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Gardennest brings floral beauty to Country Club Plaza

By Sora O'Doherty



Gardennest breathes life into Orinda Village with fresh plants and accessories. Photo Sora O'Doherty

Assistant Planner Darin Hughes introduced the Orinda City Council on Dec. 5 to a number of new businesses recently opened in the city.

Among those new businesses was Gardennest, a garden design firm that decided to open a retail shop. Owner Jeannie Fitch and Kelli Schley appeared at the meeting and, although they said they were both a little shy, spoke about their endeavor.

Introducing them, Hughes noted that the retail location had its grand opening on Oct. 7. Located at 105 Orinda Way, Hughes praised the shop for how much effort they've been putting into that space. "The shop itself is beautiful," he said. "The street out front is beautiful." In addition, he said, "they've been working with their neighbors, in order to sync up hours, so that everybody's open at the same time and kind of seems like they've got the really cool community ecosystem going on."

The shop has a small patio in back, and has been holding events there. They also participated in the Orinda Village holiday market. Hughes welcomed them as really excellent partners with everyone that's down at that end of town.

Fitch said that she has lived in Orinda for close to 30 years and raised her daughter and built her business in Orinda. She is a landscape contractor as well as running the shop. She said that it has been a longtime dream of hers to have her own flower shop. "And it's kind of, you know, morphed into something bigger and more fun. My daughter Reagan is one of the buyers along with Kelli."

Fitch said that the space is much bigger than she ever imagined. "You know, it's kind of turned into a whole other animal, on its own." A lot of creative energy has gone into putting the shop together. "It's a really old building. I don't know if you know that it's the old Penny Lane hair salon. So it actually had two different entrances. When we took over the salon, we then opened the wall that kind of divided the two spaces."

Fitch praised Kelli as a plant guru: "She's really great and she's my plant buyer and her background is horticulture and she's worked at several big nurseries." She also had kind words for the shop's neighboring stores, Maureen at Rechic, Susan Leech who owns the little antique shop, and Gepetto's Cafe, saying, "They are really adorable and super supportive of us."

Fitch welcomed everyone to come and make new friends down on that side of the town. "The buildings are really charming; I mean, they're old history," she said. "I don't know if you guys know that that building was built in the 1940s and it used to be a residence." One of the things that was uncovered during the renovation was an upstairs fireplace. "It's gorgeous," Fitch enthused, "and we uncovered built-in bookshelves on either side that had been covered with drywall." All of this has now been opened up and it's like our showroom.

Mayor Inga Miller agreed: "It's really beautiful, it's really incredible. It's something that you expect to see maybe on Fourth Street in Berkeley or somewhere in San Francisco or Santa Barbara. It's really something just eye-opening that I really haven't seen on this side of the tunnel or elsewhere in this region."

Miller compared Gardennest to another new business in Orinda, Fish Barn. She credited both business with drawing people in to Orinda and showing that what Orinda has to offer is really important.

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