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Indoor and Outdoor Entertaining Spaces Showcased at Miramonte Tour

By Cathy Tyson



The Sitzmanns' cozy patio area with fireplace and heat lamps. Photos provided

With six unique kitchens and new this year - gardens - on the tour, the April 18 "Heart of the Home" fundraiser tour highlights a range of designs to enjoy and inspire - all for a good cause. Funds raised will go to the Miramonte Parent Club that supports many academic endeavors for all students. "Our goal is to raise money for core programs that have been the victims of state budget cuts," said co-chair Jennifer Lavis.

Orinda's generally mild weather lends itself to this year's focus on indoor and outdoor entertaining spaces. From contemporary to French country to traditional, these kitchens seamlessly blend form and function to create more than just ground zero for nourishment, but personify homeowners' intentions and vision.

Lindy and Gary Sitzmann are empty nesters who were looking for a low maintenance place to enjoy when they weren't travelling. Lindy had a vision of exactly what she wanted and had contractor McKenzie Gray bring the welcoming French-country inspired space to life. They completely gutted the kitchen, enlarged the deck and converted the three petite bedrooms into two more generous bedrooms. Aiming for a comfortable open space,

they tore down the wall that separated the kitchen and family room, and raised the ceiling. Enchanting Planting designed the inviting enclosed patio; two heat lamps and a fireplace keep fog and wind at bay. Another deck was expanded with wind blocking and built-in heaters over the outdoor dining table. While they love the view from their Orinda Woods home and hardly notice freeway noise, sometimes their guests do; so they've installed two water features on either side to help camouflage the sound.

The Legallets' very generous pocket doors, by Quantum Windows and Doors, are a key element that invites the outdoors in. Marie Legallet credits their architect Jim Miller of Oculus Architecture and Design, for making the most of their updated, harmonious traditional rancher. The family purchased the home in 1997 and did the kitchen remodel about 10 years ago; their previous kitchen was white, but because the new kitchen is part of the great room, the family wanted to keep the feel of the overall space more of a living area, unified by natural materials like the wood floor, stone fireplace, and glowing raised wood breakfast bar.

Like many properties in the Orinda area, the back yard presented some challenges; it was not all flat, usable space. Steve Lambert of Garden Lights Landscape designed and installed stone retaining walls, a water feature and colorful plants along with plenty of patio space that effortlessly blends with the interior of the home.

Tom and Suzanne Melohn tore their house down to the ground about four years ago and started from scratch. The original structure was a 1,400-square-foot ranch house from the 1950s. They worked with Moraga-based Bob McLaughlin of MRC Construction. Melohn describes his work as "amazing." She had cut pictures out of design magazines as examples of what she was looking for, and McLaughlin made it happen. The family is very pleased with the fresh, traditional feel of the home. She and the tile installer took a field trip to the Walker Zanger showroom where she found a lovely serene blue/gray/green tile that is used throughout the home.

But wait, there's more: in addition to the complete house construction job, the back yard was totally raw when the property was purchased. McLaughlin built the cabana that was originally meant to be a "man cave," with a full kitchen and bathroom, and Alex's Garden Service designed and installed the blue stone patio and outdoor barbecue on the terraced hillside. While they are thrilled with the overall finished product, during the remodel process the family moved a total of four times, which was stressful, said Melohn.

Taking the Heart of the Home Kitchen and Garden tour will be the opposite of stressful; those looking for design ideas or garden inspiration can leisurely stroll through six unique Orinda homes. Co-chairs Lavis and Kathleen Metheny have some new ideas this year that include a pre-event cocktail party to thank homeowners who will graciously open their doors to the public and presenting sponsors, and a silent auction of sculptural works from talented Miramonte art students along with artwork from a group of Orinda painters.

The tour is scheduled from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. April 18. Tickets for the tour are \$35. Tickets for the Garden Cocktail Party from 5 to 7 p.m. April 14 at the exquisite garden of Marci and Patrick Dunne are \$100 (includes two tickets to garden party and one tour ticket); space is limited. Both the tour and cocktail party tickets are available online at www.miramonteparents.com. Tour tickets can also be purchased at McDonnell's Nursery, Diablo Foods, Orinda Florist and the Lazy K House at Orchard Nursery.

Organizers want to thank presenting sponsors who came on board to support Miramonte High School through the kitchen and garden tour.

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of Orinda, Alan Metheny



Tom and Suzanne Melohn's kitchen.



The Melohns' backyard cabana with spacious patio on terraced hillside.



Natural elements comprise Marie and Christopher Legallet's kitchen.



Another example of an outdoor entertaining space on the Heart of the Home kitchen and garden tour.

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