



A garden designed by Sinjen

Bruce Mutz Photo Image Photography

## **Sinjen: Legendary Landscape Designer**

*by Barbara Hartung*

His name was Sinjen, but to his friends he was “Sin.” To his devoted garden clients he was a landscaper *par excellence* who could see a finished garden even before the planting began. A landscaper in San Diego from the 1940s until his death in 2001, Sinjen grew his family of clients by word of mouth, working primarily in Point Loma, Mission Hills, and La Jolla.

He introduced his clients to lacing, which he defined as a way of trimming a tree that opened up the plant but left it beautifully and naturally sculpted. When he finished pruning, it was always difficult to know what had been trimmed—the tree simply looked natural. “You just remove what doesn’t belong,” he would remind us. Then, as we watched, he would explain we had just received his thousand-dollar lesson.

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[faustopalafox@hotmail.com](mailto:faustopalafox@hotmail.com)

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Jeff Koch

[jeffgkoch@mac.com](mailto:jeffgkoch@mac.com)

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[tigerpalafox@hotmail.com](mailto:tigerpalafox@hotmail.com)

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Nancy Carol Carter

[ncc@sandiego.edu](mailto:ncc@sandiego.edu)

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[martha.pehl@sharp.com](mailto:martha.pehl@sharp.com)

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Fausto Palafox

It is an honor for me to accept the position of Mission Hills Garden Club President, and I am looking forward to working with all of you during my tenure. I was involved many years ago when the club was more of an idea rather than the standard of excellence that it has become.

First, allow me to express my sincere thanks to our previous officers: Beverly Fritschner, outgoing President; Meredith French, Vice-President, Programs; Barbara Strona, Vice-President, Membership; Kathy Jones, Secretary; and Carol Moseley, Treasurer. Thank you also to our committee chairs: Sabine Starr, Communications; Linda Lawley, Community Projects; Mary Shelley, Education; Jim Bishop and Martha Pehl, Garden Walk; Nancy Carol Carter, Historian; Debbie Quillin, Hospitality; and Carol Costarakis, Special Events. We also owe much gratitude to our tireless volunteers who have given their time and expertise to our many activities—thank you!

How will the MHGC help our community this coming year? Our goal is to promote urban space awareness and beautification, nurture and mentor our newer club members, and develop goals for the next five to ten years.

We are one of the largest and most successful garden clubs in Southern California. This has not occurred by accident but rather because of the determination and spirit of our members who have worked towards the common goal of bettering our community. We are an example of what this sort of attitude can achieve. The Mission Hills Garden Club is revered by other garden clubs and civic groups for our community achievements.

It takes *everyone's* participation to continue being a shining star, and so I invite each one of you to participate in this effort. Remember, the greatness of the Mission Hills Garden Club lies not in our name or our geographic area but in you, our membership.

**Fausto Palafox** is the current President of MHGC and one of its original founders. He owns Mission Hills Nursery, teaches at Cuyamaca College in the Ornamental Horticulture Department, and serves on the San Diego Forest Advisory Board and the California Urban Forestry Council (state level).

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**Editor:** Nancy Dimsdale: [dimsdale@cox.net](mailto:dimsdale@cox.net)

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## Sinjen (from page 1)

Lacing, a sensitive way of pruning, is both a skill and an art as practiced by Sinjen and his followers. Because of his horticultural education, Sin knew what the natural growth pattern of a specific tree should be,

and when lacing a specific tree he worked to allow that structure to be maintained. He removed upright branches and those that crossed others—it sometimes looked as

*Laced variegated pittosporum* Bruce Mutz

though every other branch of new growth needed to go. He explained that this thinning process would open up the tree to let sunshine in without harming its basic structure.

When he decided to remove a large limb, he would remove a large segment, then make a final cut close to the joining branch or limb. He avoided leaving a



Shaded sitting area

Pat Harrison

protruding piece of the cut limb—he called those “sore thumbs.” Watching him seemingly remove a branch here and a branch there, it seemed and looked easy, but it really isn’t. “Just remove what doesn’t belong” is good advice as long as you have a feel for what doesn’t belong—and Sin seemed to.

In addition to laced trees, another mark of a Sinjen garden is the use of bricks for winding pathways, patios, and fishponds. Never use a straight line—too formal, he would say. He insisted that the eye must be drawn by flowing lines. In his gardens there are always tropicals, including palms, philodendrons, calliandra, agaves, bromeliads, and cycads; he always included unusual plants of all kinds. He loved texture and contrast in the garden and preferred evergreens to

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*Laced juniper overhanging a fish pond*

Pat Harrison Photographic Art

## Sinjen (from previous page)



Junction of curving brick walkways

Pat Harrison Photographic Art

deciduous trees. He loved flowering trees and shrubs such as tabebuia, brachychiton, bombax, pink varieties of raphiolepis, variegated pittosporum, dombeyas, gardenias, and wisteria, all of which provide a variety of color.

His gardens, each slightly different depending on the space, the terrain, and the microclimate, are considered to be special places by Sin's clients—they

are a personal spot of calm and quiet to allow one to refresh the soul and commune with nature. When he would visit one of his gardens and find leaves and blossoms needing to be raked, he would never complain. They represent "yesterday, today, and tomorrow," he'd philosophize. And if we would begin to rake up the fallen foliage, he'd simply shake his head and announce, "I love to see my people work."



Pat Harrison Photographic Art



Bruce Mutz



Bruce Mutz Photo Image Photography



Pat Harrison Photographic Art



Bruce Mutz

Sin's love of informality and his passion for curved lines might seem incongruous considering his European upbringing and horticultural training. Born the youngest in a large family in Northern Germany's Schleswig-Holstein area, he was sent to study horticulture on the extensive grounds of a wealthy family. As an apprentice he learned the growth habits of plants (both outdoors and in

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## **Sinjen (from previous page)**

hothouses) and their Latin names, which he continued to use throughout his career. As he informed us, when one uses the Latin term, everyone—regardless of country or language—knows what plant you are talking about.

Although he came to America in 1928, he never entirely lost his German heritage. He loved to speak German with other expats, and he adored eating blood sausage and dancing the polka at Little Bavaria in Del Mar. Nevertheless, he was most proud of his U.S. citizenship and often spoke about how at home he felt when he first arrived on American soil. “I knew I was an American as soon as I arrived,” he recounted. He first settled in Long Beach with an aunt and uncle; in 1934 he became an American citizen. Drafted during World War II, he was assigned to oversee the grounds at Fort Rosecrans. After the war he settled in Ocean Beach and bought a home on Longbranch where his



Walkway with Asian gong

Pat Harrison Photographic Art

garden was usually full of friends—often garden friends—in addition to well-tended plants.

Was Sinjen eccentric? Maybe. There was only one way—Sinjen’s way—and many of us had to admit that he was usually right. We often joked that our gardens were really Sinjen’s gardens and we were simply the caretakers.

As the years passed and his eyesight began to fail, he continued to direct us to do what needed to be done in our gardens—we always thought it was his sixth sense. We had to say goodbye when he passed away at age 92. Despite his death, he still lives on in our hearts—and our gardens. We’re often reminded of something he would say in German: “I thank you from the bottom of my heart with tears in my eyes.” That’s pure Sinjen. And often we thank him from the bottom of *our* hearts.

**Barbara Hartung** and her husband, Jim, are Lemon Grove gardeners who count themselves fortunate to have had Sinjen as a long-time family friend. Photos courtesy of and copyrighted by Pat Harrison Photographic Art and Bruce Mutz Photo Image Photography.



Lily

Bruce Mutz

## **Reaching for the Sky**

*by Sabine Starr*

As I sit on my terrace, scanning the view while lost in my thoughts, one plant catches my attention. It is a simple succulent, but I am impressed with its vigor, expression, and luscious health. Clearly it is well nourished, watered, fertilized, and gets the right amount of sun exposure. It is our job and desire as gardeners to find that right combination of ingredients to lure plants into their fullest expression so they can return the favor by making us happy when we see them growing and thriving.



Aeonium

Meredith French

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## Reaching for the Sky (from previous page)

But what about our *own* needs? Do we give *ourselves* the kind of care and attention we lavish on our plants? Do we take enough time to discover what we need to truly flourish or what makes us feel inspired, creative, and fulfilled? Once we identify and include these things in our lives, we will be rewarded with contentment, joy, and ease. We will find ourselves contributing to the world out of the abundance of our fulfillment, thus sharing our blessings and our joy. It is important to remember that we are not being selfish when we fulfill our needs; instead, we are preparing ourselves to play a part in this life, in this world, in the best possible way.

Just as we derive pleasure from looking at a plant that is the most beautiful expression of its species—vibrant and full of life—we can find pleasure in noting the liveliness and vibrancy in other people. We may even be motivated to find those same qualities in ourselves. I believe that whatever we seek is possible. Ask yourself: What have you been short on giving yourself that would help you thrive? What has long been a true desire? Why wait—and what for? Summer is the ideal time to think about these important questions and explore some new things in your life. Enjoy!

**Sabine Starr** is MHGC Secretary, an enthusiastic gardener, and a certified life coach. Photo courtesy of and copyrighted by Meredith French.

## Out in the Garden: Beyond Bees

*Text and Photos by Meredith French*

How many pollinators are in your garden—other than bees? Did you know that 98 percent of flowering plant species need assistance for pollination? There are currently about 240,000 such species identified, and all but a smattering depend on insects for survival. Insects purposely (or sometimes inadvertently) move pollen grains from a flower's anthers to the receptive part of a blossom's carpel or pistil as they forage for nectar or other insects. Included in this laundry list of insects are bees (at least 20,000 species), wasps, ants, beetles, flies, moths, and butterflies. Most insects adhere to the principle of "flower constancy" by transferring pollen to conspecific plants (plants that

belong to the same species). This prevents stigmas of unrelated plants being clogged with unusable pollen.

The biggest group of pollinators is the also the largest order of insects—Coleoptera, or beetles—which take care of 88 percent of the pollination of the world's species of flowering plants. Although they can see color, they rely more on scent as an attractant; fruit scents are a favorite. They are particularly drawn to large-bowled blossoms and will even chew their way through to a flower's sex organs, if necessary. Because they often defecate in the process, beetles are tagged as "mess and soil" pollinators.

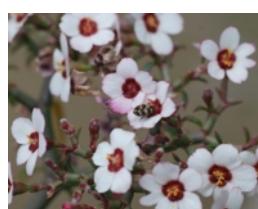
One of the more comical members of this huge order is the metallic green fig beetle (*Cotinus texana*). Measuring more than an inch long, it lumbers through the air on short flights—one wonders how it maintains altitude. Named for its host food, it is also frequently seen pollinating such plants as buddleya (butterfly bush). Another favorite beetle is the ladybird beetle, suborder *Coccinellidae*. There are about 450 species of this beetle in North America alone, in colors ranging from yellow to deep red—often with a pattern of dots specific to each species—as well as drab colors or even solid black. In addition to its well-known duties as a forager of soft-bellied sucking insects, it is an important pollinator.



Green fig beetle



Seven spot ladybird beetle



Adult carpet beetle

Two others worth mentioning are the carpet beetle (*Anthrenus verbasci*) and the tumbling flower beetle or pintail beetle (5,000 species). The adult carpet beetle moves outside to enjoy the nectar of your garden plants and

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## Out in the Garden (from previous page)

inadvertently pollinates as it moves about; it especially enjoys crape myrtle, spirea, and buckwheat



Tumbling flower beetle

tumbles in an out-of-control manner when you try to capture it. This is true even when you try to photograph one—they simply disappear.



Metallic sweat bee



Digger bee



Bumble bee

Of mine is the bumble bee (49 species), whose name derives from the buzzing noise it makes while working. What is actually happening is a process called sonication—the bee grabs on to the anthers of the plant and “buzzes” its flight muscles to get the pollen to release. They especially like berry blossoms, as well as willow, lupine, and tomatoes. Like the honey bee—but no other bees, which are solitary insects—bumble bees are social and live in colonies with a queen in charge.

Wasps are closely related to bees but have no hairs on their bodies. Aside from the fact that the adults need nectar for survival—and that means pollination for the plants—they eradicate all kinds of pests. In fact,

—be sure to check cut flowers for beetle hitchhikers before bringing them inside. The tumbling flower beetle is another comical character: as its name indicates, it

Of course one must mention bees in this discussion. The honey bee is what always comes to mind when one mentions bees, but did you know that there are more than 20,000 named species of bees? And we are still counting! To name just a few that you may have in your yard (and perhaps don’t even know you have) are sweat bees, digger bees, carpenter bees, mason bees, leafcutter bees, Andrena bees—shall I go on? They are all pollinators. A particular favorite

almost every pest has a wasp that preys on or parasitizes it: the wasp will immobilize the host adult or larva with a sting and then lay its eggs; as the eggs mature, they feed on the host and eventually emerge as wasp larvae to begin the process again. Wasps we

see in our gardens include sand wasps, paper wasps, and potter wasps. These all are black and yellow in different patterns, with the potter wasp having the most black. Digger wasps are iridescent black with long wings, while mud daubers and thread-waisted wasps both have a very thin connection between the

abdomen and thorax. Mud daubers are a main enemy of black and brown widow spiders.

Flies, as distinguished from wasps and bees, have just one set of wings and pollinate flowers with less of a sweet scent. In fact, nectar is absolutely essential to the diet of adult male flies. The tachinid fly, often confused with the housefly, parasitizes such insects as the stink bug, squash bug, and leaf-footed bug. The hover fly (or syrphid fly) is a delightful and beautiful little creature that likes to investigate everything about



Hover fly



Bee fly

you. It is one of the few flies that can not only hover but also fly backwards. They feast on aphid honeydew as well as nectar, and their larval form can control 70 to 100 percent of the aphids in your garden. Another beauty is the bee fly. This is a larger black fly with beautiful windowpane-type wings in a variety of patterns.

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The popular order Lepidoptera brings up the rear but is certainly not of lesser importance: butterflies and moths are why a lot of us have gardens. There are many more species of moths than butterflies, and they generally work at night. Both insects have an interesting structure (proboscis) that allows them to suck up liquid nectar as if through a straw; it coils and retracts when not in use, somewhat akin to a watch spring. Although it is popular lore that Lepidoptera prefer flat-surfaced blossom clusters, I have often seen them nectaring funnel-shaped flowers.



Monarch



Mourning cloak

Common species we see in our gardens in San Diego are the fiery skipper, monarch, mourning cloak, varieties of swallowtail, cabbage white, cloudless sulphur, marine blue, and hairstreak. White-lined sphinx moths (hummingbird moths) will travel through in the spring —watch out or you will bump into one.



White-lined sphinx moth

So now what does the word “pollinator” bring to mind? More than a picture of a European honey bee buzzing around, yes?

**Meredith French** is a Master Gardener and professional photographer. Photos courtesy of and copyrighted by Meredith French.

## Hydroponics: A Growing Culture

*Text and Photos by Helene Isbell*

Hydroponics is the science of growing plants without soil by feeding them mineral nutrients dissolved in water. Because of the recirculation of the nutrient



Ebb and flow bucket system with hydroponic hibiscus

solution, it is an efficient way to provide nutrition and water to your plants and allows you to produce year-round crops virtually anywhere. With hydroponics, you replace the need for soil with a complete nutrient formula and an inert growing medium to anchor the plants’ roots. You have control over the feeding schedule and environmental conditions so that bigger and more productive yields can be achieved in a shorter amount of time than in soil. For these reasons, hydroponics is fun, sustainable, and appealing to commercial growers and garden hobbyists alike. When a gardener decides to grow using hydroponics, there are some key factors to consider.

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## Hydroponics (from previous page)

### Hydroponic set-up

The first factor to consider is what type of hydroponic set-up is most ideal for you. The goal, to deliver the nutrient solution to the plants' roots, can be accomplished in several ways. Some of the most popular hydroponics—or “hydro”—systems include:

**Ebb and Flow/Flood and Drain:** Plants are set on a grow bed or in buckets in the desired grow medium. A reservoir sits under the table or near buckets filled with nutrient-enriched water. A pump connected to a timer periodically pumps the solution via hoses and fixtures into the grow media. When the water has reached the plants' roots, it stops filling and begins draining back into the reservoir. The process repeats itself at timed intervals.

**Top-Feed Drip Systems:** The nutrient solution is delivered to the base of the plants using  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch tubing or an emitter that measures a specific dose. Emitters spray streams of nutrient solution to ensure even coverage of the medium. This system can be used with individual containers, beds, or tables. Buckets can be connected together with a feeding manifold and drainage system with the reservoir directly under the growing containers. Roots eventually grow into the solution, but top feed irrigation provides aeration.

**Nutrient Film Technique:** A very shallow stream of nutrient solution is recirculated past the bare roots of plants in a watertight channel (usually PVC pipe). The plants are supported in small plastic baskets with the roots dangling into the nutrient solution for optimal



*Nutrient film technique with hydroponic peppers and basil*

amounts of water, oxygen, and nutrients. As the root mass develops in the water channel, the top part of the mass is exposed to air. However, water flowing via gravity over the roots and into a reservoir is pumped back through the system to provide the roots with constant feeding.

**Water Culture:** A platform, usually styrofoam, holds the plants and floats on top of the nutrient solution. An air stone in the water makes bubbles that provide oxygen to the plant roots dangling in the water. This system is great for leafy greens such as spinach and lettuce but is not ideal for heavier fruit-bearing plants.



*Aeroponic system with tomato clones*

**Aeroponics:** Plant roots hanging in the air are sprayed with a fine mist of nutrient solution activated by a timer every few minutes for a few seconds. One drawback to this system is that delicate roots could dehydrate if timers fail or misters get clogged; it is better to use this set-up for propagated plants that will be transplanted into a grow medium.

### Growing medium

The second important factor to consider with hydroponics is what medium you will grow in: the main difference between a hydro garden and a conventional garden is the growing media. In a conventional garden, plant nutrients are derived from soil. In hydroponic systems, the vital nutrients are delivered to the plants via water—“hydroponics” literally means “water-working.” Hydroponic plants,

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## **Hydroponics (from previous page)**

although fertilized by the water, still need some type of material that the roots can grab onto and weave through for structural support. While there are several materials that can function as grow media, some have become more favored than others in the hydroponics industry. The growing medium will depend on the hydroponic system. Some of the most popular types of hydro media include:

*Rockwool:* a combination of melted rock and sand spun into fibers that are pressed together to create different shapes and sizes from 1-inch cubes designed for use in propagation to 3-by-12-by-36-inch slabs capable of holding large root systems. Rockwool holds sizable amounts of air and water; in its loose form it can fill pots or containers of any size.

*Coco Fiber:* an “organic” medium made from broken-down coconut husks. As a by-product of the coconut industry, coco fiber is a sustainable resource. It is high in rooting hormones, protects against root diseases, and provides higher oxygen levels and water-holding capacity than rockwool.

*Expanded Clay Pellets (Hydroton):* a lightweight gravel manufactured specifically for hydroponic cultivation with a stabilized pH that releases practically no minerals into the nutrient stream. The pellets have an excellent capacity for moisture and oxygen to stimulate healthy root development. Pre-rinse the pellets to remove residual clay; they are reusable for several growing cycles.

*Perlite:* a sterile and pH neutral volcanic mineral whose capillaries and natural cavities provide excellent aeration and drainage. Use perlite by itself or add to other grow media to increase drainage.

*Soilless Mix:* a combination of ingredients like sphagnum moss, perlite, and vermiculite with small particles of organic material that can sometimes clog tubing and pumps in hydroponic systems. Many soilless mixes come premixed, but some growers prefer to make their own recipes.

## **Growing environment**

After your hydroponic set-up and medium are chosen, the third factor to consider is your growing

environment. A hydroponic garden can be set up almost anywhere but will thrive in a controlled environment such as an enclosed room or greenhouse. Growing indoors allows for year-round harvesting of crops; the temperature, humidity, and ventilation of the room can be modified to meet the needs of specific plants. If the growing area is indoors, high-intensity grow lights can be used to control plant growth. If the growing space is outside or in a greenhouse, the grower can rely on the natural energy of the sun to generate photosynthesis. There are also supplemental grow lights that can be used to increase greenhouse yields.

## **Advantages of hydroponics**

With all of the options available in the hydroponic industry, growers can really get creative with their garden design. Regardless of the hydro system, medium, or environmental conditions of the garden, the advantages of growing hydroponically are many:

- low water needs
- no weeds or soil-borne diseases
- larger, faster yields with control over nutrients and environment

Hydroponics is a sustainable technology that could very likely be the main source of food production for future generations. The sooner we understand how hydroponics works, the sooner we can embrace all the benefits it has to offer.

For more information about hydroponics, or to see some example displays, visit any San Diego Hydroponics and Organics location (see our website at [www.sdhydroponics.com](http://www.sdhydroponics.com) for directions). If you have questions about growing, submit them to <http://sdhydroponics.com/ask-a-grower> and you will be answered by our local garden expert. For a 15% discount off your entire purchase, use code MISSION HILLS NEWSLETTER at checkout.

**Helene Isbell**, a San Diego native, works with the Community Outreach program at San Diego Hydroponics and Organics. She is an advocate of organic gardening and sustainable living. Photos courtesy of and copyrighted by Helene Isbell.

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*To see things in the seed, that is genius.*

— Lao-tse

# Designing With Urbanite: Turning Construction Debris into Beauty in the Garden

*Text and Photos by Chris Drayer*

It's often said that one man's junk is another's treasure. As a garden designer, I've always thought that there is a corollary to this: If you have enough of any one thing, it's a resource. The perfect illustration of both of these ideas is broken concrete, referred to somewhat facetiously as "Urbanite" or "urban stone" by savvy gardeners. If you have ugly or cracked concrete paving that needs to be replaced, all that material is just going to cost you money to break up and haul away to be ground up and recycled. However, if you have significant grade changes in your garden, consider the effect of a properly constructed dry-laid broken concrete wall or pathway—especially if you can't afford either a stone veneer or an authentic stone rubble wall but also can't resign yourself to the rather manufactured look of a keystone wall (or other



*Raw material*

"landscape wall" material). As these photos show, the irregular broken edges, staggered joints, and varied thicknesses of broken concrete



*Walls and plantings with sloping grades*

can create the natural look and permanence of a stone wall or even suggest naturally exposed rock outcroppings with all its varied colors. As a bonus, you will create many new opportunities for planting, both on top of the wall and between the courses.

There are a few tricks and techniques to keep in mind to achieve a stable and natural-looking feature:

## Choose appropriate material

Broken paving from either driveways or patios—as opposed to foundation or wall rubble—makes the best

walls. This material usually comes in thicknesses of between four and six inches, and the more uniform the thickness, the easier it will be to work with. That said, I refer you back to my corollary: I have successfully incorporated curbings and foundations into my constructions, especially to create steps. It's very important, though, to get pieces that are at least twelve inches long in one direction, because a stable wall needs to be at least that thick. It seems to be getting harder to find good recyclable material because contractors often load it directly into dumpsters. Putting out the word to all your neighbors and friends often pays off, or talk to contractors you see doing demolition. They may agree (perhaps for a small



*Steps from salvaged saw-cut curb pieces will be faced with flagstone veneer*

gratuity) to bring material to you, but you will want to sort out as much unusable small rubble as possible beforehand. I've also occasionally gotten material advertised on Craigslist. It's important to assemble enough material to have a good selection before you start, but ideally you also want to replenish your stockpile during the course of the project because there is an unavoidable tendency to use all the best pieces first, leaving you with lots of problematic chunks towards the end.

## Compact the base and give the wall a batter

Depending on your soil and the steepness of the slope you are working with, digging down into undisturbed soil a few courses deep and compacting the soil with a hand tamper will be fine for a wall of up to about four feet high. You must ensure, however, that the wall has sufficient batter—that is, a backward slant into the hill

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## Designing with Urbanite (from previous page)

so that gravity helps support the structure; figure about one to three inches of back slant per foot of height. Unlike a monolithic masonry wall, a dry-laid rubble wall does not impede the flow of water due to its many gaps between pieces and courses, and therefore it does not need to resist the hydrostatic pressure of groundwater backing up behind it. Over time there may be some settling, but because all the pieces can move independently, the wall will remain intact.



*Step and wall construction*

## Overlap the pieces and stagger the joints

This is where artistry meets craftsmanship. It's important that each piece sits solidly on the one below and that it fits reasonably closely to the one adjacent so that no single piece can slip out of place. A masonry chisel and mallet are your friends here—use them to knock off errant knobs or pebbles. This process can still be quite time consuming, especially if your material is irregular, so a way to cheat a bit is to put some dirt, sand, or even mortar (which to me is like admitting defeat) between layers to even things out. I rarely use a level to check my work: instead, I simply step back and just visually assess how it looks. If one course contains some long pieces, I will take the opportunity to use several smaller ones on the



*Overlapping pieces of concrete*

course above. You will always have more small pieces than big, so look for ways to utilize them. Generally, I save most of them for the last couple of top courses and use the widest, longest pieces at the bottom.

## Minimize the amount of retaining wall by sloping the grade above and/or below

Unless you are growing rice, the planting areas above or below a wall don't need to be level—in fact, they usually look better when they aren't. I think of topography like sculpture: the slope should have a



*Completed wall incorporating colored concrete pieces*

rhythm and flow that the plantings can then reinforce. A flat place brings the eye to a stop, and while this might be fine for a patio, it doesn't make for appealing plantings. To see this effect, take a look at photos of



*Aloe saponaria planted during construction*

the Grand Canyon: notice how vertical cliffs are separated by sloping segments of softer strata, and see how sometimes the cliffs disappear into the sloping areas. Take a cue from nature! In the same vein—pardon the pun—think about the rhythm of the walls themselves. Is there anything more boring than a series of equally spaced, (next page)

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*Be silent. Be still.  
Just watch everything come and go.  
This is the way of Nature.*

— Lao Tse

## Designing with Urbanite (from previous page)

straight-line walls? Broken concrete lends itself to gentle, undulating curves, so feel free to “sculpt” the terrain by allowing the walls to subtly burrow in and project out of an otherwise uniform slope.



Completed wall with sloping grade above

## A final thought

Like the act of creating all good stonework, constructing a wall out of concrete rubble is a slow and contemplative process—don’t plan on knocking it out in a few days. You’ll ultimately be rewarded by a work of art that gets more beautiful each year as your garden plants embrace it. There go your weekends!

**Chris Drayer, ASLA**, is a landscape architect who has completed several projects in Mission Hills. He was the principal designer of the Rancho la Puerta gardens where he led a tour for MHGC members. Photos courtesy of and copyrighted by Chris Drayer.

*Nature does not complete things. She is chaotic. Man must finish, and he does so by making a garden and building a wall.*  
— Robert Frost

## Day Trip Delight: Sherman Library and Gardens

by Elaine Wilson

I’m always on the lookout for day trips that take me to new places but get me home in time to feed my German Shepherds. When a friend suggested the Sherman Library and Gardens in Corona del Mar, it was a perfect destination for us to explore. Opened to the public in 1966, the Sherman Library and Gardens began life in 1951 as the Sherman Foundation created by Arnold D. Haskell, a man who dreamed of developing a cultural center. Slowly, Haskell bought up land until he owned a full city block measuring 2.2

acres, where the gardens and research library are located today.



Succulent garden Jan Blakeslee

After an easy ninety-minute drive north, my friend and I were greeted by delightful blooms and sculptures; upon further exploring, we found many little specialty gardens and species plantings—a stand-out was the towering camellia bursting with blooms against the west wall. There was also a cactus and succulent area, a large display shade garden, a rose garden, and a tropical conservatory. On my next trip, I’ll visit the non-circulating research library which has an extensive collection of Pacific Southwest material.

Sherman Gardens reminds me of a mini-Huntington, complete with a high tea offered the last Wednesday of each month by reservation only (call 949-673-2261). There is a lovely garden restaurant with innovative and tasty menu choices. Our last stop was the boutique-style gift shop which is worth your time to browse. After a full day of relaxing fun, we were still back in San Diego by 3:30.

**Elaine Wilson**, a California native living in Mission Hills for 42 years, has chaired MGHC committees including Special Events, Hospitality, Fundraising, and Garden Walk Docents. Photo courtesy of and copyrighted by Jan Blakeslee.

# The Vertical Garden

Text and Photos by Amelia B. Lima

## The Origin of Vertical Gardens

The first vertical gardens were created by nature when it propped epiphyte plants high up on branches—and then on buildings and telephone wires—in temperate and tropical regions of the world. Epiphytes derive their moisture and nutrients from the air and rain and sometimes from debris accumulating around the roots. The word “epiphytic” is derived from the Greek *epi* (meaning “upon”) and *phyton* (meaning “plant”). Because these plants do not need to have their roots in soil, they are often called “air plants.”

Not all epiphytes grow high in the air, however: there are some that grow upon other plants, while others are aquatic species. Some are native to temperate zones—mosses, liverworts, lichens, algae, and seaweed—while others are native to tropical regions—ferns, cacti, orchids, and bromeliads.

Another example of vertical gardens found in nature is the group of plants that attach themselves to the surface of rocks. These lithophytes feed off moss, nutrients in rainwater, litter, and even their own dead tissue. They tend to be found growing next to waterfalls or bodies of water such as lakes or oceans.



Lithophytes growing on stone



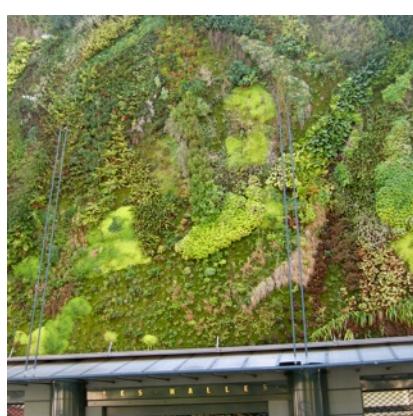
Bromeliad growing on tree

The word “lithophyte” has Greek roots as well: *litho* means “stone” and *phyte* means “plants.” Examples of lithophytes include several orchids, bromeliads, and pitcher plants.

## Vertical Gardens in Contemporary Culture

The first attempts to create man-made vertical gardens occurred in the seventeenth century when building facades were covered by trellises, thus allowing vines to grow up the structures; in this method, the plants’ roots were in soil at the base of the supporting structures.

In the twentieth century, French botanist Patrick Blanc created a system that attempted to replicate what he had observed while hiking through forests. He prepared a vertical, soilless surface upon which he arranged plants with similar water needs in an effort to replicate nature’s approach to vertical gardening. I first saw one of his walls mounted on the outside of a



Vertical garden designed by Patrick Blanc

parking structure during a visit to Avignon, France: one of Blanc’s green walls started at the second-floor level and spanned the entire width of the building. His system has proved to be very useful in modern cities where tall buildings with

large façades dominate the landscape and where there is often limited space for home gardens. My fascination with Blanc’s system, and the beauty of the installation, motivated me to try to find a location for a vertical garden in my own yard in San Diego.

## The Place of Vertical Gardens in Suburbia

Because many suburban side yards tend to be long and narrow and are often bordered by a wall or fence, vertical gardens would seem to be the perfect landscape project to embellish these frequently neglected areas. In an effort to find a location for my

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## The Vertical Garden (from previous page)



Vertical garden in side yard

first vertical garden project, I focused on my own east-facing side yard where an ordinary five-foot-tall concrete block wall sits along the property line. The dining room and kitchen windows overlook this area so it was a logical choice for a new focal point.

My intent was to create a vertical garden project that would be sustainable in San Diego's Mediterranean climate. The 260-square-foot garden features a combination of epiphytes and lithophytes growing—without soil—to create a Technicolor tapestry. The wall, supported by a galvanized steel structure set with concrete footing at a distance of one and a half feet away from the existing block wall, is covered by a layer of plywood and another layer of corrugated plastic. On top of the corrugated plastic surface, two panels of felt stretch over the entire structure so that plants can be inserted into small pockets cut into the

top layer of felt. The system adds fresh water for only three minutes, every four days; a tank at the wall's base collects and recirculates the runoff several times a day. Whenever fresh water is added, a water-soluble fertilizer solution is injected into the system. Gravel, which was used to finish the landscape, helps to conceal the water channel underneath. It was spread to a depth of three inches on the entire side yard as a mulch material.

The vertical garden system created by Patrick Blanc is not the only one on the market: there are several distinct systems available. Some utilize plastic cells to hold soil within which plants are set to grow; others utilize a hydroponic principle where plants are held in containers with hollow bottoms and the plants' roots

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### **The Vertical Garden (from previous page)**

are periodically submersed in a fertilizer solution. All vertical garden systems described above can be attached to buildings or walls, and they are always set up to ensure that no moisture is allowed to permeate into the structure itself. In my opinion, when comparing all the different systems now in existence, the one created by Blanc most resembles nature's way of creating vertical gardens.

No matter what technique is used, vertical wall systems are a good example of what can be created by observing and learning from nature.

**Amelia B. Lima** is a landscape designer based in San Diego. Photos courtesy of and copyrighted by Amelia B. Lima.

## **From Public Gardens to Guerrilla Action**

*Text and Photos by Jeff Koch*

Gardens—both ancient and contemporary—serve as descriptions of a society's cultural makeup. Looking back in history, one of the Seven Wonders of the World was the Hanging Gardens of Babylon commissioned by Nebuchadnezzar II in about 530 BCE in what is now Iraq. Trees and shrubs were planted on structures surrounding the palace and its enclave—a n engineering innovation in landscaping design—to mimic the spirit of a forest landscape in order to please Nebuchadnezzar's wife (although there is no record of her response, I'd imagine she was delighted). As a grand example of public gardens, the Hanging Gardens may be viewed as an inspiration for the current phenomenon known as guerrilla gardening—a worldwide movement to reclaim planting in the public landscape.



Irrigation systems were used to water the plants on the terraces. The gardens were a symbol of power and wealth for the Babylonian Empire.

Philanthropists, community groups, and private professionals have facilitated many permanent and temporary public garden spaces. A well-known example is *The Gates*, an art piece installed in New

York's Central Park by artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude. Millions of people visited the park and admired their work but behind-the-scenes, the public development process was constrained by engineering standards, red tape, and delays. In recent years, renegade guerrilla gardeners have chosen to bypass the official approvals and permits process to cultivate gardens on the concrete, steel, and asphalt that constitute urban real estate and public right-of-ways.

Historically, the need for public land grew as cities struggled with the Goliath of industrial progress. Parks became the answer. During the Industrial Revolution affluent city dwellers sought respite from the gritty urban environment with weekly picnics in the only oases of green space available—cemeteries. This search for public green spaces led to the development of neighborhood parks (our own Pioneer Park is a thumbnail-sized example). Large-scale permanent projects such as Central Park, or the many temporary world expositions such as Balboa Park's Panama-California Exposition, prompted city planners to begin including parks as the central core for residential and commercial areas.

Entire neighborhoods have embraced guerrilla gardening. San Francisco has a well-organized whole-neighborhood guerrilla gardening movement. Dallas has a Better Block group which was able to turn a nonfunctioning retail block into a neighborhood designed for pedestrians with street lamps, cafe tables, planters, and trees. Last year, an International Sunflower Guerrilla Gardening Day took place: on May 1, 2010 more than 3,000 people around the globe pledged to plant sunflower seeds in their neighborhoods.



*Sunflower Guerrilla Gardening Day*

I joined the movement and became a guerrilla gardener on Saturday, April 24, 2010 when my partner and I decided to plant the asphalt median on California Street at San Diego Avenue. Although the City's landscape ordinance specifies

*(next page)*

## From Public Gardens... (from previous page)

plantings, engineering plans for finishing the median surface called for asphalt. Someone had already planted a few things so we were ready to finish the job. Two neighbors joined us to remove the asphalt and as we worked, most cars driving by gave us a thumbs-up. People offered us money even though we were planting with cuttings; we used the funds for bark mulch. A month later, a neighbor left a thank-you card and balloon attached to the



Guerrilla garden on asphalt median

median's euphorbia, and a local news station did a story on our illegally planted median (for a link to the Channel 10 News report, visit my blog jeffreygeorge at <http://stirtheground.com> or go directly to <http://www.10news.com/news/23298595/detail.html>).

Of course, guerrilla gardening is not without its faults. Besides the obvious reason—it is illegal to plant on another's land without permission—a guerrilla garden can become an eyesore in its own right. If a plant is not tough, it won't survive the lack of maintenance, while some hardy exotic plant material can be tough enough to become invasive: a prime example is the nasturtium that has taken over our canyons. Improper guerrilla planting on sensitive or native habitat can set back ecological efforts for years.

Guerrilla gardening may not produce the world's Eighth Wonder, but it is a significant step towards reclaiming the aesthetics of our living environment. I am contemplating my next planting!

**Jeff Koch**, a landscape architect with a passion for public gardening, has lived in Mission Hills for 16 years and is MHGC Projects Committee Chair. Photos courtesy of and copyrighted by Jeff Koch. The engraving of the Hanging Gardens is by 16th century artist Martin van Heemskerck.



*We are the leaves of one branch,  
the drops of one sea, the flowers  
of one garden.*

—J. B. Lacordaire

## Mission Hills Garden Walk 2011

by Martha Pehl

Another hugely successful Mission Hills Garden Walk has come and gone! It was a great day to take "A Stroll Down Sunset Boulevard" and enjoy exploring the variety of gardens whose owners had worked hard to prepare them over the past few months—and the weather couldn't have been more perfect to take a close-up look. We are happy to report that the Garden Walk raised approximately \$29,000 which will help fund the many wonderful causes and organizations our club supports, including beautifying our own neighborhood and educating garden enthusiasts.



Pat Harrison Photographic Art

We are sincerely grateful to the homeowners in our neighborhood who opened their gardens for a public viewing. We understand it can be a bit overwhelming to welcome thousands of strangers into your yard to admire, investigate—and let's be honest, snoop around a bit—but the event also inspires homeowners to make changes and improvements in their gardens which, in turn, will inspire those who visit.

Co-chair Jim Bishop and I spent many a day planning, organizing, making lists, and coordinating all the details of the thirteenth annual Garden Walk but we did not do it alone—we had the help of club members who so kindly gave their time to make this event happen. Some of the names may seem familiar because they have helped so many times before. Our thanks to: Pepper Sutton (ticket sales); Don Rudesill, Mary Shelley, and Terri Skwarlo (signage); Bev Fritschner, Patti Mahoney, and Connie Jennings (ad sales); Sherri Schottlaender (booklet editing);

(next page)

## Garden Walk (from previous page)

Meredith French (publicity); Pat Harrison (photography); Scott Borden and his brother-in-law Ed (general “running around”); and of course, the Palafox family, for all that they do to stay involved and help make this event successful year after year.

I also want to thank Marien Kissling for beginning the work on the Garden Walk this year; I was very sad that she could not continue because she and I have worked together many times before and have always had a great time. I missed you, Marien!

We also had a few club members take on a committee position for the first time this year, which is what it will take to continue the success of this crucial annual

fundraiser. Thanks to Barbara Kocmuk (docent recruitment and organization); Sandra Scherf (food vendor organization); and Eugenia Kuttler (artist/musician coordination). I also want to thank all of the docents who volunteered to watch over the gardens, direct visitors, and provide information.



*Pat Harrison Photographic Art*



*Pat Harrison Photographic Art*

So it truly takes a village—or should I say a club—not just a few head honchos, to put together such a complex event. It is our hope that there are many more Mission Hills Garden Club members who will step up and get involved with next year’s Garden Walk. It is such a great feeling to see this annual fundraiser turn

out so well—and I know it will continue to be a success in the years to come.

**Martha Pehl**, Co-Chair of the 2011 Mission Hills Garden Walk and currently MHGC Hospitality Chair, is the supervisor of a retail store supporting breastfeeding at Sharp Mary Birch Hospital for Women and Newborns. Photos courtesy of and copyrighted by Pat Harrison Photographic Art.

## Call the Master Gardener Hotline



**(858) 694-2860**

**Monday–Friday**

**9am–3pm**

...for answers to home gardening  
and pest control questions.

It's FREE!

## The 2011 San Diego Garlic Experiment

*Text and Photos by Michael Blood*

“What do you put garlic in?” I asked. She replied, “In beans, pasta, with meats, soups—everything I cook except desserts or other sugar-based items.” And so I married her. My wife even likes to bake whole bulbs (the cluster of cloves) lightly covered in olive oil until they are soft and easily spread, usually on French bread or crackers. While I like to eat it that way, what really sends me is the raw taste of garlic.

My wife is a gourmet cook and we love garlic in EVERYTHING. We once went to the Gilroy Garlic Festival, held in the hottest part of the summer when it was well over 110 degrees—not our idea of fun, but we did pick up an entire case of garlic for \$7. We have also eaten several times at the Stinking Rose restaurant in Los Angeles, famous for serving all manner of garlic-based and garlic-laced dishes.

*(next page)*

## Garlic Experiment (from previous page)

Last winter a friend of mine from Canada sent us some hardneck garlic he grows up there. My wife and I were both highly impressed with this variety's superiority over the California softneck garlic in every way, from tang to breadth of flavor to the superb long-lasting qualities of the dried slices. I arranged a significant trade with him that would assure us yearly supplies for life: he collects meteorites and I am a dealer; I had one he dearly wanted but could never afford. He was delighted to get the meteorite, and I was delighted to ensure that I would have some of that "gourmet garlic" (hardneck garlic) every year whether I was able to grow it in San Diego or not.

He sent us whole cloves, dried thin slices, and powder, all of the finest quality we had ever tasted. I decided I had to find out more about hardneck garlic, so I purchased the two primary resources on garlic, *The Complete Book of Garlic* by Ted Jordan Meredith ([www.timberpress.com](http://www.timberpress.com)) as well as *Growing Great Garlic* by Ron Engeland ([www.filareefarm.com](http://www.filareefarm.com)). Below is a brief overview of the information found in these books—my hope is that it will inspire you to start growing this outstanding garlic.

First, it should be noted there are numerous varieties of garlic. I looked up several lists in the above texts as well as online: one source listed 83 varieties, most of which did not overlap other lists. In other words, there are so many varieties that one would be hard pressed to build a comprehensive list, let alone grow each variety.

The most important differentiation is the split between "hardneck" and "softneck" garlic. "Hardneck" is commonly grown in California, but good luck finding stock differentiating "California Early" and "California Late" which, as the names indicate, have differing maturation times that impact storage time. The famous "Gilroy garlic" is one or both of these varieties.

The virtues of "softneck" are as follows: they will grow in warm winters and hot summers and also have exceptional storage capacity for six to eight months (although I have stored softneck cloves from one season to the next). Their weakness? As good as they

are, they lack the intensity and depth of flavor of the hardnecks. My wife and I had always loved the Gilroy garlic, but once we tasted hardneck garlic, we couldn't be without it. Other garlic freaks agree.



*Garlic plants sprouting*



*Garlic crop*

Although both the literature on garlic and my friend up north were skeptical that I would be able to grow hardneck garlic in San Diego, I was determined to succeed. I took half the cloves from my friend's shipment (quite a sacrifice not to eat them) and kept them in a paper bag in the refrigerator for two or three months. I then planted them in alternating rows with cloves of

California softneck varieties, thus insuring that I would at least get half a planting's worth. I was delighted to see that both varieties produced a full plant for each and every clove planted!

Planting is simple: work the soil as with any crop, including plenty of compost (available free at the Miramar Landfill off Highway 52). Draw a line about two inches deep so that the top of the clove will be covered with, at most, one inch of soil. Apply mulch and keep the area moist. Primary planting time is theoretically in the fall, but I was late and didn't get my crop in until the beginning of February, and it's doing fine (of course, we've had a uniquely cool and wet winter).

In addition to the cloves of garlic, there are the delightful bulbils that form later in the flowering top of the garlic. These are practically never available except in the most expensive specialty restaurants located near a garlic grower—or on the table of a grower—as they have a far smaller yield and are often used to plant next year's crop. They are, I am told, the very best of the best.

The entire crop of garlic should be allowed to grow until the plants completely yellow and droop in the fall. There should be no sign of life in the tops before they are harvested. Carefully pull the plants from the

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## **Garlic Experiment (from previous page)**

ground, shake them clean, and then braid the strands before storing them at low temperatures until you're ready to eat the garlic.

As with all crops, the best results come when they are rotated in the garden. I have also found that most crops do well if a very generous layer of compost is added every year. This year's crop will be partially used to plant next year's.

Regardless of how well this crop does, information I have gleaned leads me to believe that one can never count on a crop of hardneck garlic in this climate. However, I am also told that using cloves from a successful crop in this area should increase how adaptive (and successful) next year's crop will be.

If you have questions (or any information you would like to share), please contact me: [mlblood@cox.net](mailto:mlblood@cox.net).

**Michael Blood** is a connoisseur of meteorites and garlic. Photos courtesy of and copyrighted by Michael Blood.

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## **Southern California Gardens**

[Conejo Valley Botanical Garden](#)

[Descanso Gardens](#)

[Earl Burns Miller Japanese Garden](#)

[Fullerton Arboretum](#)

[The Huntington Botanical Gardens](#)

[Japanese Friendship Garden of San Diego](#)

[The Living Desert](#)

[LA County Arboretum & Botanic Garden](#)

[Lotusland](#)

[Markham Regional Arboretum](#)

[Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden](#)

[San Diego Botanic Garden](#)

[The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden](#)

[Sherman Library & Gardens](#)

[Theodore Payne Wildflower Gardens](#)

[Water Conservation Garden at Cuyamaca College](#)

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*If you've never experienced the joy of accomplishing more than you can imagine, plant a garden.*

— Robert Braul

## **The SDSU Greenhouse: A Hidden Gem**

*Text and Photos by Samantha Afetian*

Deep within the confines of San Diego State University is a well-kept secret: a spectacular and unique greenhouse that is a hidden treasure of the university. Housing many botanic and genetic experiments, the SDSU greenhouse is utilized mostly for teaching but because it showcases more than 400 species of plants from around the world, the greenhouse also displays an astonishing collection of rare and unusual specimens—a visit to see these plants is a unique experience for any garden enthusiast.

The greenhouse was founded for teaching purposes in the 1960s by SDSU's botany department, which was later absorbed into the biology department. The biology department now uses the greenhouse to showcase the depth of diversity that can be found in different plant families. Towards this teaching goal, the greenhouse has acquired a collection of well-known plants such as coffee, cocoa, hops, and tobacco, as well as some of the most unique plants on the planet.



*Venus flytraps*

In fact, the SDSU greenhouse is home to a wide variety of carnivorous plants, including *Dionaea muscipula* (Venus flytraps) and species of *Drosera* (sundews), *Nepenthes* (monkey cups), *Pinguicula* (butterworts), and *Sarracenia* (pitcher plants); these plants are all especially fascinating because of their evolutionary adaptations. Many carnivorous plants live in habitats in which it is difficult for their roots to obtain nutrients from the soil. Over centuries, these plants have adapted in order to obtain essential nutrients from insects instead.

*Nepenthes* Holland hybrids are one such example found in the SDSU greenhouse. The structure of this

*(next page)*

## The SDSU Greenhouse (from previous page)

plant is designed to attract and trap insects by a combination of color, nectar, and scent. When insects crawl into it—curious to see if more nectar is inside the plant—they are unable to get out due to a waxy substance that makes the plant slippery. There is fluid at the bottom of the pitcher that drowns the insect. Its body is then slowly broken down by the pitcher plant's digestive enzymes within the fluid. The resulting nutrients are absorbed by the plant.



*Pitcher plants*

In another display of plant adaptation, the greenhouse contains different kinds of carrion flowers. While

some flowers are colorful and sweet-smelling, these flowers often come in dull colors and carry the scent of rotting flesh or feces. That is not to say they aren't beautiful—some of them are breathtaking—but this isn't the type of flower



*Carrion flower*

that you would want to put by your bedroom window. The stench of the carrion flowers attracts flies, which ultimately pollinate the plant.

The greenhouse also contains a large variety of beautiful orchids, including the vanilla orchid. A valuable plant, vanilla is also extremely temperamental: the temperature in which the plant is kept can never fluctuate more than ten degrees or it will not flower; in addition, it can also only be pollinated during specific hours in the day. For these reasons, the vanilla orchid in the SDSU greenhouse has not flowered for thirty years. The greenhouse does,



*Vanilla orchid (vine on the wall)*

however, hold a plant that has been growing for about thirty years: a staghorn fern. Staghorn ferns are air plants, meaning they do not require soil or much water—they receive all of their nutrients from the air. As their leaves die, they mold to the plant, making the fern larger. Fully matured, staghorn ferns can grow to be up to a meter long.

These are just a few of the wide variety of plants that the SDSU greenhouse has to offer. The greenhouse,



*Staghorn fern*

located between the Life Science North and South buildings on the SDSU campus, is open Monday through Friday from 9:00am until 11:00am.

To make an appointment for a free tour, please contact the SDSU Greenhouse technician, Bob Mangan: [bmangan@sciences.sdsu.edu](mailto:bmangan@sciences.sdsu.edu).

**Samantha Afetian**, a public relations junior at SDSU, is a writer for the SDSU News Center. Photos courtesy of and copyrighted by Samantha Afetian.



*My garden is always moving and changing, in tune with the world around it, and I get to both witness this endless mutability and grow along with it.*

— Ken Druse

# San Diego Urban Tree Club

by Fausto Palafox

San Diego has lost more than 300,000 trees from its street medians and public spaces! If those missing trees were replaced, they could capture as much as 6 million gallons of rainwater each year at maturity, scrub 15,000 tons of carbon dioxide from the air per year, and save us heating and cooling costs.

With this in mind, the San Diego Urban Tree Club was born thanks to MHGC members Carol “Drive a Car—Plant a Tree” Wilson who implemented the idea; Barbara Kocmura, who set the goal of planting 300,000 trees in San Diego over the next five years; and Fausto Palafox, an urban forest expert. To expand our urban



Koelreuteria bipinnata (Chinese flame tree)

Meredith French

forest canopy the San Diego Urban Tree Club will focus on educating communities how to organize tree-planting events; secure trees, supplies, and funds; and plant and maintain trees. The club will seek funds from private sources, grants, and fundraisers and offer support to organizations promoting urban forestry.

The San Diego Tree Club is planting a legacy and we need your help. Please contact: Barbara Kocmura [bkocmura@janezgroup.com](mailto:bkocmura@janezgroup.com), Carol Wilson [cwilson12@cox.net](mailto:cwilson12@cox.net), and Fausto Palafox [faustopalafax@hotmail.com](mailto:faustopalafax@hotmail.com). Information about the San Diego Urban Tree Club is on the MHGC website: <http://www.missionhillsgardenclub.org>.

**Fausto Palafox** is the current President of MHGC and one of its original founders. He owns Mission Hills Nursery, teaches at Cuyamaca College in the Ornamental Horticulture Department, and serves on the San Diego Forest Advisory Board and the California Urban Forestry Council (state level). Photo courtesy of and copyrighted by Meredith French.

# Palomar District News

## Summer Quarter—MHGC Awards!

The Palomar District of California Garden Clubs, Inc., of which we are a member, held its Summer Board Meeting in June. Hosted by Vista Garden Club, the meeting was called to order by our new director, George Speer.

Items on the agenda included the upcoming Environmental Education Forum. To find out more about CGCI programs and projects, visit <http://californiagardenclubs.com/content/programs-projects>.

Following the business and committee reports, the CGCI State Level Awards were announced. Among those, our very own Mission Hills Garden Club won awards in four categories: *Published Articles by Individuals*, *Habitat Garden Creation*, *Photography* (two categories).

The Mission Hills Garden Club also received *The Sweepstakes Award* by California Garden Clubs, Inc. because our club had the highest number of submissions/wins—four first place awards!! Thank you, Meredith French, for your contributions to make this possible. Our last big win was in 2009 with our State Level Award for *Greatest Percent Membership Increase* among clubs with over 100 members.

## Cheers to Our Volunteers!

by Carol Costarakis

The setting was a beautiful Mission Hills home and garden. The spring weather was perfect. The outstanding food was delicious, perfectly chilled sparkling champagne and tangy sangria were served, and the repast was topped by irresistible desserts. But the most important component was our marvelous volunteers, the lovely folks whose commitment, time, and energy make the Mission Hills Garden Club thrive and grow. We had a grand time! Perhaps a new Garden Club tradition has taken root?

**Carol Costarakis**, an interior designer and artist, served as MHGC Special Events Chair this past year.

# The Great Bee Rescue: The Positives of Live Bee Removal

Text and Photos by Meredith French

I happen to be one of those strange people who value bees and don't see them as Public Enemy #1. When our home of many years was for sale, and escrow was contingent on removing the bee family living in an unused chimney, I began to investigate how I was going to get them out alive.



After talking with so-called live removal bee *exterminators*, I became suspicious. It turns out that the live removal is by way of very powerful vacuums and few insects survive the ordeal. So now what? I contacted the SD Beekeeping Society and voilà! Here were beekeepers who used live removal: <http://www.sandiegobeekeepingociety.com/swarm-list.php>.

This is a dedicated and informed group; three people were interested in removing my bees to a temporary hive. I had really warm feelings about all of them, but I chose the person who could do the job before my escrow deadline: Veronica Bunas from Bee Haven Bee Rescue (619-358-3523 or [veronicabunas@yahoo.com](mailto:veronicabunas@yahoo.com)).

On the big day, rain was forecast which meant more of the bees would be at home rather than out working; removing the comb, eggs, and queen to the new hive was going to be much more difficult—and gaining access to the chimney without demolishing it was the *other* challenge. I contacted our master craftsman, Francisco, and with some serious arm twisting and the promise of a bee suit, he agreed to carefully pry off the tiles for the bee removers. I didn't tell him about the rain forecast.

Everyone arrived ahead of time and began their duties. We were all pretty excited (with the possible exception of Francisco). Beekeepers Veronica and Alyssa prepared the comb holders for the new hive, began making smoke, and then donned their bee suits.

The kindling was getting wetter by the minute, but the smoke gave us peace of mind that the bees would settle down soon. The keepers also allayed our fears about Africanized bees: interbreeding over many years has restored tameness to the bee populations.

Now it was time to get the temporary hive up on the roof and level it. As a precaution, the area was smoked before Francisco went up to dismantle the chimney area where we knew the hive to be. No angry swarming occurred so, with the hive exposed, the beekeepers began to remove the comb. They used knives to separate long extensions of comb, placing each section in the new hive (along with accompanying bees). At last the egg "room" was found and also moved to the new hive. The queen was not located, but she may have escaped notice—because new queens are often introduced into hives like this, it was not of great concern. With the box filled to capacity with honeycomb, the rest was bagged and handed down the ladder. We all had to have a taste—or mouthful—or two. It was wonderful, with a full flavor hinting of eucalyptus.



Removing the first comb

Two hours later the job was done and the rain really began in earnest. An almond-scented spray—which bees detest—was applied to the old site, the chimney was covered with a heavy tarp, and the edges sealed. Any bees that tried returning would not be able to get back into the old site and would instinctively find the new hive by following their noses (yes, bees *do* have a good sense of smell)!



Mission accomplished



The last of it

Seven days later, the new hive was moved to an organic nursery where it will remain until we are settled in our own new home. Yes, they are going to be our guests again, as part of a new habitat garden planned for the property—hopefully they will remain in the hive box rather than selecting a chimney or attic.

**Meredith French** is a Master Gardener and professional photographer. Photos courtesy of and copyrighted by Meredith French.



## MHGC MISSION STATEMENT

The Mission Hills Garden Club was created to bring together friends and neighbors, share our knowledge and love of gardening, and support and educate others in order to make our community a more beautiful place to live.

### MISSION HILLS GARDEN CLUB COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

COMMITTEE	RESPONSIBILITIES
<b>COMMUNICATIONS</b> Linda Stanley <a href="mailto:divinevine@aol.com">divinevine@aol.com</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>E-News &amp; Monthly Meeting Postcards</li><li>Quarterly Newsletter</li><li>Website</li><li>Liaison to other community groups</li></ul>
<b>EDUCATION</b> Mary Shelley <a href="mailto:rubyhart17@gmail.com">rubyhart17@gmail.com</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Grants, Internships, Scholarships</li><li>Reports &amp; Record-keeping</li><li>Encourage recipients to join in on club events</li><li>Ask recipients to present a program at a meeting</li></ul>
<b>HOSPITALITY</b> Martha Pehl <a href="mailto:martha.pehl@sharp.com">martha.pehl@sharp.com</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Meeting logistics</li><li>Meeting refreshments</li><li>Greet members</li><li>Encourage members to participate in activities</li></ul>
<b>MEMBERSHIP</b> Lee Skillman <a href="mailto:lee.skillman@ml.com">lee.skillman@ml.com</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Recruitment</li><li>Record-keeping</li><li>Greet members</li><li>Membership renewals</li></ul>
<b>COMMUNITY PROJECTS</b> Jeff Koch <a href="mailto:jeffgkoch@mac.com">jeffgkoch@mac.com</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Street Trees: plant trees in parkway areas</li><li>Planter Boxes: Goldfinch &amp; Washington Streets</li><li>Petals for Patriots</li><li>Hanging Baskets: Business District</li><li>SD River Park: provide picnic tables &amp; signage</li><li>Concerts in the Park</li><li>Pioneer Park: plant a large tree as focal point</li></ul>
<b>SPECIAL EVENTS</b> Wally Hartwell <a href="mailto:metreco@pacbell.net">metreco@pacbell.net</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Coffee/Wine in the Garden</li><li>Craft Events</li><li>Field Trips</li><li>Member Appreciation Party</li></ul>