

San Diego Floral Association's 2013 Historic Garden Tour

Eastern Prospects: Gardens of Burlingame, North Park & South Park

By Nancy Carol Carter

Neighborhoods east of Balboa Park provide a different perspective on our city and on the park itself. Eight gardens in these charming and historic areas will be open to visitors on May 18 during San Diego Floral Association's annual "garden tour with a difference."

Every ticket holder will receive one of the Floral Association's bright red tote bags. Vendors in a garden marketplace on the day of the tour will offer arts and crafts and a new Jim Zemcik geranium, 'Linda Anne', will be sold for the first time during this tour.

New Life in Historic Neighborhoods

Earliest development in Burlingame, North Park and South Park began after San Diego announced plans for the 1915 Panama-California Exposition, but the three areas didn't grow into robust neighborhoods until after electricity and a reliable water supply came there. Population density increased steadily in the 1920s, '30s, and '40s. For several years, these neighborhoods have demonstrated an energetic revitalization. Residents take pride in their gardens and in the eclectic neighborhood architecture. Streets are lined with expertly renovated homes in craftsman, Tutor revival, Spanish revival, Prairie and mission styles.

Here's a preview of each area.

Burlingame - One garden on the tour surrounds a handsome redwood home built 100 years ago in the style of a Swiss chalet. It was the first home in what is now the Burlingame Historic District, distinguished by rose-colored sidewalks and curvilinear streets. Real estate speculators George Buxton and Joseph McFadden created this jewel box of a neighborhood located within the boundaries of North Park. Each of the 170 homes in the historic district is unique and architecturally appealing. The area is considered a prime example of single-family subdivision development in years before World I through to the mid-1940s.

North Park - Initially the large mesa east of Balboa Park was an agricultural community with multi-acre citrus orchards.

Low rainfall and lack of water doomed farming in the area just as streetcar connections encouraged the subdividing of farms for home construction. A streetcar reached North Park in 1890, prompting some residential development, but it was the University Avenue line in 1907 and the 30th Street line in 1911 that changed the area's history. More housing followed the business development of these transportation corridors. By 1924, North Park was the fastest growing district in San Diego.

South Park - Some locals have been slow to acknowledge its distinctiveness, but South Park has become known as a separate neighborhood situated between North Park and Golden Hill. Its idiosyncratic small business district continues to add eateries, craft beer production, art stores and galleries along with enterprises serving the practical needs of residents. An extension of streetcar service around 1905 prompted the first development in the area and the building for Firehouse 9, constructed in 1912, still stands. As planning for the 1915 Panama-California Exposition got underway, transportation was enhanced and more residential building followed, along with the construction of apartment buildings and bungalow courts. Some of San Diego's best known early architects are represented in this walkable neighborhood.



Tutor revival is one of the architectural styles represented in the neighborhoods of the garden tour.

While in the Neighborhood . . . More Sights to Enjoy

The variety of architectural styles and an ever growing number of sensitive renovations make driving through these neighborhoods a visual treat. Watch for history plaques on houses. Many homes have obtained San Diego Mills Act historic designation. Research recently authenticated a previously unknown Richard Requa home in North Park. (It will be identified in the garden tour guidebook). Requa was an expert on Moorish-influenced Spanish architecture who left an enduring mark on the gardens and buildings of Balboa Park when serving as Master Architect for the 1935 California Pacific International Exposition.

Golden Hill Park is a section of Balboa Park developed by the wealthy San Diegans living in dignified Victorian homes dotting the steep hills immediately east of downtown San Diego. A circular drive through the mature trees in this corner of the park offers skyline views and overlooks the verdant descendant of San Diego's first golf course, built in Balboa Park and sporting oiled dirt "greens." Nearby, a hidden gem of Golden Hill Park has fallen on hard times - a rustic Arts and Crafts fountain designed in 1907 by architect Henry Lord Gay. Tucked into a hillock, the rock steps and curved fountain still hint at its former allure, despite the profound neglect that has dried its flowing water and eliminated benches that once offered quiet repose to park visitors.

Bird Park is a relatively newly developed area at the extreme northeast corner of Balboa Park. It offers a children's playground and picnic area and is the site of summer concerts. Morley Field, just down the hill, is better known but many San Diegans are unaware of the extensive recreational facilities it offers.



Photo: Rachel Conib

While on the tour, enjoy views of downtown San Diego from vantage points east of Balboa Park.

Garden tour visitors may find themselves returning to enjoy the swimming pool, tennis courts, senior center, playgrounds, picnic areas, archery range, ball fields, bocce courts, and bicycle-racing velodrome—all part of the area named after San Diego's first superintendent of public parks, John G. Morley.

Bookending the garden tour area are the lively and newly fashionable business districts of North Park and South Park, both of which offer a variety of good eats and shopping. While on tour enjoy the view—the "Eastern Prospect" looking over Balboa Park and downtown San Diego.



Garden Tour Essentials



DATE: Saturday, May 18, 2013

TIME: 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

TICKETS: \$20 advance; \$25 day of tour.

Purchase tickets online at www.sdfloal.org.

Tickets also are for sale at Green Gardens in Pacific Beach, Kniffing's Discount Nurseries in El Cajon; Mission Hills Nursery in San Diego; Walter Andersen Nursery in San Diego and Poway; Water Conservation Garden in El Cajon and Weidner's Gardens in Encinitas.

TOUR MAP & GUIDEBOOK; TOUR-DAY TICKET PURCHASE; WILL CALL:

3200 block of 28th Street, near Morley Field (between Redwood and Upas Streets).

Maps available from 10:00 a.m. on May 18.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Eight gardens in historic San Diego neighborhoods
- Free tote bag for ticketholders
- Boutique marketplace shopping
- Sale of 'Linda Anne', a new Jim Zemcik geranium
- City and park views from an "Eastern Prospect"

Walk Through History: 2013 Garden Tour Stops

Profiles by Nancy Carol Carter; Photos by Rachel Cobb



Burlingame Pioneer

One of the most ardent proponents of Spanish Colonial architecture, Carlton Monroe Winslow, influenced the style of the 1915 Panama-California Exposition in Balboa Park. But for his first professional commission in San Diego in 1913, he built a very different kind of structure. This house – one of three that Winslow, designed for the relatively empty area of Burlingame – was part of an effort to attract the attention of Exposition visitors and spark development east of Balboa Park.

The entrance to the home is unconventional, located on the side of the house instead of facing the street. This design element resulted in an alteration that significantly enhances the garden and its uses. A privacy fence was built parallel to the street at the front of the house, creating a protected outdoor room that is a natural extension of the generous porch at the main entrance. Brick pavers set this area apart from the lawn and absorb heat, creating a microclimate within the sheltered area. A small pond is a focal point among a wide variety of thriving plants, including some favorites like ‘Cecile Brunner’ rose.

The owner has many historical records on the house and old letters written about the garden. Visitors will see a canyon view from a rear deck and may peek in at the imaginative game room, formerly the garage.



Urban Edge of the Wild

From the distinctive pink sidewalk, visitors are drawn to a gently flowing fountain clad in aqua and golden tiles and set into the front wall of this Spanish revival home. A steep canyon falls away from this street, restricting level building space and the size of front gardens, but behind the house, a roomy green sanctuary beckons. The “bones” of a terraced canyon garden were excavated and shaped over 15 years by the owners into plant-rich, naturalistic outdoor rooms. All are made more striking by a borrowed view of tall trees stretching up from an untamed corner of Balboa Park.

“On the edge of the wild,” a comfortable tone is set by paired Adirondack chairs, a wooden swing swaying from the limbs of a stately tree, and circuitous paths and stairs that encourage further exploration. Found art injects playfulness into the garden and every visitor stops to consider the predicament of a small boat, complete with fishing nets, set adrift in a rocky dry creek. Plants are many and varied, with an area of cool gray foliage, a boisterous ‘San Diego Red’ bougainvillea, a sunny corner of native plants and many shade lovers beneath the canopy of a mature pittosporum and a large chinaberry tree.



Canyon Playground

Gardening challenges confronted the young family who bought this flat-roofed modernist home with Spanish flair. The back yard quickly falls off into a steep canyon shared with hawks, owls and other wildlife. Large eucalyptus, pine and pepper trees shade much of the space. The owners set to work to create a secure play space for young family members and establish places for outdoor dining and an edibles garden.

In just three years, hard work, artistry and a generous serving of whimsy transformed the steep backyard into an enchanting garden and playground. Six terraces of varying size have different uses; for example, blueberries grow on one. The owners-designers made the practical decision to link the terraces with a long stairway on the fence line and partially sheltered by a curved arbor. In this garden, children’s art has no less prominence than an exquisite miniature teak house from Thailand. Don’t miss the toy trucks mounted on garden posts. Everywhere one looks, there is something growing, something beautiful and something amusing.

North Park Tropical

Is that Joan Crawford lounging by the pool? Rumor has it that the famous Hollywood star once was a regular visitor at this Spanish style, historically designated home with a view over Balboa Park and the city skyline. The current owners have given the house and garden an Oscar-worthy makeover, adding another home to their list of tasteful, architecturally respectful home renovations.

The pristine garden presented to the street is accented with well-maintained succulents and a very old sago palm (*Cycas revoluta*), imported from Japan and planted by the home's first owner. Fruit trees in a small orchard at one side of the house also date back to earlier times. The entire back garden area was redesigned by the present owners with friends and outdoor entertaining in mind. A generous use of hardscape is softened by large container plants and a tropical border along a graceful curve of the saltwater pool.

The owner visited the San Diego Zoo repeatedly to study tropical plants. His sketch of the tropical border design was sufficient to guide the landscaper's purchase and installation of plants. Decorative tile used in the pool provides a splash of color, while nearby three bronze muses from Spain stand a serene watch.



Here Comes the Sun

This 1916 property that overlooks the municipal golf course has a unique twist in its history that helped it win historic designation. It has belonged to the current owners since 2004. While maintaining the traditional street character of the house, the back of the building has been significantly altered to fully exploit the thin line between indoor and outdoor living in San Diego.

The kitchen and back garden, deliciously flooded by morning sun, are virtually one space, separated only by glass panels that can be folded completely out of the way. Comely tile hardscape is punctuated by decorative beds of ornamental plants and large raised vegetable plots. The garden area is spacious, with room to spare around the outdoor cooking facilities, hot tub and music room. A sunny south-facing patio looks out onto the garden's most dense and verdant plantings and overlooks a Mexican-style fountain favored by birds.





Flower Power

A walled area behind a distinctive Spanish Style house built in 1925 by the owner of Sunbeam Bakery encloses one woman's very personal garden. She loves her grandchildren and flowers. She rejects rigid gardening rules and instead plants masses of favorites and experiments with any new plants that catch her eye. A silvery pink 'Our Lady of Guadalupe' rose was added after the floribunda made its official debut and gained the blessing of an archbishop.

The garden is dominated by a large shade tree, a gazebo and a small stucco house where a Hobbit may live. A wide border of plants loved by butterflies is flanked by a meandering path through the garden. The profusion of familiar flowering annuals within a walled garden evokes the comforts and pleasures of an old-fashioned cottage garden.

A Garden Anthology

In just seven years, the owner of one of Burlingame's most beautiful craftsmen has carried out the Arts & Crafts creed of making the garden an extension of the home—a place to comfortably live and play outside. Out front, the garden shows a preference for native plants and only those exotics that are comfortable in this environment. 'Sticks on Fire', crown of thorns and other healthy euphorbias are interspersed with native plants on each bank of a wide dry river of smooth stones.

The garden areas at each side of this home are spacious enough for some unusual amenities. At the west side, there is a shaded "theater in the round" conversation area, topped with an open arbor. Here, giant birds of paradise lend just a touch of the tropics. Three large vegetable planter boxes in this area are in transition with a future life as a Zen garden. The east side garden features a sandbox large enough for children of all ages. It is protected by covering screens.

Fruit trees come into view before the space opens at the back of the house to an inviting outdoor eating area, complete with a large oval glass table, built-in grill and strings of overhead lights. Here a serpentine walk of slate pavers leads to a small art studio, winding among small but luxuriant beds that include ferns, bamboo, vines, heavenly bamboo and a Japanese maple.

The owner has creatively eased the transition from an elevated back door with richly planted mounds of earth sloping down to ground level. This mounding technique is effectively used in other planting areas, including around the spring-flowering yellow trumpet tree that shades a portion of the back garden.



Professional Escape

The exuberant and environmentally smart front garden of this home, with its striking succulent display and perfectly trimmed accent tree, is something of a tip-off. This is the garden of an expert with a sensibility about water use and landscaping appropriate for a distinctive house.

One of the owners is a landscape architect who has spent almost 30 years perfecting her own garden. Her partner in the enterprise adds his skill and talent in building rock walls, prominently on display in the back garden. The couple are just the third owners of this historic North Park home, prominently sited above Balboa Park.

The garden offers up a wide selection of plant materials, beautifully placed. Sunny ligularia and a fountain are welcoming touches in the shady passage to the back garden where the patio area is highlighted by a striking installation of Catalina tile, the hand-glazed decorative art tiles popular in buildings constructed in Southern California during the 1920s and '30s. The tile made on Santa Catalina Island at a company owned by the heir to the Wrigley chewing gum fortune is particularly prized.

Trees include a king palm, crape myrtle, and some that have been nurtured since their original planting in 1920, including a pomegranate and magnolia. Every corner of this garden offers the visitor a visual treat, including the unusual decorative shadow boxes mounted on the fence. Not to be missed: the transformed garage, now a charming garden room housing a library of books for the gardener.



More May Garden Tours

MAY 3-5

"Nature's Palette" - 16th Annual Sage & Songbirds Garden Tour & Festival

Explore five Alpine-area gardens teeming with winged wildlife, plus a raptor rehabilitation facility and a "place-of-worship" garden. Concurrent with Festival May 4-5 at Viejas Outlets with butterfly releases at 2 p.m. both days.

Time: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily.

Tickets: \$20

Info: www.chirp.org

MAY 4

17th Annual Clairemont Garden Tour

Tour a dozen gardens ranging from tropical to succulent, all located in San Diego's Clairemont,

Bay Park and Bay Ho neighborhoods.

Time: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Tickets: \$15 (\$12 in advance), \$10 for seniors, free for kids under 10

Info: www.ClairemontOnline.com

MAY 11

"Something for Everyone" - 15th Annual Mission Hills Garden Walk

Ten gardens on this 2 1/2-mile walking tour surround historic cottages and large estates. Artists and musicians in residence in many gardens.

Time: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Tickets: \$30 (\$25 in advance); children under 12, free.

Info: www.missionhillsgardenclub.org

18th Annual Fallbrook AAUW Country Garden Tour of Fallbrook

Tropical, water-wise and succulent gardens are featured. Complementary refreshments at the tour start, Palomares House, 1815 South Stage Coach Lane, Fallbrook

Time: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Tickets: \$25 (\$20 in advance)

Info: www.aauwfalbrookca.org

MAY 18

15th Annual Secret Garden Tour of La Jolla

La Jolla Farms and Muirlands gardens are among the six on this tour that keeps details secret until event day. Artists, musicians and designer table-top displays in each garden. New this year is a garden boutique with plants, art and gourmet farm products.

Time: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Tickets: \$60; \$175 for Platinum Tour with brunch, transportation and additional garden stop.

Info: www.lajollahistory.org

MAY 19

7th Annual Loma Portal Home & Garden Tour

Six homes and gardens spotlight historical restoration, outdoor entertaining and xeriscape landscaping. Craft fair and opportunity drawing at Loma Portal Elementary School, start of the tour and its beneficiary.

Time: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Tickets: \$25 (\$20 in advance)

Info: www.lomaportalelementary.com

New Geranium with Historic San Diego Roots

By Aenne Carver

A new Martha Washington geranium, 'Linda Anne', will be introduced at SDFA's Historic Garden Tour on May 18. It also will be for sale at the San Diego Geranium Society's Annual Plant Show and Sale May 18 and 19 in Balboa Park and at the Marston House Museum.

The plant, developed by San Diego geranium breeder Jim Zemcik, will not be available in local nurseries. After May 18 and 19, it will only be available at the Marston House Museum. Money raised from plant sales at the Garden Tour benefit SDFA while Marston House sales aid restoration of the historic gardens there.

'Linda Anne', a larger-sized Martha Washington geranium, has a tendency to produce flowers with more than the standard five petals. This gives the blooms an unusual semi-double look. In San Diego's climate, expect it to flower most of the year. The

abundant flowers are magenta with dark veining. Each petal starts out with that rich color and then gradually fades to almost white at the tip, giving blooms the appearance of having white throats.

Zemcik's past geranium introductions include such favorites as 'Kate Sessions', 'Balboa Park 2015' and 'Geranium George'. Zemcik also created a Duckport series of angel geraniums. Each one - 'Duckport', 'Margot Mouse' and 'Cornelia O'Plume' - was named after whimsical animals from the imaginary town of Duckport created by cartoonist Suzy Spafford and popularized in cards and other accessories.

Zemcik also introduced a series of plants that have been adopted by various cities as their official City Flower. These include 'Santa Maria Centennial', 'Huntington Beach Centennial', 'Chula Vista Centennial', 'Lompoc' and 'Villa Park Jewel'.



Photo: Jim Zemcik