

Home & Garden Design

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Shangri-La in the woods

A beauty of a Woodside garden with great bone structure

by Sue Dremann / photos by Shannon Savage

Amid the wooded lanes near Manzanita Road in Woodside, a mother and daughter are creating a garden for the ages. More than a pretty backdrop for the home, the gardens reflect a heritage to be passed down from mother to daughter, and perhaps even to succeeding generations. It's an inheritance that will grow over time, enriching the land and the spirit of its heirs. The garden will be featured on the Fourteenth Annual Symphony in Flowers Atherton-Woodside Garden Tour on April 25-26.

"There is a sense of peace and history here," says landscape designer Jenna Bayer. Bayer's work involved taking the garden's bone structure -- foundation plantings of trees and shrubs planted more than 20 years ago by the mother -- and editing the overgrown plantings where needed. Additional bone structure was added in the form of raised beds. Surrounded by a low Coldwater Canyon rock wall and meandering flagstone paths, they added depth and dimension to the areas behind the house where there was once only bare ground.

Design challenges: Building up from a flat area; removing a waterlogged oak tree and editing the mature tree/shrub portion of the property

Year home built: 1975

Size of property: 4.5 acres

Once the bone structures were in place, the 4.5-acre gardens became the culmination

of the experiences of two lives well traveled: A Thai spirit house centers the environment around raised beds; a stone basin from China catches water for reflection; a

Japanese rice huller forms the centerpiece of a planting of ornamental crabapple that nurtures birds with ripe orange fruit.



An authentic Chinese blue ceramic Fu dog guards the gateway to the home.

The addition of boulders also added focal points in the flat areas that create a sense of height, Bayer says. It all helps to balance the plantings and to maximize the sense of scale in proportion to the surrounding soaring trees.

One way to create stand-out plantings in a large area is to combine contrasting colors. Climbing the side of an aviary-turned-conservatory, golden hop vine adds chartreuse color to contrast with an espaliered red bud tree.

Adding plants with unusual forms also creates focal points in the large space. Strange, twisting branches of a contorted beech and dwarf styrax trees imbue the garden with the magical sense of travel to faraway lands.



Rounding a corner along the brick path, a visitor is greeted by white-flowered clematis, one the many surprises in the wooded wonderland.



A former aviary evolved into an orangerie, or conservatory, perfect for meditation.

"The focus in these beds is on plant textures, contrasting colors and scents," says Bayer. She filled the raised beds and adjacent areas with exotic surprises to create conversation pieces and interest. Favorites are Rhodichiton, a vine with racemes of burgundy and pink flowers, night-blooming jasmine, and Viburnum plicatum 'Mariesii,' which has the unusual habit of planing out, rather than mounding, with white flowers.

Cocoa bean hull mulch adds a pleasant fragrance. Situated to the side of the raised beds, the conservatory was once an aviary filled with cherished birds collected by the mother. Transformed into an orangerie, potted citrus plants ripe with fruit mingle with exotic sculptures and luxuriant cushions, set upon a floor of tropical purple heartwood. The spot is perfect for meditation, and the glass panels can be removed to accommodate the summer heat, letting in soft scents from the raised-bed garden.



Variegated-leaved New Zealand flax is paired with shrubs and grasses to create a centerpiece in the garden bed.



Landscape designer Jenna Bayer worked with the existing bone structure of this large, mature Woodside garden, playing on the sense of peace and history.

Not everything needs to be large to add punch. Black and dwarf mondo bunchgrass add lyrical notes at the edge of a path

stepping down to a small, burbling waterfall and pond at the side of the house. Striped-leaved New Zealand flax creates a lively counterpoint.

Sometimes creating a little more light can transform an innocuous plant into a thing of recognized beauty: For example, burgundy colored maples need sun to turn color, she says.

A lot of interest can be created with just a few unusual trees. The front of the house is graced by a weeping hemlock. Its tendrily branches soften a large basalt fountain that sits beneath it. Another tree, Luma, a native of Chile in the myrtle family, has "terrific bark" the color of cinnamon and dark purple berries, says Bayer. A paper bark maple with russet, peeling bark is a botanical show-stopper. It's one of the first plants to catch one's eye when approaching this part of the house.



The large garden is broken up with meandering flagstone or brick paths, as well as a low Coldwater Canyon rock wall.

These trees are good examples of how Bayer recommends "scheduling costs where we really want a bang for our buck." Against such a fascinating backdrop, only a few judiciously chosen under-story plants may be required to complete the picture.

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