



DAVID CAMPICHE PHOTOS

Portland property of Hank Langfus.



A koi pond in Portland.

CLOSE TO HOME

For the love of gardens

By DAVID CAMPICHE
FOR COAST WEEKEND

Much of our great wilderness has been despoiled. A pioneer must be content with bits and pieces of primal forests and free-rushing rivers, the shadows of what was, in older times, an environment that remained stimulating and mysterious.

As one might learn from the diaries of Lewis and Clark or early environmentalists such as John Muir, primal dangers often lurked in the deep abiding green, as did the opportunity for inspiration. Nowadays, one may choose another option.

Wander into the backyard and lay a garden. Sculpt a green and nurturing environment. Contentment comes in many shapes and sizes. The best rise like the plants themselves and evolve into buds of beauty.

Last month the Long Beach Peninsula offered another tour of some of the best gardens in the area, an event called “Music in the Gardens.”

Seems as if I’ve always been a bit too busy with this and that. With at least a partial retirement facing me, my family — led by my wife, Laurie Anderson, and my son Jed Campiche — began to plan a garden, both with flowers and a smaller plot with vegetables. Susan McCash — the head gardener at the Shelburne Inn, our beloved property of 40 years — helped with dedication and skill.

To see is to believe

But when I walked through the six properties on the garden tour, I realized that I was playing softball in the minor leagues. I simply had to stop and marvel.

Let’s focus on just one, a property of several acres owned and manicured by Steve McCormick and John Stephens.

These gentlemen are green-thumb pros, and their garden is diverse, exceptional and lovely. They have also dedicated thousands of hours to their passion.

Steve talks of the pleasures of planting seeds and watching “what they do.” These are men with scholarly and exploratory personalities. They enjoy challenges.

John and Steve are deeply involved in the American Rhododendron Society. Their property unfolds like the blossoms on their varieties of Rhodies, plants, trees and flowers (another 1,500 or so), a display borrowed from around the world.

This includes a bridle vale of indigenous plants they have cultured and sustained. And one giant redwood to boot.

The garden of these two men tumbles through a stand of Sitka Spruce, weaves along the shoreline and up their driveway, a collage of colors and serpentine arrangements, offering an invitation to what a visitor perceives as a path into rich fertile territory. Manicured trails meander through it. And wonderful shrubs, more than I am capable of listing.

Those plants, evergreen trees and a vast array of human and God’s handiworks,

enhance the shaded and delicate light that swoons over Willapa Bay. To see is to believe.

‘Natural high’

What is it about a fine garden? Is this an art or a hobby? Is gardening in the big leagues an obsession or a *raison d’être*, a passion unleashed? And remember, we can travel a simpler path; we can become followers of an indigenous landscape, followers of the Tao of nature. Or, like Steve and John, we can combine both and double our pleasure.

GARDENS ARE SIMPLY A CANVAS. FRUITING WITH BLOSSOMS OF COLOR, THEY INFATUATE. OF COURSE, VEGETABLE GARDENS CAN ALSO SUSTAIN THE HEART, BODY AND SOUL.

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