

Sculptures Grow Like Flowers

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Even the ceilings of Karen Wyse's home are filled with sculpture.

Photo Chris Lavin

Wooded acres, an abandoned house, outbuildings, a creek running through it. Paradise, the laundry detergent salesman thought. But Wyse didn't understand the concept when he rushed to her to explain.

She wasn't interested.

"Orinda?" she yelled at her friend. "Who wants to live in Orinda? I'm happy in Berkeley!"

She wanted him to go away.

But the friend had insisted, so she and her husband, Matt Wyse, went to look. (Only to shut the guy up, she says.) She set foot on the overgrown property off El Toyonal, trekked inside the abandoned house, shined a flashlight up into the dark second story, "and I knew I'd be living here someday," she said.

It took a while to buy it. Wyse found herself visiting the absentee owner almost every day. She persisted for some months. Wyse is a persistent person. Finally, on one such visit, Wyse insisted on a signature at the dotted line. Wyse is also insistent.

With papers signed, Wyse, who owned and operated Bizarre Bazaar in Oak-

land for many years, and her husband, who owned and operated bookstores, made the move. She envisioned a landscape of blooms, of flowering shrubs, of verdant vines reaching to the sky. But little would grow beneath the spreading oaks, and the tannins in the soil didn't support the kind of life she had considered. "I mean, look at this!" she exclaimed, holding her hands out helplessly beneath a towering oak tree. "I couldn't get a plant to grow!"

Therefore Wyse began to create her own garden – a sculpture garden that would begin to take shape and gradually transform their 3 acres into a garden of whimsy, of contemplation. It has become a garden of life, of life's entrapments, its allures and pleasures. A meandering walk takes one through sculptures both small and large, sculptures that grow from the ground or hang from trees.

Wyse chooses her materials carefully. When a contractor friend called and asked her if she would like a truckload of plastic irrigation pipe that he had just torn up, she didn't say yes right away. What color is it? she asked. "A very nice brown," he said.

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