

# Lamorinda OUR HOMES

Lamorinda Weekly Volume 11 Issue 3 Wednesday, April 5, 2017



*April Gardening Guide with Cynthia Brian ...read on page D12*

## Changing your garden, changing your life

By Sophie Braccini



*Kay Countryman and Ron Briggs*



*Photos Sophie Braccini Robert Sorenson*

Every year, the Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour features new and mature gardens composed mostly of native plants. The three Lamorinda gardens featured here — and which will be on the tour — are each so different from each other, but all testify of how gardening practices have shaped not only the landscape but also the lives of the gardeners.

Over several decades Orinda's Robert Sorenson has restored the wild native habitat on his very large property that extends on both sides of a creek; Kay Countryman and Ron Briggs replaced the lawn in their medium size backyard three years ago with natives, working with a landscape architect; while Tré Fran has transformed a relatively small front-

yard into an intricate kingdom for tens of different natives. Each of these residents came from a different background but with a similar quest for beauty and authenticity. They all say that the experience they have in their garden is enriching their lives.

Sorenson embarked on the restoration of his one-acre property years ago. The front of the Orinda house already sets the tone with native grasses under the trees, and the voyage in nature continues in the back. It is somewhat of a little expedition to explore the whole property. Sorenson has built stairs and bridges to access both sides of the creek with recycled woods and there are no guardrails of any type. But the hiking effort is totally worthwhile.

There, people will not only discover Califor-

nia natives, they will be exposed to an area that has been entirely restored to its original flora. Sorenson removed all the invasive and nonnative plants and went on a hunt for plants from the local watershed. Collecting seeds in nearby parks and buying small plants in specialized nurseries, he worked tirelessly to create a sustainable space of beauty. There are literally hundreds of native plants to be discovered on that land.

Sorenson is a Berkeley optometrist who says that gardening is his way of balancing his life. He feels that he is a student of nature, and that even if he has researched plants for years there is still so much for him to learn. He also loves to experiment and propagate.

... continued on page D4