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Diverse elements bring vision to life

By: Brigid Gaffikin
Special to The Examiner
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SAN FRANCISCO — When a house remodel left their garden in need of an overhaul, Deborah Howard-Page and S Page knew they didn't want an outdoor space that mirrored the symmetry and clean, modern lines of their Potrero Hill home.

"We knew what we wanted: We wanted two flower beds and an area for the dogs and we didn't want a lawn," Page said. "We wanted a very small deck. But we were completely unable to lay it out."

So the couple brought in Alma Hecht, a landscape designer and certified arborist who, coincidentally, went to high school with Howard-Page.

Hecht introduced native Californian plants to the garden that are especially suited to the serpentine soil found in this part of The City.

"So there's tons of birds and wonderful insects," she said.

California poppies, festucas and carex nestle between pavers and pebbles. Trees and shrubs include a flowering current, three toyons and fruit trees, and a raised garden bed is home throughout the year to a pantry of non-native edibles: strawberries, tomatoes, squash, lettuce and herbs.

"The lemon tree took a while, but the apple tree almost immediately started producing monster apples," Page said.

Hecht used "urbanite" — her term for recycled concrete chunk — throughout the garden.

"There was a construction job going up the street so we got a bunch of it there," she said.



Native plants, edibles and reclaimed construction material are just some of the pieces that brought the Potrero Hill garden together. (Courtesy photo)

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Above the back deck, a vine-wrapped pergola provides shelter and a place to sit outside. Further into the garden, a light table built from an old steel irrigation tube is filled with a mix of old beach glass and topped with a glass disk.

"Just sitting out here is a real pleasure," Howard-Page said.

Local sculptor Kris Borchardt created two quirky, angular, metal laundry trees now installed at one side of the yard.

"They're a wonderful solution to being able to hang everything outside and wonderful sculptures too," Howard-Page said.

Urbanite pavers dotted with patches of elfin thyme, a groundcover, trace a curved path through the center of the yard and meet at a second pathway that's also a dry-wet stream bed. A tall, tubed-shaped fountain sits in a small gore point between the paths.

"I love the fountain," Page said. "We knew there would be two paths ... but we had no idea how to integrate them."

The fountain is surrounded by blue glass that glows when lit from below.

"That's definitely a conversation piece," Howard-Page said.

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