

Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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The Home Designer ...read on page D7

Life on the Creeks

By Sophie Braccini

Lamorinda resident Martin Spittler probably described it best, “Creeks are really ‘Beauty and the Beast’ for most homeowners.”

Beauty for the sylvan quality of the environment they nurture, but potential beasts if storms overwhelm local drainage systems. A creek in a back yard can be a wonderful feature, but it is part of a natural or engineered drainage system that the individual homeowner rarely controls. Still, most of these homeowners would choose their piece of property again.

Many Lamorinda residents live near a creek – some a permanent feature that creates challenges, others ephemeral subsidiaries that run in winter and are often less trouble. Those who live close to the open space that surrounds Lamorinda have to take charge of potential hazards.

When Tom and Virginia Steuber bought their Lafayette home that borders Briones Regional Park, they knew that the beautiful natural creek meandering down from the surrounding hills could flood their property. They hired an engineering firm to build a collection and piping system large enough to catch the worst storms.

What they did not anticipate was that mud and brush would come down with the water, instantly clogging the drain entrance. “I will always remember that morning of New Year’s Eve in 2005 when we woke up and discovered our



Wild creek coming down Briones toward Virginia and Tom Steubers' home.

Photos Andy Scheck

entire backyard and two-thirds of the swimming pool buried under four to 18 inches of mud,” says Steuber. Since then, her gardener installed rows of poles that catch the debris along the way.

To balance the tempestuous nature of the creek in the back of her prop-

erty, Steuber created a peaceful artificial creek in front, with a pond. The serene atmosphere of that decor is very close to what Zoe and Jim Klippert experience in Moraga with a garden bordering an ephemeral creek.

“It’s never gone any higher than the

base of the little redwood,” says Klippert pointing to a young tree in the lower tier of the bank of the creek. Their creek is quite tame; it drains some adjacent open space and joins shortly after the Klipperts’ property to the larger Moraga Creek. ...continued on page D4