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'Through the Garden Gate'

By Cathy Dausman



Japanese maples frame the front of the Diraimondo's Lafayette home. Photos Cathy Dausman

Sal Captain designed the vineyard; its 450 vines are a 50/50 mix of petite Syrah and Grenache grapes. Thanks to an on-site well and drip irrigation, Rose's water bill has fallen by 26 percent. The grounds are a collection of vistas, pathways and sitting areas with a purpose: Rose is developing the site as a wedding and events venue called Campana Farm. There is poolside seating, covered entry seating and side-yard seating - even a picnic bench on the artificial island Rose's grandson christened "Pirate Island."

Wild grasses cover swaths of land. Potted plants include a containerized orange tree - left behind when the previous owners moved to Seattle. Two wheelbarrows house a collection of succulents. Houses set in trees welcome birds. Frogs croak midday on the property edge.

The Geary Garden. Lisa Geary loves the three-quarter acre lot she shares with husband Scott and their children, describing it as a combination of sunny, shady, sheltered and windy areas. "It's tucked away and flat and overlooking the Orinda Theatre," she said.

Seeing the theater marquee at night from afar is a special treat, she noted. Even with the yard's natural shade - the lot is laden with mature oak trees - and a heightened water rationing awareness, Geary said, "There's always something to be done."

"I'm a realtor, so I see so many beautiful homes," Geary explained. This has allowed her to borrow successful landscaping ideas from other homes. She strove to incorporate a good indoor and outdoor flow between her house and its grounds. She also recycled a portion of one natural resource predominating her space: rocks! Pointing to a collection of landscape-sized boulders collected along the side yard, Geary said many have been repurposed as retaining walls and pathway pavers.

Originally built as a cattle ranch, the late 1940s home retains its modest hillside profile. The original flat roof was given a pitch, which lessens the topside collection of leaves and nut debris, and the Gearys installed an outdoor pizza oven in the side courtyard, which is tied together with a wisteria trellis. The largest change was removing an old black-bottomed pool from its shady front yard location and installing a stone-edged infinity pool in the sunniest backyard location. When swim time is done, guests can enjoy a game of bocce ball in the nearby shade.

The Gearys strove to incorporate a sense of how they might best use their space, taking into

The 2015 Moraga Junior Women's Home and Garden Tour showcases a collection of five fabulous spaces owned and occupied by Lamorinda residents in Moraga, Lafayette and Orinda. Here is a preview of what to expect for the 10th anniversary tour:

The Rose Garden. It seems unfair to call Pat Rose's tour location a simple garden. It is more correctly a collection of outdoor spaces - acres of them - in a setting that feels remote yet is only a short drive from Moraga Commons.

By her estimation, Rose owns a property spread over six acres. It includes a vineyard, a man-made pond and island, a pool, a backyard cook island, a wood burning fireplace, an on-site cottage, a side yard with clear bulbs laced overhead for night time garden parties, and outlying corrals and coops. Rose acts as her own gardener and brings in help when she needs it. In the two-plus years since moving in, she has replaced two lawns with a vineyard and planted a small apple orchard.

account their three teens. Their landscape plan should be 90 percent complete by the garden tour date, she promised.

The Diraimondo Garden. Feng shui is the term Mary Diraimondo most likes to describe the garden feel of the spaces surrounding her Lafayette home. It is intended to have an orderly, Japanese feel, while not being overt.

Four beautiful Japanese maples set the tone in the front yard, framing the house and bracketing a river of gravel flowing around to the side yard. "It was absolutely beautiful before, but we've done a total remodel," Diraimondo said of her outdoor space. "Something is always blooming."

The birds are delighted, as evidenced by their ever-present songs. In the last two to three years, guided by Shari Sullivan of Enchanting Planting, the owners have removed a lawn, extended the back yard, lowered fences, installed an outdoor kitchen, built retaining walls and a fire pit, restructured the wisteria arbor, and relocated a charming tea garden onto a hillside. Because the Diraimondo family loves golf, there is even a putting green of artificial turf that takes advantage of sweeping vistas to the northeast.

A hillside slope to one side of the pool was pushed back and is kept at bay by a waist-high retaining wall, allowing space for a built-in barbecue, just steps from the outdoor dining room. Views of Mt. Diablo have been carefully framed by growing vegetation; each bedroom has its own special outside space.

In addition to these three outdoor spaces, the self-guided 10th Moraga Juniors Garden Tour will showcase two additional gardens in the Lamorinda area from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday, May 3. Guests can gather inspiration and ideas while supporting the Moraga Juniors' 2015 beneficiary, the Contra Costa Crisis Center. Cost is \$35 per ticket. For information, visit moragajuniors.org.



Wild grasses are found throughout Pat Rose's Moraga garden. A vineyard is tucked behind this grassy knoll.



This stone-edged infinity pool was installed in the sunniest backyard location of the Geary's Orinda home. Photos Cathy Dausman



To one side of the pool the hillside slope was pushed back and is kept at bay by a waist-high retaining wall, allowing space for a built-in barbecue, just steps from the outdoor dining room in the Diraimondo's back yard.



This covered outdoor area with wood burning fireplace at the Rose home in Moraga offers a cozy space for entertaining.

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