscaping business is called Terrapin Garden; he can be reached at 254-8343.



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## Lamorinda Home Sales recorded

LAFAYETTE	Last reported: 7
LOWEST AMOUNT:	\$555,500
HIGHEST AMOUNT:	\$782,500
MORAGA	Last reported: 10
LOWEST AMOUNT:	\$122,000
HIGHEST AMOUNT:	\$1,175,000
ORINDA	Last reported: 6
LOWEST AMOUNT:	\$250,000
HIGHEST AMOUNT:	\$1,220,000

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

3279 Mt. Diablo Court #25, \$555,500, 3 Bdrms, 1731 SqFt, 1986 YrBlt, 3-3-11;  
 previous Sale: \$320,000, 12-08-99  
 828 Mountain View Drive, \$702,000, 3 Bdrms, 2432 SqFt, 1959 YrBlt, 2-25-11  
 840 Reliez Station Road, \$609,000, 4 Bdrms, 2269 SqFt, 1975 YrBlt, 3-4-11  
 3410 Shangri La Road, \$760,000, 3 Bdrms, 1990 SqFt, 1956 YrBlt, 3-3-11  
 3323 Sweet Drive, \$710,000, 5 Bdrms, 1610 SqFt, 1952 YrBlt, 3-1-11  
 3114 Sweetbrier Circle, \$782,500, 4 Bdrms, 1710 SqFt, 1962 YrBlt, 3-1-11;  
 previous Sale: \$951,000, 07-22-05  
 708 Wee Donegal, \$621,500, 4 Bdrms, 2190 SqFt, 1980 YrBlt, 3-2-11;  
 previous Sale: \$812,500, 06-01-07

### MORAGA

1897 Ascot Drive, \$365,000, 2 Bdrms, 1379 SqFt, 1973 YrBlt, 3-4-11;  
 previous Sale: \$248,000, 03-16-90  
 783 Augusta Drive, \$799,000, 3 Bdrms, 1728 SqFt, 1974 YrBlt, 3-2-11;  
 previous Sale: \$445,000, 02-02-98  
 1369 Camino Peral #B, \$272,000, 2 Bdrms, 1279 SqFt, 1970 YrBlt, 3-1-11  
 1588 Del Monte Court, \$880,000, 4 Bdrms, 2212 SqFt, 1966 YrBlt, 3-1-11;  
 previous Sale: \$735,000, 02-27-01  
 2133 Donald Drive #14, \$122,000, 1 Bdrms, 560 SqFt, 1963 YrBlt, 3-1-11  
 8 Hanson Court, \$350,000, 2 Bdrms, 1211 SqFt, 1984 YrBlt, 3-2-11;  
 previous Sale: \$445,000, 03-16-04  
 1056 Larch Avenue #A, \$670,000, 3 Bdrms, 1936 SqFt, 1976 YrBlt, 2-25-11;  
 previous Sale: \$78,000, 03-15-77  
 4 Magee Court, \$1,100,000, 4 Bdrms, 2740 SqFt, 1985 YrBlt, 2-25-11;  
 previous Sale: \$739,000, 06-15-98  
 160 Valley Hill Drive, \$1,175,000, 1806 SqFt, 1956 YrBlt, 2-28-11;  
 previous Sale: \$1,495,000, 04-19-07  
 149 Westchester Street, \$545,500, 3 Bdrms, 1892 SqFt, 1979 YrBlt, 3-4-11;  
 previous Sale: \$132,500, 05-10-79

### ORINDA

75 Donna Maria Way, \$976,000, 4 Bdrms, 2264 SqFt, 1966 YrBlt, 3-2-11  
 2 Marston Road, \$250,000, 2 Bdrms, 814 SqFt, 1950 YrBlt, 3-1-11;  
 previous Sale: \$689,000, 02-04-05  
 63 Meadow View Road, \$758,000, 3 Bdrms, 1524 SqFt, 1951 YrBlt, 3-1-11  
 5 Rich Acres Road, \$1,220,000, 4 Bdrms, 2932 SqFt, 1955 YrBlt, 3-4-11;  
 previous Sale: \$1,375,000, 08-11-04  
 28 Watchwood Court, \$997,000, 2 Bdrms, 2014 SqFt, 1986 YrBlt, 3-4-11;  
 previous Sale: \$369,000, 04-28-87  
 246 the Knoll, \$590,000, 2 Bdrms, 1532 SqFt, 1974 YrBlt, 3-1-11;  
 previous Sale: \$725,000, 06-07-07

## Lamorinda Foreclosures recorded

### LAFAYETTE

3156 Stanley Boulevard, 94549, RWW Properties, 03-04-11, \$480,000, 1568 sf, 4 bd  
 831 Tanglewood Drive, 94549, US Bank, 03-02-11, \$1,835,379, 6120 sf, 5 bd

### MORAGA

1982 Ascot Drive #C, 94556, US Bank, 02-28-11, \$279,500, 1473 sf, 3 bd  
 2133 Donald Drive #8, 94556, Federal Home Loan Mortgage, 02-14-11, \$215,411, 1224 sf, 2 bd  
 651 Moraga Road #11, 94556, Federal National Mortgage, 02-25-11, \$322,041, 1418 sf, 3 bd





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# Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

## Monet's Masterpiece Makeover

*"My garden is my most beautiful masterpiece." Claude Monet, 1840-1926, Impressionist painter and life-long gardener*



In my youth, when I still considered myself a farmer as opposed to a gardener, I viewed the magnificent oil, "The Artist's Garden in Giverny" painted in 1900 by Claude Monet, now hanging in the Musee d'Orsay in Paris. It was love at first sight, partly because the swathes of purple bearded iris reminded me of my own fields of scented dreams on our farm, and also, because as an apprentice artist, I ached to try my hand at dabbling in dots of light and color.

At the time I was a student living in Holland. April in Lisse, the Netherlands, is breathtaking at the Keukenhof as a sea of tulips in every color and shape announce the first breath of spring. Wrapped in winter wear, braving the frigid air, I attempted to capture the splendor on canvas. But it wasn't until I arrived in Normandy that the artist in me was reborn as a gardener.

Monet's garden mesmerized me. There were chickens and rabbits and a lush harmonized estate of thousands of plantings lovingly sowed. I strolled in wonder through a living painting, stopping to inhale the fragrance, and to photograph the brilliance. I vowed that when I designed my first garden, it would be in tribute to the visions of Giverny and Keukenhof sensibilities.

The acres of poison oak, blackberry bushes, and wild grasses were daunting when I bought land in Lamorinda. My quest for an impressionistic garden was almost thwarted by the unproductive clay soil and the myriad of thistles, weeds, and brush that needed to be cleared before I could begin propagating. While reading a biography of

Monet, I noted that he had hauled countless railway wagon-loads of topsoil to his Giverny garden. I followed suit with truck-loads of loam and compost.

With copious amounts of aid from my Dutch and French inspirations, my horticultural passion was two years in the making before my painter's palette beds yielded armloads of flowers in tones of amethyst, rose, sapphire, indigo, vanilla, and pale yellows. How delighted I was to witness my hillsides carpeted in colors carefully chosen for beauty, balance, and bounty!

Then Mother Nature intervened with a reminder that our climate zones differ by cloaking Lamorinda in a fortnight of below freezing weather. By the time the earth thawed, my carefully designed dream had drowned, died, and decomposed. The Dutch bulbs survived the cold becoming the foundation of my masterpiece makeover. Heartbroken yet determined, I underpinned the landscape with a more wild, tousled scene, allowing a rainbow of colors, textures, and plant specimens to frame the undulating fields.

Today my garden boasts mementos from travels to spectacular gardens I have visited around the world. However, my earliest affections for Gaulle and the Low Lands trump the others at this time of renewal. Keukenhof tulips and daffodils in every hue spring to life this season. Monet's iris wave in the wind, wafting their heady perfume my way as I sit in my creek side meditation meadow listening to the gurgling waterfall, the chirping of the nesting songbirds and the

croaking toads' mating dance.

Monet planted to paint. I plant to pray. In these stressful days, my garden decompresses the angst. Gardening is my universal language of love and I luxuriate freely in my Lamorinda cultivation. However mediocre, imperfect, untamed, and unruly, it is my personal masterpiece, my slice of heaven.

I join Monet in exclaiming, "What I need most of all in life is flowers, always, always!"

### CYNTHIA'S COMPOST COURSE

My garden is a kaleidoscope of colors and fragrance in April and I have my rich compost to thank for that. Keep your kitchen sink clean with my super simple recipe for success to recycle and repurpose your waste.

1. Keep a bowl or small container under your kitchen sink and every time you prepare any food, put all the scraps, except for meat, into the container. This may contain carrot, banana, onion, garlic, and potato peels, lettuce, all vegetables, tea bags, coffee grounds, bread, eggshells, etc.
2. Empty it each day in a five-gallon bucket in your garage, or to a storage area close to the kitchen. Do not leave outside or you'll attract raccoons, skunks, birds, and deer.
3. When the bucket is filled either dump into a pile you have created specifically for composting or use a purchased bin.
4. Add leaves, grass clippings, wood chips, pine

needles, straw, spent flower arrangements, blossoms, and any other combination of green or brown organic materials that are not diseased. It's best to have three times as much brown ingredients as green.

5. Turn with a pitchfork. As the weather warms, decomposition occurs.
6. When the mixture is rich, crumbly, filled with worms, and smells like the good earth, spread as organic mulch in your garden where it will leech into the soil to fertilize your plants.
7. Voila! Happy, healthy plants.

### PERENNIAL FAVORITES FOR MASTER MAKEOVERS

Daffodil	Rhododendron	Dianthus
Tulip	Astilbe	Dahlia
Crocus	Saucer Magnolia	Roses
Freesia	Lavender	Gladioli
Hyacinth	Calendula	Jacobinia
Muscari	Ornamental	Bergenia
Dutch Iris	Grasses	Abelia
Bearded Iris	Delphinium	Plumbago
Daphne	Campanula	Echinacea
Ranunculus	Aster	Columbine
Anemones	Agastache	Digitalis
Agapanthus	Lamium	Artemisia
Clivia	Coreopsis	Shasta Daisy
Kangaroo Paw	Hosta	Ground Covers
Camellia	Ferns	
Azalea	Gaillardia	



*A spectacular spring selection of daffodils mingle with long stemmed blue blooming rosemary, a bee's favorite friend.*  
Photos Cynthia Brian





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## Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide For April

*"The richness I achieve comes from Nature, the source of my inspiration." Claude Monet*

"April showers bring May flowers," or so the saying goes. It's time to tiptoe through the tulips, even with galoshes and umbrellas to celebrate the sensory spring jewels of crocus, daffodils, muscari, hyacinths, hellebores, tulips, freesias, and other early gems as they carpet our woodlands, hillsides, and personal havens. The secret to beautiful gardens is a gardener who is enthusiastic about digging deep-rain or shine!

- COMPOSE beautiful stoneware container gardens by mixing a combination of cannas, tuberous begonias, oxalis tetraphylla (lovely pink flowers), dahlias, Tinkerbell agapanthus, and lobelia.
- CAPTURE a photo of your garden with you in it and send it to us for possible publication subject to editorial approval. We want to showcase your creativity. Email high quality jpegs to

Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com.

- CLEAN out perennial beds now and prepare the soil for replanting.
- MULCH plants with organic compost. Wood barks are great for a top cover, but rob nitrogen from the soil as they decay.
- START seeds as soon as the soil is warm enough. If you are anxious, start your crops indoors near a south-facing window or use a fluorescent light for 12 or more hours per day.
- WELCOME the migrating birds home with fresh water in the fountain and seed in the feeder.
- PRUNE wisteria and other woody specimens before they leaf out to promote flowering.
- PLANT edibles amongst your ornamentals. Lettuces, parsley, dill, and basil are pretty as well as delicious.
- GROW your own personal bouquets. Create a stunning arrangement of a variety of daffodils and calla lilies and add sprigs of flowering herbs such as rosemary with its deep blue florets.
- DIG out and replace older woody lavender bushes. Lavender thrives for about 5 or 6 years then is ready for the compost pile.
- FLOAT camellias for an attractive conversation, stimulating centerpiece at a dinner party. Continue to pick up any camellia blossoms that have fallen to the ground to maintain the vigor of the bush.
- ADJUST your lawn mower to a higher setting and allow the clippings to nourish the soil.
- DON'T cut grass when it's wet as it breaks the delicate blades and compacts the soil.
- PROTECT your sewer lines by composting your food scraps as opposed to using the garbage disposal. Your garden and your pipes will thank you.
- BEE friendly by planting three or four types of native wild flowers to attract the honey gatherers as well as pest resistant varieties of flowers, shrubs, trees and vegetables, thus eliminating pesticides.
- LOVE caterpillar larvae as part of the natural food chain attracting birds. Plant host plants for the butterflies such as milkweed and dogwood. Leave a patch of dense vegetation for protection from inclement weather and a small mud puddle to quench their thirst.
- PARTICIPATE in any of the spring flower events in our area
- DECORATE for Easter with fresh eggs from geese, chickens, and ducks. With their natural loveliness, no food coloring is necessary.
- HAUL heavy rocks and flats of flowers by investing in a good wheelbarrow, cart, or even a Red Flyer wagon.
- EXPLORE our local hiking and biking trails for a whiff of springtime wild flowers.
- EXPERIMENT with new plantings and unusual varieties by visiting Lamorinda garden centers and talking with the garden experts.
- EXPERIENCE the bliss of living green and growing memories.

Welcome to spring. May you and your family enjoy a sunny bunny day in your personal Monet's masterpiece makeover.

Happy Gardening to You!

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Cynthia Brian

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## Top 4 Opportunities in 2011

- 1) Buy foreclosures in select neighborhoods and cities in Contra Costa County, for strong rental income returns, with future appreciation.
- 2) Buy a home in Lafayette, Moraga, or Orinda, in a rare buyer's market.
- 3) Sell in the under \$1,000,000 range in Lamorinda, where sales are now improving, and move up to your dream house in a higher price range where the best negotiating opportunities exist.
- 4) Downsize, and sell in Lamorinda, where the market has not dropped as much, then buy a great one-story home at a bargain price in a nice neighborhood where homes have dropped more. Keep a low property tax by transferring it to the new house within Contra Costa County.

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**Offered at \$2,499,000**



MORAGA



New Listing

**725 Crossbrook Drive**  
Traditional 4bd/2ba ranch home on private .69 ac lot with fabulous views & pool. Great floorplan w/living rm, formal dining, fam rm, new carpet & paint.

**Offered at \$829,000**



MORAGA



New Listing

**2 Wingfoot**  
Exceptional Bruzzone blt Forest Hills home just under 3000 sf. Spacious kitchen/family rm combo. French doors open to striking views, plenty of storage, located on cul-de-sac.

**Offered at \$949,000**



MORAGA



New Listing

**1843 St. Andrews Drive**  
3432 sf hm in MCC w/pvt patio, decks & views. New stainless applis, cathedral ceilings, dual panes, 3 fireplaces. Many upgrades by original owners. All MCC benefits, top schools.

**Offered at \$955,000**



MORAGA



New Price

**1383 Camino Pablo**  
Light & bright turnkey 2820 sf 5bd/3ba entertainer's delight w/hdwd flrs, dual panes, granite kitchen & baths. Lg pvt bckyd & close to award-winning K-8 schools, park & hiking.

**Offered at \$949,000**



MORAGA



New Listing

**297 Corliss Drive**  
Large former model 5bd home. 3200 sf w/updated eat-in kitchen & expanded mstr bath. Hdwd flrs, lg bonus/in-law suite & much more. Level, pretty yd w/lawn, pool & patio.

**Offered at \$1,065,000**



MORAGA



New Listing

**1350 Bollinger Canyon Road**  
Huge price reduction!! Rare oppty! 33 acre gated estate w/vineyard & lots of usable land. Incredible views throughout this updated 4bd + office home. Au-pair/in-law set-up. Helipad.

**Offered at \$1,595,000**



LAFAYETTE



Pending

**1252 Quandt Road**  
Beautiful trad Harold Smith hm & neighborhood. Fab end of cul-de-sac location. Updated kit/spac fam rm, 4+bd/3ba + lg bonus room. High ceilings, hdwd flrs, pvt master suite.

**Offered at \$1,175,000**



LAFAYETTE



**3419 Shangri La**  
Totally charming 3100 sf 5bd w/updated eat-in kitchen (granite/gas top), huge fam rm + bonus rm. 3-car gar. Lg 1.07 ac lot w/pool & use of riding arena. Great Reliez Valley location.

**Offered at \$1,175,000**



LAFAYETTE



**4090 Coralee Lane**  
Beautiful .61 zcre setting. Close-in 5bd + office with 4 baths. Remodeled kitchen, open floor plan.

**Offered at \$1,250,000**



LAFAYETTE



**3724 St. Francis Drive**  
Happy Valley Rose Lane neighborhood! Beaut sgl lvl 4bd hm, gorment kit/lg fam rm open to beaut landscaped yd. Fab vineyard, waterfall & pond, garden, views of hills, 5-car garage.

**Offered at \$1,599,000**



LAFAYETTE



**15 Candlelight Lane**  
Perfection in this stunning 3417 sf Craftsman-style sgl lvl hm blt in 2005, fab floor plan, many impressive finishes & features, a very exceptional 4bd/3ba home.

**Offered at \$1,695,000**



WALNUT CREEK



**578 Monarch Ridge**  
Superbly located townhome w/outstanding views. Lovely hdwd flrs, vaulted ceilings, sep DR & lg eat-in kitchen. Nr shopping, open space, trails & outstanding Lafayette schools.

**Offered at \$625,000**

## THE VILLAGE ASSOCIATES:

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Joan Eggers  
Linda Ehrlich  
Joan Evans  
Linda S Friedman  
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