



Real Estate

Adding an element of surprise

Personalize your garden with a sense of whimsy ... or not

by Judy Maier / Palo Alto Weekly

Uploaded: Wed, Aug 10, 2011, 11:07 am
Time to read: about 3 minutes

There are many styles of gardens, and likely one that best suits you, your house and your environment. But no matter what the style, a quality that sets one garden apart from others is the element of surprise.

Some people may think of it as whimsy, but surprise does not have to be whimsical -- it can just be something not expected.

The unexpected comes in many different forms and is a wonderful way to add interest to your garden. For instance:

- just the right curve in the path that takes you to an unexpected view or garden room;
- the sound of water coming from somewhere, calling you;

SLIDESHOW



Outside, this house had little personality before adding pots, new plantings and an art piece. The variety of brightly colored, textured and shaped pots adds a sense of modern whimsy to the design. Photograph by Judy Maier.

Help sustain the local news you depend on.

Your contribution matters. Become a member today.

Join

- a change in hardscape materials that signifies you are entering a different part of the landscape;
- repetition of a certain plant and then the surprise break in repetition;
- a pause along the way; perhaps it is a serene lantern nestled in a planting that gives you a sense of calm and makes you feel you'd like to linger;
- the tranquil sound of water from a water feature you come upon;
- the sound of chimes in the wind;



Stay informed
Get daily headlines sent straight to your inbox in our Express newsletter.

Sign up for Express

- an unusual use of materials;
- perhaps it is an intoxicating scent from a plant that wafts its way towards you from an unknown location;
- or perhaps it is a completely unique use of a space, such as a front yard that has been turned into an aesthetically pleasing and useful, working edible garden.

Layering, changes in topography, the use of water, fire, sound, texture and color. The creative use of space, a whimsical pot or piece of garden art, a uniquely placed mirror that reflects back into the garden, a secret garden hiding in a corner of the landscape -- these are all ways to personalize your space and create the element of the unexpected.

But how do you get there? How do you discover what is right for your space, your garden? How do you create that sense of whimsy, or timelessness or serenity?

Most Viewed Stories

- Now roaming Palo Alto streets: On-demand Teslas
- Lifted by federal funds, Palo Alto Airport prepares to welcome electric aircraft
- Man arrested for alleged hate crime after downtown Palo Alto altercation
- Tolling begins on Highway 101 express lanes between South San Francisco and Sunnyvale
- Palo Alto bans firearms in schools, government buildings, polling places

There are many approaches. I like to discover what brings my clients a sense of joy, or tranquility or beauty or whimsy or a feeling of "home" or other positive feelings. This process of discovery starts during our first design consultation. I ask questions and show pictures, asking for comments to get a sense of their interests and style, what they like or dislike. We talk about how they would enjoy using their space if they could, what their family's activities and interests are, how they see their lives changing in the future, and how far away that "future" is.

Going a little deeper, I like to find out what memories they might have from places in their past, be it childhood or another time, that gave them a sense of peace, or happiness or joy. Was it a particular flower in their grandmother's garden? Was it a tranquil setting in a garden they once visited? A particular color or material, etc.? Was it something reminiscent of a memorable vacation to Italy or India or Bali, etc.? Or was it that beautiful piece of garden art they just found last weekend that they must find a place for in their new outdoor living space!

During that first meeting, if my clients wish to work collaboratively, we may already begin to work towards a vision, taking into consideration the specific parameters of the location microclimates, grades, soil, size, sun exposure, and the types of plants and elements they would love in their garden space. As the process of creating a design continues, I like to always leave room for spontaneity. Some of the best design decisions happen during installation, rather than on a plan, though a plan is very helpful.

Think outside the box. Your garden has endless creative possibilities. One example is the growing popularity of gardens that feature edibles -- even in the front yard. No longer do edible gardens need to be unattractive plants hidden in the back yard. Front yards now have "permission" to be working, edible or mixed-edible gardens, providing food as well as beauty and interest.

This season, take time to think of your garden, and consider the forms of whimsy or surprise you would like to develop. Have fun and enjoy your space.

-- Judy Maier is a landscape/garden designer, garden coach and garden writer working in Palo Alto and the greater Bay Area, and an aesthetic pruner specializing in Japanese maples. She can be reached at 408-398-3161, judy@judysgardens.com or [Judy's Gardens](#).

Follow Palo Alto Online and the Palo Alto Weekly on Twitter @paloaltoweekly, Facebook and on Instagram @paloaltoonline for breaking news, local events, photos, videos and more.

Craving a new voice in Peninsula dining?

Sign up for the Peninsula Foodist newsletter.

Sign up now

Comments

Post a comment

Sorry, but further commenting on this topic has been closed.

Index

- Home
- News
- TownSquare
- Blogs
- A&E
- Community Calendar
- Sports
- Home & Real Estate
- Visitor Info

- Send News Tips
- Become a Member
- Print Edition/Archives
- Express / Weekend Express
- Promotions
- Special Pubs
- Obituaries
- Circulation & Delivery

- About Us
- Contact Us
- Advertising Info
- Place a Legal Notice
- Terms of Use
- Privacy Policy
- Mountain View Notice
- The Almanac
- TheSixFifty.com
- Redwood City Pulse

© 2023 Palo Alto Online
All rights reserved.

- Embarcadero Media
- PR Media/Release
- Spotlight
- Mobile site