

THE LATE SHOW GARDENS

Where brilliant design meets sustainable practices

September 18, 19, 20, 2009
9:30 am–5:30 pm
at Cornerstone Sonoma

Change the way you think...
a garden show for the future.

The Sonoma Wine Country.
Groundbreaking garden design.
Thought-provoking lectures.
Great food and wine. Ahhhh.
Be there!

Celebrate beautiful design
while addressing climate
change and sustainability.

ORDER TICKETS TODAY:
www.thelateshowgardens.org
or call 415-721-1550

the
Late Show Gardens
the latest in design every fall

©2009 The Late Show Gardens
Photo ©2009 Marion Brenner

landscape

explains: “The design is abstract, based on ideas. If you copy nature, people won’t ask questions. I want to spark questions. Half of intelligence is asking questions.”

The question then is: What does this landscape mean? With the Sacramento River flowing through Turtle Bay, the landscape’s story emphasizes water — how water shapes the land as it moves from high to low, how it dictates the plants that grow there and how water must be conserved now to preserve the region’s environmental integrity.

The Sustainability Gardens function as a living classroom of ecology as well as a pretty park. Open free to the public (there’s an admission charge to other parts of Turtle Bay), the gardens are at the western end of the park, near the Garden West Entrance and a parking lot.

Visitors can wend their way up oak-lined paths that spiral around a mound that is the centerpiece of the project. The conical mound’s design echoes the form of the Cascade Range’s volcanic peaks (Mount Lassen, Mount Shasta); it was built from soil excavated from another part of the site and in so doing, designers reconstructed a wetland, which in turn connects with an existing wetland that was created by gold dredging more than a hundred years ago. A narrow rivulet of water cascades from the mound’s top into a pool, then flows into a watercourse that serpentine its way down a series of stone terraces — much like a river winding through the flood plains of the region.

The project’s water system was designed with conservation in mind. All surface water is diverted to the wetlands below. Water is captured through direct percolation or surface drainage. Runoff is filtered by bioswale plantings of riparian species. Spring rains demonstrate the natural rise of the water table — as the Sacramento River rises, so does the water table, and water floods the stone terraces.

The drought-resistant, mostly native plantings demonstrate the plant communities of the area. Also arranged high to low, based on natural range, the plants reflect their dependence on different water availability and soil types.

High on the mound are the altitude-loving plants of California’s montane chaparral community. White manzanita, Idaho fescue and other mountain grasses, arranged in geometric patterns right to the edges of the rivulet, blanket the dry slopes. Redbuds provide a burst of rosy color in spring.



Above: In the midsection of the Sustainability Gardens’ central mound, native plantings represent the dry plateaus of the region. Rows of native deer grass form an abstract pattern of regularly spaced concentric rings.

The middle terraces form a dry plateau like an oak savannah. Blue oaks (*Quercus douglasii*) dominate the highest of the terraces, and interior live oaks (*Q. wislizeni*) dot the lower terraces. Grasses in concentric patterns mark the midsection: deer grass, California needlegrass and *Nassella pulchra*, also called purple needlegrass, which was once dominant in California’s grasslands until European grasses forced it out and is now the state grass.

At the moister lowest levels, native riparian vegetation traces the natural distribution of the high water table. Plants include rushes (species of *Juncus*) and sedges (species of *Carex*). The main water-loving trees are cottonwoods — familiar fast-growing denizens of California’s stream and river banks.

One of the few nonnative plants on the site is actually quite prominent. This is the Lombardy poplar: a tall, slender exclamation point of a tree traditionally planted to line driveways in California’s ranch areas. Here Lombardy poplars are used to delineate where future buildings will go. The buildings will be low-slung rammed-earth structures, designed to stay in the background of the landscape. The poplars will be removed after the buildings go in — the plan is to mill the trees for pulp.

A provocateur, Lutsko leaves the visitor wondering, “Why have we treated the Earth the way we have?” In his gardens, you see abuses corrected. You get an understanding of how nature operates in the region and elsewhere and you wonder if there’s a future when water and other precious natural resources will be understood and treasured instead of squandered. ♣

SEE SOURCEBOOK FOR MORE INFORMATION, PAGE 82