

Published April 19th, 2017

Orinda Garden Tour highlights outdoor living

By *Sophie Braccini*



A Lafayette garden on the tour seen through an arbor. Photo provided

Five Orinda and Lafayette gardens have been selected this year to showcase the best in elegant Californian suburban outside living in the biannual Orinda Garden Club Tour May 11.

This chance to see professionally landscaped private estates and the associated social events returns every other year. The tour is first an eye-pleaser and an opportunity for inspiration, and it also includes a fundraiser that supports the club's many local programs.

This year the tour focuses on gardens that showcase outside living and entertainment. Orinda residents Shari Bashin-Sullivan and Richard Sullivan of Enchanting Planting designed three of the gardens featured on the tour. Bashin-Sullivan, a club member, encourages garden enthusiasts to tour all of the gardens to enjoy the many flowering plants and to also "appreciate the many interesting textures, colors and structures provided by

the evergreen shrubs, the backbone of a strong planting composition." Nature in these gardens is never very far, but it has been domesticated and magnified.

The very spectacular gardens present an interesting mix of formality, with some grandiose designs that take advantage of large spaces, mixed with the abundance and more carefree California spirit. Visitors will appreciate the variety of plants such as dwarf mondo grass, mature Japanese maples, wisteria, camellia and weeping bamboo, mixed with stunning architectural details such as a fire pit set into a large boulder.

The mix of colors, atmospheres and types of features is particularly appealing in one of the Lafayette gardens that completely wraps around the house. Another garden features interesting textures and shades of green from a combination of evergreen shrubs, annuals and ferns. The attention to detail and the careful maintenance of these gardens will certainly impress and inspire.

Water features and lawns are incorporated in several gardens along with arbors and terraces, surrounded by flowers, shrubs and trees that create an enchanting oasis for the homeowners and their guests.

The event is also a fundraiser for the club, along with other events that are happening simultaneously. The cocktail party is one of them (tickets are sold separately) and the club is organizing a silent auction as well as a unique plant sale. Club member Vanessa Crews explains that all the hundreds of plants sold are the result of club members' gardening talents. Members have contributed herbs such as lemon verbena and pineapple sage, as well as perennials and succulents. There will also be orchids and some unusual scented leaf pelargoniums.

Crews adds that the club is particularly proud of the tomato plant sale that is offered thanks to the expertise of club member Sue Berger-Anderson. "She is an heirloom tomato guru and she is nurturing about 300 hard-to-find plants for the sale," says Crews with pride. Berger-Anderson grows multiple varieties in her Orinda garden, so these are almost sure to be successful for local gardeners. Crews says that every kitchen gardener will want to visit this sale. The purchase of a tour ticket is required to access the sale.

Club president Margie Murphy says that all the proceeds from the tour and its various events go to fund the club's different charitable projects. The club is one of the oldest in the area; it has been operating since 1937 with a mission to beautify Orinda. The ongoing projects include the restoration of the cork oaks (*Quercus suber*) around Lake Cascade and the installation of a memorial rock and bench, placing holiday wreaths around town as well as the beloved fall scarecrows and pumpkins, maintenance of several public spaces such as the Highway 24 off-ramp and the triangle at Orinda Way and Camino Sobrante.

The club extends its reach beyond Orinda with projects such as the monthly offering of Orinda Garden Club's bouquets for patients at Contra Costa Medical Center in Martinez, a project that has been going on for 52 years; participation in Partners 4 Plants at the Martin Luther King Jr. Shoreline Restoration Area in Oakland; maintaining the David Austin Roses at The Gardens at Heather Farm in Walnut Creek; and scholarships to local students studying horticulture.

For more information and tickets visit www.orindagc.org/tour2017.



A Lafayette wrap-around garden. Photo provided



A beautiful Orinda garden with a pool Photos provided



An elegant side garden on the tour.

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