



Docent Tour Speaker Notes

Revised 11/22/19

WELCOME To Western Hills Garden

Introduction

We are pleased to welcome you to one of the landmark gardens in California. The garden covers three acres and is over 60 years old. The site has been an operating nursery for over 40 years. The garden is a unique micro-climate, about five miles from the ocean, surrounded by Redwood trees. and cooled by coastal fog most mornings. Thousands of gardeners and hundreds of garden clubs and societies have toured the grounds over the years, and many articles have been written about its unique allure.

We have found the best way to provide a history of the garden is to highlight the different owners of the garden. The garden was founded by Lester Hawkins & Marshall Olbricht as a “back to nature” refuge in the 1960’s, but quickly became a horticultural experiment, bringing in plants from around the world.

New owners, Christine & Tim Szybalski, bought the property in 2010. The garden was shut down for two years for renovation. Structures have been upgraded, bridges rebuilt, and trees pruned and removed. An event space was built in 2012 to host various groups, including garden clubs, weddings and private parties. The garden is designated a “Preservation Assistance Garden” by the Garden Conservancy and re-opened for public tours in June 2012. The nursery operation has been growing each year, concentrating on propagating plants from the garden. All proceeds go to support the garden.

Collections

The original vision of the garden featured drought-resistant native plants. Lester and Marshall's design relied on winding paths that created individual planting rooms with a unique character and scenic vistas. Over time, the owners traveled around the world and gathered plants from other compatible Mediterranean climates. Over the years, more Asian plants were added with the construction of a new well and an extensive irrigation system.

The key collections in the garden include: endangered **Chinese Maples**; a **Rhododendron Grove** with old cultivars; many **Dogwoods** and **Magnolias**; a dozen species of **Camellias**; **Australian species**, and more than 100 different **Conifers**.



Logistics

The short tour takes about an hour. The trail is well marked and takes you past more than half the garden. There is one steep uphill slope. Please stay on the paths and do not cut flowers, take cuttings or seed pods without permission. The bridges can be slick if wet, so watch your step. Several hundred signs mark significant plants and describe the Genus, Species, Common Name, and Geographic Origin.

The Outhouse is near the Folly. The bathrooms in the Office and Octagon house are also available to the public. The water is metallic and generally not potable, but on hot days we have bottled water available at the kiosk.

The workshop, pump and utility area are restricted. Ask for a tour award-winning composting operation. We mulch most of the waste from the garden and achieve temperatures up to 150 degrees.

The propagation areas are marked as "staff only". The "Big House" on the hill has been completely rebuilt and is now the owner's private residence as in the early years of the garden. Please respect their privacy.

We do encourage you to visit the Greenhouse to see the Begonia collection and other more delicate plants. We have a eclectic variety of plants for sale in the nursery, including plants from the garden and from selected wholesale nurseries.

#1: The Entrance

The arbor (aptly named the **Folly**) was commissioned by Maggie from an image in a Penelope Hobhouse book. The nickname “folly” is a Victorian term applied to any structure that is overbuilt for its purpose in a whimsical way. The arches were produced from strips of heart redwood that were bent, glued together, and clamped to dry.



Many different vines grow around the folly: *Hydrangea seemannii x peruviana*; *Tetrastigma voinierianum*; *Wattakaka sinensis 'Variegata'*; *Clematis armanii*; *Mandevilla laxa* (commonly known as “Chilean Jasmine”) and *Wisteria 'Shiro Kapitan'*. Other plants around the folly include: a beautiful “Lion’s Mane” Maple (*Acer palmatum 'Shishigashira'*); a giant *Brugmansia*; and a huge Purple Banana.

The **Family Room** sits under an airy *Acer pentaphyllum* (one of the five nearly extinct Chinese Maples on the property). This tree is one of the oldest specimens in the US, with a well-documented history originating at Strybing Botanical Garden and is seeding prolifically -- several daughters can be seen nearby. The aging and also nearly extinct “Snake Bark Maple” (*Acer morrisonense*) produces lots of seeds and seedlings, including the original variegated form. For information on endangered Chinese Maples see <https://www.iucnredlist.org/resources/gibbs-and-chen-2009>. The **Kiosk** is a reminder of the many years as a retail nursery. Western Hills introduced and sold many plants for the first time into the US.

Landmarks/Trees: Bridge #1 is one of 33 numbered bridges, each with a unique design (only a few are named – this is the “mother bridge”). You can see the beautiful stonework of the aqueduct. The two *Michelias* (a Magnolia relative) have spectacular white flowers. *Michelia doltsopa* is on the right and the *Michelia fusca* (a cross between *M. doltsopa* and *M. figo*). Nearby is a large *Magnolia ernestii* (formerly *wilsonii*) and the Parakmaria (*Michelia* relative from China) which both entered the garden as 4” plants from UC Botanical.

Looking up you can see the towering “Coast Redwoods” (*Sequoia sempervirens*) with the *Wisteria* vines growing up 180’ and back down. Also at the entrance to your left you will notice an evergreen “Chinese Plum Yew” (*Cephalotaxus fortunei*) -- there is also a prostrate form in the garden on the upper path (*Cephalotaxus harringtonia 'Prostrata'*).

#2: Rhodis

The Rhododendron garden usually blooms starting in March. There are 40-year-old specimens rising to 20', as well as some recently planted cultivars. More than 1000 species of Rhodis and Azaleas have been identified in the wild and countless cultivars have been developed, so identification of our older Rhodis is difficult (although we know most came from nearby Sonoma Horticultural. The bridge on your left was rebuilt and the stone runnels were strengthened. after a storm in 2014. The water flow in winter is truly amazing (60" of rain a year) which travels east to Dutch Bill Creek and then on to the Russian River.



Landmarks/Trees: Along the path you will see some large specimen trees: a "Tasmanian Cedar" (*Athrotaxis cupressoides*) and an "Alaskan Cedar" (*Cupressus nootkatensis 'Pendula'*), as well as several *Chamaecyparis* cultivars. Two endangered Chinese Maples are also here: the original *Acer paxii*, which came down in the December storm of 2014 and has been replaced by a volunteer; the *Acer laevigatum* ("Smooth" or "Nepal" Maple) and acer

pseudoplatanus 'Brilliantissimum' (called "Sycamore Maple"). The *Edgeworthia chrysantha papyrifera* (a Daphne relative) has showy flowers before the leaves emerge in winter we have planted many more in the garden. The bark of this plant is used in Japan for manufacturing fine paper and currency.

You might start noticing the raised valve boxes; one of the first tasks in renovation was to automate the irrigation system. There are almost 200 sprinkler heads and an extensive drip system controlled by 40 or so automated valves.

#3: Perennial Border

The **Perennial Border** is perhaps the most formal path in the garden. At the start, you can see the large *Camellia cuspidata x saluensis* 'Winton', an unidentified *C. sasanqua*, and some newly planted Camellia cultivars. Several Maples on the left include: *Acer japonicum* 'Aconitifolium' ("Full Moon Maple"), and *Acer shirasawanum* 'Golden Full



Moon'. Looking through, you will see the "Paperbark Maple" (*Acer griseum*). On the right is an unusual *Hydrangea sargentii*. Many flowering shrubs have been added over the last few years to enhance existing plantings, including Hydrangeas, Fuschias, Daphne, and Edgeworthia

During foreclosure, the path had become completely overgrown with giant "Oriental Plume Poppies" (*Macleaya cordata*), Abutilons, Lamium, and shrubs that had not been tended for many years.

The Wine Barrel Art is new, but mirrors some of the whimsy that was in the garden and have long since collapsed or been torn down.

Landmarks/Trees: To the right, you can see one of the many "Himalayan Dogwood" (*Cornus capitata*), and a large "Tri-color Beech" (*Fagus sylvatica* 'Roseomarginata'). Across the runnel you can see large Rhodis, and a variegated Boxwood. Other notables include: *Azara microphylla* 'variegata', *Kolkwitzia amabilis* ("Beauty Bush" -- closely related to Wiegelia), and wispy *Thalictrum aquilegiifolium* ("Meadow Rue").

#4: Bottom of the Garden

The **bottom of the garden** was a neglected area at the east end of the property. A line of Willows (*Salix irrotata*) that blocked the early morning sun has been cut down. The **rose garden** was expanded to augment the very old 'Lady Hillington Rose' climbing the contorted "Black Locust" tree (*Robinia pseudoacacia 'Contorta'*). The foggy climate turned out to be inhospitable to modern roses, which were replaced by Dahlias in 2018.

Landmarks/Trees: Along the fence line, you can see a "Coffin Tree" (*Taiwania cryptomerioides*), "Tri-colored Beech" (*Fagus sylvatica 'Roseomarginata'*), "Himalayan Spruce" (*Picea smithiana*), "Oaxacana Pine" (*Pinus pseudostrobus var. apulcensis*), "Tulip Tree" (*Liriodendron chinensis*), and a "Big Leaf Magnolia" (*M. macrophyllum*)



The original few Camellias have been supplemented with many species and modern cultivars. To the right is an original stand of *Iris confusa 'Chengdu'* ("Running" or "Bamboo" Iris). Further on to the

left, you can see the *Litsia japonica* and *Symplocos paniculate* ("Sapphire Berry") in an interesting grassy area made up of *Luzula sylvatica 'Marginata'* and naturalized Hellebores. In March, there is a wonderful flowering Cherry. The "Portuguese Cherry Laurel" (*Prunus lusitanica*) has gotten out of control and is being brought down to a he

#5: ICU and Lower Rock Garden

The **ICU** got its name because it was the repository for plants uprooted during the early days of restoration. It is currently the nursery for specimens that we want to re-introduce into the garden, including the “Spotted Hercules Lily” that was first introduced into California at Western Hills.

In January, you will be able to see the “Chinese Wintersweet” (*Chimonanthus praecox* ‘*Luteus*’) -- the blooms are a traditional Chinese New Year decoration.



The **Lower Rock Garden** was hidden by weeds in foreclosure, but has been restored complete with two curved bridges. The yellow *Kerria japonica* and the blue *Omphalodes cappadocica* provide a lovely show in early Spring.

The **boggy area** is the home of “Skunk Cabbage” (*Lysichiton americanus* and *Lysichiton camtschatcensis*), as well as *Houttuynia cordata* ‘*Flore Pleno*’ (an pungent Thai herb), “Marsh Marigolds” (*Caltha polypetala*), and Japanese Iris.

Further along on the right, a major storm in 2018 knocked down five of the neighbor’s Oak trees. Decorative plants have been introduced along

the fence line for color in the spring and summer: Bronze-Leaf Dahlias, Campanula, *Lobelia laxiflora*, Penstemon and Princess Flower bush (*Tibouchina urvilleana*). On the left, just planted several *Acer pentaphyllums*, a variegated *Acer morinense* ‘*Fasciata*’, and a “Chiines Parosol Tree” (*Firmiana simplex*).

Landmarks/Trees: Notable trees include *Parrotiopsis jacquemontiana*, *Dacrycarpus dacrydioides* (“Kahikatea” from New Zealand), “Persian Ironwood” (*Parrotia persica*), “Catalina Ironwood” (*Lyonothamnus floribundus*), “Cutleaf Alder” (*Alnus glutinosa* ‘*Imperialis*’), and a large *Camellia transnokoensis*. Note: two of the original native trees recently succumbed to disease -- a “California Buckeye” (*Aesculus californica*) and a “Coast Live Oak” (*Quercus agrifolia*).

#6: Dry Perennial border

The **dry perennial border** is the clearest example of the adaptation to the dry Mediterranean climate where there is seldom rain between April and September. One of the founders (Marshall) wrote about drought tolerant plants being the only choice until they drilled a new well in the 1980's. He also talked about losing plants to over-watering when they began irrigation in some of the areas.

Landmarks/Trees: The most distinctive plants are the examples of terrestrial



bromeliads: the "Blue" Puya (*P. alpestris*) which have a striking turquoise flower with bright orange anthers in late summer; very large "Chilean" Puya (*P. chilensis*), and Dykia. There are also interesting shrubs; a *Leptospermum* with a large round leaf and a beautiful light pink "Bottlebrush" (*Callistemon 'Cane's*

Hybrid). In spring the area is dominated by the giant "Honey Bush" (*Melianthus major*) originally from South Africa, and rangy "Matilija Poppies" (*Romneya coulteri*).

There is also one of the several species of *Knifophia*, including *K. northiae* – a giant "hot poker" which has yucca-like leaves, to 6" wide x 2' long, and a trunk that forms with age. Thick flowers of creamy yellow topped with salmon appear in early spring and often in fall.

This area has been damaged several due to falling Oaks, and has had to be recently replanted and the fence repaired. Two new additions from UC Botanical include our second "Monkey Hand Tree" (*Chiranthodendron*) and an unusual cross with a *Fremontedendron*.

On the left is the **Circle Garden**, which includes a "Strawberry Tree" (*Arbutus unedo 'Elfin King'*), *Stachyurus praecox* (winter bloomer with white hanging flowers), "Turk's Cap" (*Malvariscus arboreus v. Drummondii*), and "Butterknife Tree" (*Cunonia capensis*). A *Camellia oleifera* x 'Snow Flurry' has come back from a major washout and has been joined by some new cultivars.

#7: Smokebush Hill

Smokebush Hill was completely engulfed by *Cotinus*, which once rare, has recently become a popular garden plant. The Smoke Bushes have recently been tamed to give room to other species.

Landmarks/Trees: Here is a huge stand of giant Puyas (*P. Chilensis*) is here, which bloomed for the first time in 40 years in 2018; the leaves have spikes pointing inward reportedly to trap small animals for food (called the “Sheep Catcher” at Queue Garden). Annually the giant *Beschorneria alba*, the only of the species to form a trunk, sends up a giant spike. There is a different cultivar by the big house.

Starting in spring the path is covered on both sides by a sea of lanky blue biennial *Echium vulgare* that reseeds itself and is a favorite of the bees. There are several stands of native pacific iris, “Bamboo Iris” and other cultivars brought in by one of our



volunteers. Poppies come back for a variety of color throughout the year. At the top of the hill is a display of color, form and texture provided by the large Phormium, Smokebush, and Mexican Grass Tree (*Nolina*). This is one of the few places in the garden where Succulents grow.

#8: Lower Big Pond

Big Pond is the center of the garden. The foliage has filled in so that there are views almost in every direction you look, as well as changing vistas as you raise your gaze.

Look up: Around the pond, there is an interesting cluster of “Serbian Spruce” (*Picea omorika* ‘*Pendula*’), and a large Arbutus cross. Here you can find specimens of the “Redwood” Family¹ (now reclassified as *Cupressaceae*: “Montezuma” Cypress (*Taxodium mucronatum*); “Dawn Redwood” (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*); “Florida Swamp Cypress” (*Taxodium ascendens* ‘*Nitens*’), “Chinese Pond Cypress” (*Glyptostrobus pensilis*), and a newly planted *Cryptomeria japonica*. In the distance you can just make out a “Bald Cypress” (*Taxodium distichum*). The *Pseudocydonia sinensis* (“Chinese Quince” has pretty flowers in Spring and softball-sized fruit in the Fall. The “Seven Sons



Flower” (*Heptacodium miconioides*) is largely unknown to gardeners (only discovered in China in 1907). Each flower cluster is actually comprised of 7 tiny flowers.

The **Bridge** across the tunnel was rebuilt with redwood from a salvaged water tower. Close at hand are two different “Flowering Quince”. Across the bridge, you walk past pretty orange *Berberis* ‘*Darwinii*’, “Giant Chilean Rhubarb” (*Gunnera tinctorial*), as well as a very nice stand of *Helleborus foetidus* which bloom early in the year). Mixed in is the only surviving stand of the prostrate-growing *Microbiota decussata* (commonly called “Siberian Cypress”).

¹ The Taxodiaceae were at one time regarded as a distinct plant family comprising the following ten genera of coniferous trees: Athrotaxis, Cryptomeria, Cunninghamia, Cunninghamites, Glyptostrobus, and Metasequoia ... [Wikipedia](#)

Across the pond, you can see the large red and pink Rhododendrons, which start to flower in Spring. After the rain, a rushing waterfall comes under the bridge (rebuilt with diamond-shaped details to match the glass house). A waterfall feature was recently added at the top of the pond adding to the effect of rushing water. In early summer, the “Chinese Fringe Tree” (*Chionanthus retusus*) provides a beautiful display, followed *Wackendorphia*, and *Claredendron*. Our goal is to achieve a “layering” of ground covers, shrubs and trees that were evident in early photos of the pond. The Pond in the distance was rebuilt with a diamond pattern to mirror the glass house decorations.

Pond Plants are a continual maintenance problem. Water lilies (family *Nymphaeaceae*) used to cover almost half the **Big pond**, but have been tamed over time. An aerator was introduced in 2014, but the pond is still a battleground between the water lilies and two very fast growing invasive water plants: *Azolla*, a fern that doubles in a week; and “Parrot Feather” (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*), which is a fern originally from the Amazon but now a worldwide pest., and common “Duckweed” (*Lemna minor*). We also battle two other invasive species on the border: “Pickerelweed” (*Pontederia*) which has a smallish blue flower and tall “Yellow Flag iris” (*I. pseudacorus*), which absorbs heavy metals out of the soil and water. Some classify *Wachendoftia* in the invasive category.

Wildlife: The wildlife changes over time. Up to four turtles took up residence for a year, followed by a pair of River Otters. A Kingfisher visits in the fall, and migrating ducks (including a pair of Hooded Mergansers). There are plenty of mosquito fish, dragon flies, frogs, and salamanders. A volunteer stocked the pond with goldfish, but we only see a flash of them when caught by the occasional Egret or Heron.

#9: Lester's Pond

Lester's pond is named for one of the original owners and is one of the most photographed areas of the garden. You can see the large variegated "Wedding Cake" Dogwood (*Cornus controversa 'Variegata'*) as well as a stunning Weeping Katsura (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum pendula 'Magnifica'*), which was planted in memory of Lester Hawkins who died in 1985.



As you walk to the small pond, you can also take the first look at some of the 20 or so species of ivy – many very slow growing, including a vertical "Pyramid Ivy". There is also one of the many stands of bamboo in the garden – a continual challenge to

contain. The bridge was recently renovated with a diamond pattern that mirrors the designs of the Glasshouse.

Landmarks/Trees. The two aqueducts come together here – a raging torrent in winter (we average 60" of rain a year). You can also get a look at the Hydrangeas that abound in the garden. There are several interesting trees, including a very pretty Japanese Maple (*Acer palmatum 'Inaba Shidare'*), Purple Beech, and a 50' Pittosporum. Note: some may notice we removed one of the large "Weeping" Podocarpus to provide more light and room for a viewing bench. Two very pretty species Camellias are along the path – *C. transkoenensis* and *C. lutchuensis*. During spring, you can see the attractive *Lunaria annua* one of several species called "Money Plant" (or "Honesty Plant").

We are on our way to the "Back Nine" but first we will stop to take in the view up the Meadow, and enjoy the new plantings including Crinum, Edgeworthia, Corokia, Impatiens, and Pulmonaria.

#10: Top of Big Pond

On the walk to the **top of the pond**, you pass a good size “Tasmanian Tree Fern” (*Dickensonia antartica*) and two more recent sisters. Don’t miss the view past the low fence up the hill, or the “Coral Tree” (*Erythrina crist-galli*) (Note: we will come back around later) A newly planted area features a nice stand of Corokia, Crinum, Impatiens, and Edgeworthia. On the way to the pond, you will pass a weeping Cypress and have a peek at the Chilean Wine Palm.

From the top of the big pond you have arguably the best view of the garden (you are looking Eastward which provides good photographic light in the afternoon). The landscape is a painting, with differing colors in every season.



Landmarks/Trees:

Standing under the giant Eucalyptus and Montezuma Cypress you can see across the pond to a backdrop of the Taxodium relatives (loosely called the “Redwood Family”): Cryptomeria, Dawn Redwood, Chinese Pond Cypress and Florida Swamp Cypress. You can also see the four Serbian Spruce, Maples, and a tall European Beech (*Fagus sylvatica 'Riversii'*).

In the foreground are Pickerelweed, Canna Lilies, and some variegated white Ivy. In close range are the Mt. Etna Broom *Genista aetnensis*, and a stand of Restio, a rush-like plant (*Rhodocoma gigantea*.) As we move toward the Palm Room, we walk past the “Chinese Windmill Palms,” (*Trachycarpus fortunei*), another endangered Chinese Maple (*Acer laevigatum*), *Stransvaesia davidiana*, (called “Chinese Photinia” which provide great winter color), an *Osmanthus suavis*, several white “Mexican Climbing Hydrangea” (*H. seemannii*), and a large stand of *Phlomis 'Edward Bowles'*.

#11 Palm Room

The **Palm Room** is centered around the large Chilean Wine Palm (*Jubaea chilensis*) which is the sole extant species in the genus. Our specimen is about 35 years old – not quite as ancient as the *Jubaea* at Kew Garden in London which is the largest indoor plant in the world at over 60’.



“When the Spanish first entered central Chile in the early 16th century, they found literally millions of **Chilean wine palms** spread over valleys and slopes throughout much of the coast ranges. The conquistadors quickly learned from the indigenous populations that these palms produce large quantities of a sugary liquid from the collection of palm sap. This syrup could be used to produce an alcoholic beverage. The process of collecting the palm sap requires cutting down the tree. Four centuries of heavy utilization of Chilean wine palms have drastically reduced their numbers and range. Today, this palm is primarily restricted to three large stands with a total population of about 100,000 trees.”

From UCLA Botanical Garden Newsletter November 10, 2016

Landmarks/Trees: You can see several other palm trees from this vantage point. We have windmill palms from Asia and the Mediterranean. There is a Kashmir Cypress (*Cupressus cashmeriana*) to the right, and a large Juniper (which looks blue from afar), a “Curly White” Pine (*Pinus strobus tortulosa*), and a Weeping Golden Cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa 'Coneybearii Aurea'*), as well as Madrones. Shade plants include Bilbergia and Shefflera.

#12 Jurassic Garden

We named it “**Jurassic Garden**” to highlight some of the more ancient plants in the garden and the tropical feel. When the Earth left the Triassic period (250 -200 million years ago) and entered the Jurassic (199 to 145 years ago), the major categories (phylum) in the plant kingdom were **Gymnosperms, Ferns, and Mosses**.



The **Gymnosperms (Conifers, Ginkgos, and Cycads)** were the dominant plants from the Jurassic period. **Conifers** are well represented throughout the garden. Here we have two very exotic **Wollemi Pines** (*Wollemia nobilis*). Discovered in a gorge in Australia in 1994 it was called the “Botanical Find of the 20th Century”.

“The Wollemi Pine is one of the world’s oldest and rarest plants dating back to the time of the dinosaurs. With less than 200 adult trees known to exist in the wild, the Wollemi Pine is now the focus of extensive research to safeguard its survival.” www.wollemipine.com

Nearby is the closest relative to the Wollemi – the “Norfolk Island Pine” (*Araucaria heterophylla*).

Ginkgo is a living fossil, with fossils recognizably related to modern Ginkgo from the Permian, dating back 270 million years. We have not been able to grow **Cycads** probably because it is too wet in most of the garden.

Ferns: Ferns are very ancient plants that were well established before the Jurassic period. There are about 50 families of ferns, grouped by Class and then Order. Most of the ferns in the garden are in the Class **Polypodiopsida**, which includes commonly seen fern species such as *Blechnum*, *Woodwardia*, and *Polysticum*. There are examples of other primitive groups of plants in the garden (including “Tree Ferns” and “Horsetails”).

“Horsetails were an important source of nutrition for plant-eating dinosaurs. These primitive vascular plants were fast-growing and resilient (they could propagate using underground runners which a grazing dinosaur wouldn't eat). This meant that a hungry dinosaur could eat the plant without killing it, since the plant would regrow from the rhizome (the underground stem).”

<https://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/dinosaurs/plants/Jurassic.shtml>

Mosses: We have some examples of moss-like plants in this area, such as Spikemoss, Clubmoss, and Selaginella, but you have to look carefully.

Plants that would not be in Jurassic include most Angiosperms and Grasses:

- By the time the Jurassic period ended and the Cretaceous Period had begun, the early ancestors of the flowering plants (Angiosperms) had appeared, and the dinosaurs had disappeared.
- “The latest major group of plants to evolve were the grasses, which became important in the mid Tertiary, from around 40 million years ago. The grasses, as well as many other groups, evolved new mechanisms of metabolism to survive the low CO₂ and warm, dry conditions over the last 10 million years.”

<https://www.expansiontectonics.com/wpclips/infoPanels/PX.htm>

Landmark Plants/Trees: One genus of non-Jurassic plant we feature is the *Colletia*.

- *C. paradoxa*: “A rare oddity from South America with a truly unique look. Also called the “Jet Plane Plant”, this is a leaf-less shrub with flattened, blue-green stems that function as leaves. The stems are arranged in opposite pairs, like boat anchors or airplane propellers. It's hard to capture the geometric beauty of this plant in photographs, but it always gets compliments! This is a very rare plant, usually only seen in botanical gardens.” . . . www.strangewonderfulthings.com
- *C. ulicena* is less fierce and with a refined red flower, that surprises in mid-Summer with a showy display.
- *C. hystrix* is the most fragrant of the three, but less distinctive.

Oddities: Two other oddities that don't really belong to the Jurassic Period are

- *Gunnera* a flowering plant only 93 million years old, but kept in the SF Botanical ancient plant collection as “Dinosaur Chow.”
- “Tapeworm Plant” (*Homalocladium platycladium*) from the Solomon Islands.

#13: Rock Garden

The **Rock Garden** is comprised of three mounds with well-drained soil, next to a small pond, which in November of 2014 was rebuilt to hold water year round. The definition of a rock garden is pretty open:



“The North American Rock Garden Society is for gardening enthusiasts interested in alpine, saxatile [def. “living and growing among rocks”], and low-growing perennials. It encourages the study and cultivation of wildflowers that grow well among rocks, whether such plants originate above tree line or at lower elevations. . . . Woodland gardens, bog gardens, raised beds, planted walls, container gardens, and alpine berms are all addressed.” . . . www.NARGS.org

Landmarks/Trees: The rock garden is a natural for Sedums, Geraniums, and various types of grasses, as well as dwarf Japanese Maples and “Hanoki Cypress”. Two huge Eucalyptus dominate the area; the largest is the White Whale (*Eucalyptus Rubida*)-- yes you can give it a hug, everyone does. A yellow Banksia Rose completely covers a dead cypress. By the pond there are Fairy Fishing Wands (*Dierama*), and a large *Wachendorfia thyrsiflora*. Nearby is “Marshall’s Azalea” a Pacific Rhododendron grown from a sport by one of the founders.

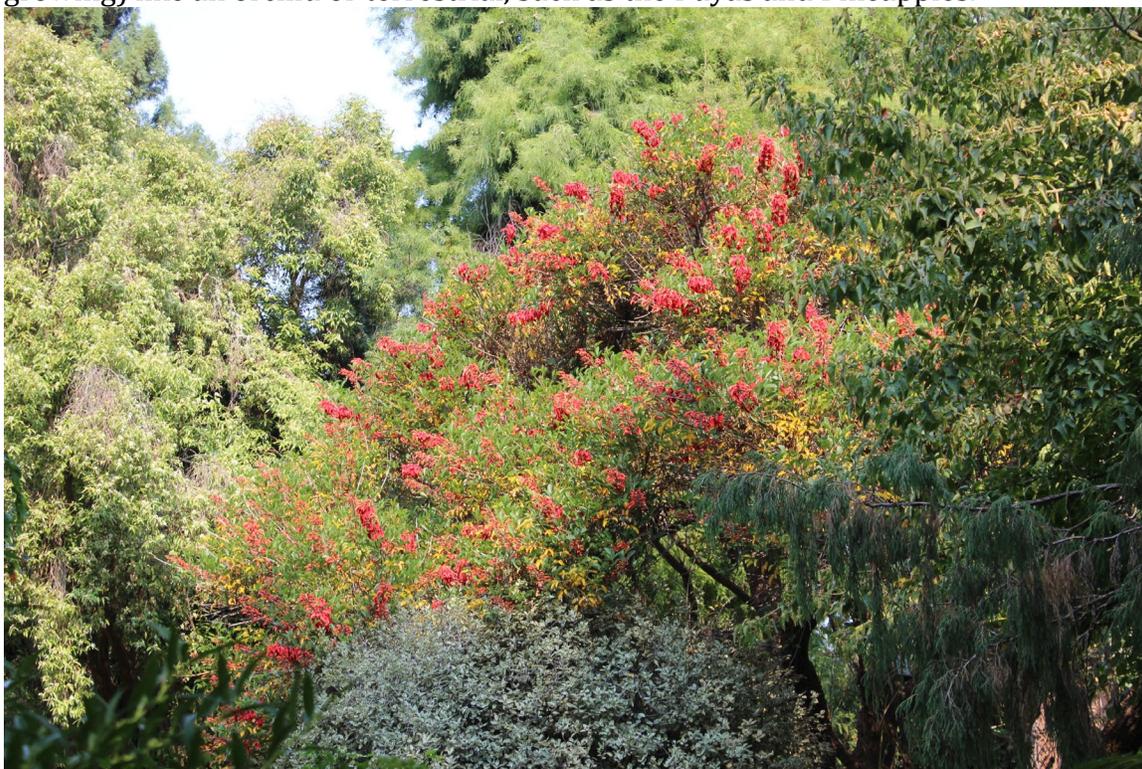
Behind the chairs is a newly planted area that includes: variegated Fatsia, Mahonia and Carex, among others.

The area is special for its view of conifers in the near and far background. Near are “White Pine”, “Black Pine”, Juniper, various Chamaecyparis, Western Red Cedar (*Thuja plocata*), the related “Hiba Cedar” (*Thujopsis dolabrata*), as well as stands of Spruce, and Yew. Farther away are the Cryptomeria, Redwoods, Bald Cypress and Keteleeria, Leaving the rock garden, you pass through a peaceful meadow with established ground covers, such as Cranesbill, a “Chinese Woodland Poppies” (*Eomecon chionanth*),, and Symphytum.

#14: Coral Tree

The meadow leading to the Coral Tree features naturalized plantings of Geranium, “Chinese Woodland Poppy” and Symphytum. We had added Crinum, “Renga Lilies” {*Arthropodium cirratum*}, “Shrimp Plant” (*Justicia brandeana*), and “Bamboo Iris” (*Iris confusa* ‘Chendu’).

Ahead we see the “Coral Tree” (*Erythrina crista-galli*). The flower from the Coral Tree is the national flower of Argentina and Uruguay. Our tree is 45 or so years old and popular with bees and birds of all kinds, especially the hummingbirds. Notice the bromeliad growing in the center of the tree – it has a very small uninspiring flower, which appears intermittently. Bromeliads are either epiphytic (tree growing) like an orchid or terrestrial, such as the Puyas and Pineapples.



Landmarks/Trees: Off to the right, there is a Southern Beech, Aesculus, and Scotch Pine. The two dominant trees around the Coral Tree are the Weeping Podocarpus (now a “climbing Tree”) and the Hoheria (a great bee attractant when it blooms).

A very large naturalized stand of *Helleboros orientalis* is here, known for early bloom (called the “Lenten Rose”). Like the Poinsettia, the Hellebore color is in the sepal, not the petal. Here is also a nice patch of “Green Goddess” Calla Lilies, purple Agapantha, “Renga” Lilies from New Zealand (*Arthropodium cirratum*), and a deep blue Salvia. On to the meadow . . .

#15 The Meadow

The meadow poses several challenges: provide color to create the vista; look good all year; and make the plants interesting close-up. Initially we relied on annuals (such as *Nicotiana*, *Cleome*), but introduced more perennials to get year-round interest. Our recent experimentation with Roses has not been a success (too wet from fog and run-off from the irrigation system. So this area will be undergoing rethinking and renovation.



Note: The **lower path** to the left takes you back to the event space, past Roses, Hebes, Fuschias, and Pittosporum, as well as two nice *Chaemacyparis Lawsonii*. The **middle path** goes to the upper event space, past an undeveloped area. Unless you want a shortcut back, we usually go up the steep hill to the **upper path**.

Landmarks/Trees: Several *Cryptomeria japonica* are along the way.

The “Sugi” or “Japanese Cedar,” is the national tree of Japan, commonly planted around temples and shrines, with many hugely impressive trees planted centuries ago. The larger tree is the cultivar ‘*Spirales*’ (or Granny’s Ringlets).

Along the way you can see two Curly Willows, “Snakebark”

Maple, and Himalayan Dogwoods. There is a very large Magnolia, as well as a very black Michelia (developed at Western Hills by former owner Maggie Wych). We have introduced several new Magnolias and Michelias. The smaller plants change over time, but the Irises are notable.

We will continue up the hill to the upper path.

WATCH YOUR STEP – THE PEA GRAVEL IS SLIPPERY.

#16 Upper Path

The upper path features some of the more unusual species which are adaptable to the drier conditions, including Australians.

Looking North: At certain times of the year, we make a diversion to the right to see Camellia corner. But you can see some of the key landmarks from a distance: great Rhododendrons ('Mi Amor'), "Dove Tree" (*Davidia involucrate*), "Golden" Monterey Pine, and a nice selection of Japanese Maples, a handsome "White Southern Beech" (*Gmelina leichhardtii*, a rainforest tree of eastern Australia), an interesting twisted Birch (*Corylus avellana 'Contorta'* also called "Harry Lauder's Walking Stick"), and *Osmanthus fragrans*. Some plants that have survived the years in the drier conditions that might be worth a quick walk: the "Tapeworm Plant" (*Homalocladium Platycladum* from the Solomon Islands), "Brazilian Fuchsia" (*Justicia rizzinii*) and *Mathiasella bupleuroides* ("Green Dream:" -- discovered in Mexico in 1954.), Two unusual prostrate growing conifers are here: "Japanese Plum Yew," (*Cephalotaxus harringtoniana 'Prostrata'*), and *Sequoia sempervirens 'Yurok Prince'* (a gift from the American Conifer Society). Also see *Luculia gratissima*, Mexican Marigold, and *Roldana petasitis* (also known as "Velvet Groundsel").



Looking South: At the top of the path, you can see the large Cordylines, Echiums, and Cryptomeria. Viburnum, showy "St. John's Wort" cultivar (*Hypericum x hidcoteense 'Hidcote'*), and *Abelia 'Francis Mason'* provide color.

Note: Several favorite plants have been lost to drought and storms: "Jelicote" Pine" (*Pinus patula*), a spectacular variegated "Himalayan White Pine" (*Pinus wallichiana*), and California native "Silk Tassel Tree" (*Garrya elliptica 'James Roof'*). The towering Cordylines were knocked down but are growing back.

Along the trail are Brugmansia, Iochroma, Cuphea, Fremontedendron, *Tradescantia*, and a small stand of *Homeria* (yellow flower in early Spring). Secluded on the left are Iochroma, Brugmansia, and variegated *Abutilon* (*A. pictum* 'Thompsonii', *Roldana petasitis* (also known as velvet groundsel). A nice stand of *Aloe* provides good color from a distance..

Back Row replacements not yet fully grown: Western Red Cedar, Monkey Hand Tree, *Fremontodendron* cultivar, Smokebush Tree, transplanted Puyas and *Beschornaria*, Coral tree, and a Mexican Grass Tree (*Dasyliiron longitissimum*, an interesting Broom (*Cytisus scoparius* x 'Lena', a *Dallimorei* hybrid).

NOTE: A neighbors 150' Douglas Fir fell in winter 2019 taking out a fence and requiring a major replanting.

Australians: Western Hills Garden was once considered one of the best Australian collections outside Australia. But periodic freezes have taken a toll. You can still see two large *Banksias* (*B. integrifolia* and *B. spinulosa*), "Rimu Tree" (*Dacrydium dacrydioides* from Australia), and lots of original *Grevillea*, a nice pink "Bottlebrush" (*Callistemon*), and "Tea Trees" (*Leptospermum*). Also, if lucky, in the Spring you can see blooms on the "Giant Spear Lily" (*Doryanthes palmeri*), and a "Gynea Lily" (*Doryanthes excelsa*). We are currently working to restore the Australian area by introducing plants from important botanical gardens (such as UC Santa Cruz, UC Berkeley, and Mendocino Botanical Gardens), as well as plants available through wholesalers. Included are: *Protea*, *Melaleuca*, new cultivars of *Grevilleas* ('Moonlight' and 'Peaches and Cream' are favorites), *Correa*, Purple *Acacia*, "Rimu" (*Dacrydium cupressinum*), a transplanted *Eucalytus rubida* volunteer (maybe a mistake given its huge eventual size), *Boronia*, and *Berberis*.

Camellia Corner: Beginning in November and lasting through March, the *Camellias* are in bloom. We have over 50 specimens of *Camellias* in the garden representing a dozen species. Most of original plants are in *Camellia Corner*.

#17 Vista Bench

Take a minute to sit on the **vista bench** and enjoy one of the best views in the garden. You can see the middle path, meadow, and trees around the large pond. Notice especially the colors of the trees, with the wild Coral Tree, the Hoheria (with small white flowers), and the bluish and yellow



conifers you walked under in the palm room. You can see there is quite an elevation change in the garden. which the hummingbirds take advantage of with great aerial displays.

Landmarks/Trees: Below you can see several “Himalayan” Dogwoods (*Cornus capitata*) that produce great pink-white flowers and large orange berries. A large Michellia stands guard on the left, and several newer Magnolia cultivars have been added.

Other plants adding to the colorful tapestry at different times of year are: Wachendorfia, Canna Lilies, Echium of several hues,

“Mexican Bush Sage” (*Salvia leucantha*), Alstromeria (new and old cultivars), Abutilons, Sunflower varieties, and fragrant Osmanthus. A bit farther along are some rangy unusual plants, including “Mexican Bush Mallow” (*Phymosia umbellata*) and “Natal Shell Flower (*Bowkeria verticalla*). New plantings by the “Million Dollar” bench include a *Sophora prostata* ‘Little baby’ and a new dwarf Erica cultivar.

#18 Big House View and Circle Pond

The **Big House** was built as a rustic cabin with a Bohemian flair, decorated in 60's style with plaster work and art on the exterior walls. Interior spaces had interesting wood work with stain glass windows. Unfortunately, the house was not well built, nor was it well maintained. Over the winter of 2013 the house was renovated within the limits set by the County and is now the living quarters for the owners. The house was rebuilt and remains an integral part of the garden.



The view down to the garden is expansive. The “Chinese Elm” tree (*Zelkova serrata*) is the largest tree on the property and has influenced the micro-climate underneath. Gone is the sunny meadow with a profusion of flowers, replaced by shade tolerant plants. The showy large “Australian Grass Tree” (*Xanthorrhoea preissii*) would much prefer its prior sunny existence. The

largest stand of 'Hercules' Spotted Leaf Calla Lilies (*Zantedeschia aethiopica*) do like the shade and intermingle with the very large *Geraniums maderense* (Annies Annuals website calls them “Ginormous Geraniums”). Somehow, sun-loving “Red Bells Agave” (*Beschorneria yuccifodes*) co-exist.

Landmarks/Trees: The **circle pond** features an unusual intersection of several arcs. Off in the distance is the **event space** which was added to the garden in 2011. The **glass house**, the **mist house**, and the **shade structure** remain as originally constructed.

Close at hand is the “Chinese Bitter Orange” (*Poncirus trifoliata* ‘Flying Dragon’), which is a citrus relative that can be used as root stock for the dwarfing of citrus trees. The orange Alstromeria have naturalized and become a weed, but there is a stand of some other colors, and new cultivars being introduced.

Off to the right you can see several smallish conifers, including Cryptomeria and Chameacyparis. A large Mahonia (*M. x media* ‘Arthus Menzes’), giant Aralias, and “Chinese Windmill Palms” (*Trachycarpus fortunei*) complement the view.

#19 Walk Back

On the way back to the office, notice the beautiful Golden Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia* 'Frisia') which catches the light especially in the afternoon. Also see the giants of the garden: "Chinese Windmill Palms" (*Trachycarpus fortunei*), "Devil's Walking Stick" (*Aralia spinosa*), a large stand of an unidentified Draceana species, and the creepy *Decaisnea fargesii* (known as "Dead Man's Fingers Plant"). Notice our **Redwood Cathedral** (a colony of Redwood trees). Farther on are "False Gensing (*Pseudopanax*), Ginger, and Fuschias around the **Swanson Pond**.

We have made a significant investment in the infrastructure so that we can support large groups. The **Octogon House** has been restored as a lunch room for volunteers. The **Barn** was upgraded to be used as an office or small meeting room. And the **Event Space** has hosted garden club tours, horticultural society meetings, private parties, and two weddings. Think about using this space for your group.



Thank you for visiting the garden. The restoration process is ongoing and will continue to be so for multiple years to come. Please visit in a different season to truly appreciate the diversity.

There is not time to mention all the specimens in the garden. If you are interested in learning more consider becoming a volunteer. Please sign up for our monthly e- newsletter and consider becoming a member.

On your way out , stop by the nursery. We specialize in plants from the garden. Some are available from vendors, but most have been propagated on site.