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## A Lamorinda Valentine's Day

By Lou Fancher



Celebrating Valentine's Day without leaving Lamorinda turned out to be much harder than expected.

When the assignment came in, I thought: Piece of cake!

Literally. With bakeries, florists, gift boutiques, spas, new and established restaurants, movie theaters, and even a luxury hotel, what could be simpler?

Within 30 minutes, the list of choices was longer than the stem of any red rose I've ever had the good fortune to receive. With a price tag to match.

The article needed to be put on a diet.

I wrote the three names-Lafayette, Moraga, Orinda-on slips of paper. I wrote three budgets-\$25, \$50, \$250 and above-on paper, and put them all in a hat. Several random draws later, I had a plan worthy of any New Year's trim-the-fat resolution.

Orinda paired up with \$25; Moraga with \$50, and Lafayette got the big budget at \$250 plus change. I figured tax was like a gift to the town and city coffers, so didn't count that as part of the tab.

With a cap of \$25, I tackled Orinda first, mistakenly regretting the slim budget would mean V-Day had nothing to do with victory.

Two of Sam's Very Messy Chocolate Cupcakes from Republic of Cake (\$2.75 each) satisfied the time honored-tradition of delving into all things chocolate. Ten percent of the cost went to support a local

charity, making the purchase even sweeter.

For me, Orinda Books is like an open candy case to a sugar-holic, so finding a collection of love poems or a slim volume on travel to exotic locations was a cinch (\$10).

With the remaining \$9.50, an inexpensive bottle of wine from Bev Mo! was a possibility, but it lacked the truly local connection I was seeking.

Table 24, the new kid on the block, tempted me with the possibility of two iced teas (\$2.00 each) and an order of the luscious house corn bread (\$4.00), but left only \$1.50 for a tip.

Orinda Hardware came to the rescue, meeting almost any desire. Bird lover? Bird seed at \$3.99 a bag. Miss Fix-it? A \$1.99 flashlight for help in tightening a slip nut under the sink. There was even a cordless drill at \$9.97, leaving me only 47 cents over budget.

I felt flush as I descended upon Moraga with fifty dollars. That amount deserved to be spread from dawn to dusk. I decided. I started with breakfast at Terzetto's.

Valentine's Day falls on a weekday this year, so the \$4.99 special topped my list. Two eggs, two bacon, two slices of toast made for some pretty pairings. If I stuck to the organic breakfast blend coffee (\$1.75) a twosome could swing out of there for a sweet 16 bucks.

The chance to hang out at the Hearst Art Gallery's Civil War exhibit (\$4), with public hours Wednesday through Sunday, would have been an option on another day, but instead, a romantic hike at no cost from Moraga Commons Park, to the Hacienda de las Flores and up the Mulholland Ridge filled the rest of the morning.

A pedicure at Anna Nails (\$20) in the Rheem Valley Shopping Center would leave just \$14, not quite enough for two tickets to a matinee (\$8 each) at the New Rheem Theatre.

But a bottle of polish from CVS (\$5), applied at home while watching a flick from the Red Box (\$1), allowed for a flowering plant from Moraga Garden Center (\$14) and two Caff•Cremosos at Ristorante Amoroma (\$7 each) to end the day.

It was open season in Lafayette, with \$250 and more to burn.

At Lafayette Car Wash and Detail Center a full detail (\$250) knocked down all the pins in one strike. This is for men and women whose vehicles are their sanctuaries and think they deserve to look like one.

Jewelry is a standard idea, but making it uncommon is simply a matter of visiting Ware Designs, where a low-end necklace or custom earrings will run \$150 and up.

I've always wanted to have a staycation at the Lafayette Park Hotel & Spa. The Romantic Escape packages (\$209-229) were an obvious way to spend down the cash. Champagne, chocolate dipped strawberries, \$35 room service credit and a late check-out made this a perfect choice and left just enough dough for snacks from Diablo Foods. (Love that hummus, about \$5, or \$10 with chips.)

With all the momentum I built up exploring the wonders of Lamorinda businesses, it's lucky I didn't get a speeding ticket. Even a fool knows there's nothing romantic about spending Valentine's Day (and your budget) at the county courthouse. My advice? Take it slow, shop close to home, and love the one you're with.

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