

Eden





Above: Conference attendees gather at Montgomery Woods. Photograph courtesy Eleanor Cox.

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Above: One of the “Notable Trees of Ukiah.” This impressive oak is at Observatory Park. Photograph courtesy Janet Gracyk.

Florence Yoch & Ruth Shellhorn

A Friendship That Preserved the
Bryner / Doerr Garden in Pasadena

BY KELLY COMRAS, FASLA



Left: Ruth Shellhorn, FASLA, 1971. Photographer unknown, image in author's possession.

Right: Florence Yoch, 1964. Courtesy of Architecture & Photography, Huntington Library, Art Museum & Botanical Gardens.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The idea for this article came from the author's participation in a webinar for the California Preservation Foundation on November 14, 2023 (with Erin Chase, Associate Curator, Architecture & Photography, Huntington Library, Art Museum & Botanical Gardens), entitled, "Pleasure Gardens, Movies, and Malls: How Florence Yoch and Ruth Shellhorn Reimagined the California Landscape." Unless otherwise attributed, the text in this article draws upon the author's material prepared for that webinar, the author's research files and notes, and material from the author's publication, "Ruth Shellhorn," University of Georgia Press / Library of American Landscape History, 2016. The author expresses gratitude to Professor David Streatfield for his generosity of time and insight.



INTRODUCTION

The connection between landscape architects Florence Yoch and Ruth Shellhorn emerged from a fortuitous 1924 meeting that would eventually exert an important impact on the midcentury landscape of Southern California. The circumstances of their connection are not well-known. Yoch and Shellhorn were, after all, of two consecutive generations. At the time of their meeting, Yoch was an established professional with a rapidly growing roster of wealthy and influential clients; Shellhorn was a bright and curious high school student, considering her career choices and imagining a future as an independent woman. There were substantive similarities between these two, however, that would transcend their generational differences. Both were intelligent, ambitious, and came from progressive families that supported the education of women. Each one would find success in her respective career

by breaking through the boundaries of her Beaux Arts design education; each developed a distinctive response to California's Mediterranean climate that paralleled an emerging trend toward comfort and practicality in garden and landscape design; and each successfully navigated the shoals of running her practice within a predominantly male profession.¹ The early bond they formed developed into a friendship of mutual respect that endured not only until Yoch's death in 1972, but carried on in the stewardship of the Bryner/Doerr garden designed by Yoch in 1928, and thoughtfully updated and maintained by Shellhorn until 1996.

Florence Yoch was born in Santa Ana on July 15, 1890. She began her studies at the University of California at Berkeley in 1910, transferred to Cornell's College of Agriculture in 1912, then graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with a Bachelor of Science in Landscape Gardening



in 1915. Over the next decade Yoch designed residential gardens in Orange County and Pasadena. In 1921 Yoch took on an apprentice, Lucile Council. Council had studied at the Cambridge School of Domestic and Landscape Architecture in Massachusetts, and at Oxford. They soon formed a partnership and established an office in the garden studio of Council's parents in Pasadena.²

In their residential work, Yoch and Council were adapting the conventions of traditional European gardens to create a fresh American style. Their gardens took into account the local climate and geography, the smaller scale of urban properties, and the active lifestyles of modern clients, while managing to preserve a cherished sense of luxury and attention to detail. They were not only highly-regarded for their finely appointed residential gardens, which made up the majority of their work; they designed movie sets for *The Garden of Allah* (1935),

Romeo and Juliet (1936), *The Good Earth* (1937) *Gone With The Wind* (1939), and *How Green Was My Valley* (1941). They were also considered specialists in creating Mediterranean-style gardens for public spaces. By the time Yoch and Shellhorn met, Yoch had completed a seventeenth century-style courtyard for Vroman's Bookstore in Pasadena, and she and Council were working on a high-profile rooftop-garden for the Women's Athletic Club in downtown Los Angeles.³

Ruth Patricia Shellhorn was born in Pasadena on September 21, 1909. She was fortunate in her parents—two college graduates who encouraged her to pursue a profession that made use of her strong math skills and artistic ability, and in her neighbor, Florence Yoch, who inspired fifteen-year-old Shellhorn to pursue a career in landscape architecture. Their initial meeting was brief but had a profound impact on Shellhorn; in 1927 she left home to become a landscape

Opposite left: Lucille Council, 1964. Courtesy of Architecture & Photography, Huntington Library, Art Museum & Botanical Gardens.

Opposite right: Ruth Shellhorn, Oregon State College, 1928. Photographer unknown. Courtesy UCLA Library Special Collections.

Above: Welton Becket, 1960. Photographer unknown, image in author's possession.



Above: Bullock's Pasadena on Lake Avenue, 1967. Photographer unknown. Image in author's possession.

architect herself. She studied first at Oregon State College, then at Cornell University, where she took courses in design, engineering, regional planning, and horticulture. She was an excellent student and garnered academic awards at both institutions. After completing six years of study, she found herself four units short of her degree; unable to afford a final semester, she left Cornell without graduating.⁴

Shellhorn returned to California in 1933, during the depths of the Great Depression. She had hoped to work for Yoch, but design commissions were scarce and Yoch could only offer Shellhorn a few drafting assignments. Yoch did, however, give Shellhorn friendly encouragement to seek out work on her own. As small jobs became available, Shellhorn rented office space in the same building as Yoch on Argyle Avenue in Hollywood.⁵ Yoch guided Shellhorn in her search for reliable, high-quality nurseries and shared information on the boxing of

trees, a practice not used in either of the states where she had studied landscape architecture, Oregon and New York. In a letter to Yoch's biographer in 1981, Shellhorn acknowledged the encouragement and added, "She was helpful after I was out of school, giving advice on where to get certain [plant] materials, etc. We became good friends."⁶

Yoch also gave Shellhorn priceless advice, counseling her to (1) pay meticulous attention to the details of design; (2) focus on the craftsmanship of construction; (3) exert absolute control over a project whenever possible, and (4) insist on long-term maintenance to extend the initial integrity of the landscapes. "Otherwise," Yoch foretold, "the gardens fall apart."⁷ Shellhorn was grateful for the admonition, later attributing her most successful projects to having followed Yoch's insistence that maintenance review was as important as design.



Over time, these imperatives became trademarks of Shellhorn's own practice. Between 1933 and 1992, she created almost four hundred landscape designs. Her work included award-winning plans for such projects as the Bullock's department stores and Fashion Square shopping centers (1945-1978), Disneyland (1955), the University of California, Riverside (1956-1964), and more than two hundred residential estates and gardens. On projects such as these, Shellhorn collaborated with some of the most celebrated architects and architectural firms in the region, including Welton Becket, Pereira & Luckman; Skidmore, Owings & Merrill; Killingsworth, Brady & Associates; A. Quincy Jones; and Wallace Neff. Her adherence to Yoch's imperatives stands out as a consistent factor linking Shellhorn with this distinguished group of colleagues.

Another factor establishing her reputation as one of the midcentury era's most widely-respected landscape architects was Shellhorn's ability to work on architects' projects that covered a wide variety of size, genre, and styles that ranged from traditional to modern. Shellhorn always insisted that she did not "do" a particular style. After the end of World War II, Shellhorn's postwar landscape designs became well-known as a bridge between the Beaux Arts influence of her academic training, and the rise of Southern California Modernism.

As a practical matter, Shellhorn's adoption of Yoch's imperatives came naturally. Her academic training and comprehension of engineering and construction methods enabled her to insist on excellence from those who executed her designs. She was discomfited when some of these tradesmen or contractors called her "honey," patted her cheek, or left her standing

Above left: Bullock's Pasadena courtyard, 1985. Photographed by Robert M. Fletcher. Courtesy Burton and Patricia Fletcher.

Above right: Bullock's Pasadena, palms and Bird of Paradise, 1987. Photographed by Robert M. Fletcher. Courtesy Burton and Patricia Fletcher.



at the job site at lunchtime while they went off together for lunch. But she soon earned their respect for her professional acumen. They responded by giving her their best work. The results produced award-winning projects with a level of workmanship for which all participants could be proud.

BULLOCK'S PASADENA

Shellhorn's midcentury commercial projects for the Bullock's department stores and shopping centers were designed and maintained from 1945 to 1978. Beginning with Bullock's Pasadena, she applied Yoch's imperatives to noticeable effect.

Bullock's Pasadena was hailed as a bellwether project when it opened in 1947. The first modern department store in the region to be located in the suburbs, it was one of the first of a genre to explicitly embrace the automobile. Welton Becket (Wurdeman

& Becket) designed the department store to emphasize open space, horizontality, convenience, and Southern California's indoor-outdoor living ethos. Shellhorn's landscape design responded to Becket's architectural approach, interpreting the development as a park-like oasis within a larger suburban landscape. She gave special attention to the design details of pedestrian movement to and through the site. Each entrance point, each set of steps, and each turn of direction was treated as an opportunity to enhance the viewer's experience. In the stairway transition from street to store entrance, for example, she arranged plants in a planter that created a picture, composed like a classical painting, and balanced with a hierarchical arrangement of elements, including a discernible foreground, middle ground, and background. Shellhorn's ability to design these fine details drew upon her



Opposite left: Bullock's Pasadena, palm trees being planted, 1947. Photographed by Harry Keuser. Image in author's possession.

Opposite right: Bullock's Pasadena, Kangaroo vine (*Cissus hypoglauca*) espalier on stone wall. Photographed by Robert M. Fletcher. Courtesy Burton and Patricia Fletcher.

Left: Bryner-Doerr garden, pond, 1985. Photographed by Robert M. Fletcher. Courtesy Burton and Patricia Fletcher.

background in art. Elaborating upon Yoch's imperative to pay meticulous attention to the details of design, these details formed the essence of Shellhorn's "Southern California look" – a contemporary expression of traditional principles.

This expression applied to other elements drawn from the formal tradition, as well. When Becket specified bronze hardware for the store, Shellhorn experimented with an espalier to adorn the wall of a small adjacent planting space in an entrance alcove. The highly-polished, bronze-tinted leaves of a twining kangaroo vine introduced a modern informality that took the form of an abstract sculpture, and it added a shimmering detail of elegance as one pulled open the door.

In 1957, Becket added a parking structure for 1,800 cars to replace the south parking lot. Under Shellhorn's direction, the tight area between the parking garage and

the store became a beautiful garden courtyard of enclosed space. She selected pavers to create a pleasing visual movement, and added curbing for a detail of definition. Her textured compositions of bold leaves contrasted with linear, strap-leaf foliage. The soothing neutral tones of Becket's stone walls blended harmoniously with the site furniture, which included a bench designated by Shellhorn to set down packages and search for one's keys, a thoughtful touch of livability.

The Bullock's projects provide a good example of Yoch's lasting influence. Shellhorn analyzed each aspect of a landscape development, focused attention on the details of design and supervised the craftsmanship of construction; she did not consider a project finished until it met her exacting standard of excellence. With Bullock's Pasadena, she hired and supervised her own construction crews, and worked with her husband as crew



foreman to exert absolute control over the project. Throughout construction, Shellhorn was on the site, every day, overseeing installation, and ensuring that the craftsmanship she sought was properly implemented. In doing so, Shellhorn created a design template for the development of subsequent Bullock's department stores and Fashion Square shopping centers throughout the Southland. Laughing when she spoke about it later, Shellhorn admitted that she could be somewhat obsessive. She said, "Being a detail person, I had to see that everything was right. I had to be there for every tree to be set, turned just right, check on every plant. Sprinkler systems? I had to see every sprinkler head, I had to see every joint before that, see that it didn't leak, run tests, check it all the way through to the sprinklers...to make sure they worked."⁸

Shellhorn's design and installation practices earned her the trust of Bullock's management and this gave her the latitude

to follow Yoch's repeated advice to secure long-term maintenance contracts to extend the initial integrity of the landscapes. She learned firsthand that long-term supervision of maintenance was as important as the design and installation of a high-quality project. Bullock's management retained her to visit each of the projects twice a year and she wrote voluminous, step-by-step recommendations for landscape management tasks and procedures. No detail escaped her scrutiny. When it came to tree pruning, she made sketches of individual trees, noting each branch to be removed. With full support from management, Shellhorn conducted frequent checks to see that her directions were followed to the smallest detail.⁹

Maintenance was an easier task in the early years when Bullock's hired its own full-time gardeners. Shellhorn developed close working relationships with many of the gardeners, who were trained to adopt, and adapt, her fastidious maintenance instructions. The



attention to detail paid off. Landscaping awards for both design and maintenance were numerous. These included the presentation of an award in the White House by Mrs. Lyndon Johnson for Bullock's Fashion Square Santa Ana, in 1966.

After 1964, the Bullock's department stores were sold to Federated Department Stores, and the Fashion Square shopping centers were sold to Draper and Kramer. Over the next decade, Federated began the practice of bringing in contract gardeners. Shellhorn was increasingly unable to work person-to-person with the gardeners and, although she continued to regularly visit the properties and prepare maintenance reports, the gardens went into decline. Shellhorn continued maintenance reviews and guided minor landscape remodeling for the Fashion Square properties until 1978, when cost-cutting measures eliminated her position as consulting landscape architect. Her last review was written for Bullock's Pasadena in 1980.¹⁰

In his book, *California Gardens: Creating a New Eden*,¹¹ Professor David Streatfield discussed the extent to which proper maintenance accounted for the remarkable quality of the gardens created in California during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Landscape architects and garden designers were frequently retained by the owners of estate gardens to write detailed maintenance manuals for the garden staff and make annual maintenance visits. While this practice waned due to social and economic changes and as estates and gardens diminished in size, Yoch continued the tradition for many years. Her commitment helps us understand why Yoch's views on maintenance are remembered as one of her most important contributions.

Of Yoch's influence on Shellhorn, Streatfield added, "Maintenance was a critical element in Shellhorn's design approach. She learned from Florence Yoch the importance of superb and regular maintenance... and the preparation of

Opposite: Clusters of wisteria blossoms hang from porch rafters at front door of residence, 1996. Photographed by Peter Christianson Valli.

Above: Rose terrace, 1996. Photographed by Peter Christianson Valli.

Left: One of eleven flights of stairs connecting three terraces, 1996. Photographed by Peter Christianson Valli.

Opposite: Rose terrace on right, with stairs leading up to citrus terrace at left, 1996. Photographed by Peter Christianson Valli.



detailed maintenance reports. Thus, in Shellhorn's work, the world of the immaculately maintained private garden was transferred into the public world of the shopping center-faultless supervision and maintenance. She insisted on contracts where she could return every year to check on the maintenance practices. This alone distinguished her work from that of other modernists.¹²

As Shellhorn's work matured, she and Yoch developed a relationship of mutual professional admiration. Shellhorn had great respect for the "soft-spoken, domestic quality" of Yoch's public projects, and for her ability to make those spaces seem "intimate, useful and friendly."¹³ Yoch returned the compliment; she grew to admire Shellhorn's design aesthetic and kept notes marked "special contributions of certain individuals today." The list included Shellhorn's name at the top of a select group of landscape architects including Ralph Cornell, Edward Huntsman-Trout and Thomas Church. Next to Shellhorn's name, Yoch wrote, "feeling for plants to express or define; taste, scale, permanence; industrial and commerce—therefore practical." Yoch's biographer pronounced these words to be Yoch's "highest tribute."¹⁴ Yoch also held Shellhorn in high regard for her knowledge of plants, borrowing photographic slides of Shellhorn's landscape of Bullock's Pasadena to illustrate a lecture Yoch gave in Mexico.¹⁵ The glossy-leaved plantings represented Shellhorn's signature "Southern California look," and Shellhorn was flattered when Yoch's similarly-inspired 1955 landscape design of Robinson's department store in Beverly Hills was occasionally mistaken for a Shellhorn design.¹⁶

BRYNER/DOERR GARDEN

(*Note: Descriptions about Shellhorn's alterations to the Doerr garden after 1978 are drawn from the author's book, Ruth Shellhorn, University of Georgia Press/LALH, 2016, 199-207, as well as subsequent research.*)

In 1928, just a year after Ruth Shellhorn left home for college, Florence Yoch undertook the design of a Pasadena garden that would come to memorialize the friendship between these two women. The garden, designed for oil businessman Ira L. Bryner, was part of a property that spread across three lots and sloped steeply down to the street. The architect, Roland Coate, positioned the residence with views of the San Gabriel Mountains to the north and the nearby Arroyo to the west.¹⁷

Yoch's period revival garden design was considered an elegant, concise adaptation of European prototypes that juxtaposed traditional design elements with natural features. The patio adjacent to the front of the house was paved in brick and had arbors of wisteria and rose.¹⁸ The garden was conceived as three distinct gardens, each reflecting inspiration from a different European precedent. The terrace closest to the house had a small citrus grove of orange, lime, and tangerine trees, which evoked simple Spanish gardens; the second terrace displayed a riot of differently colored roses in a formal elongated oval and edged in boxwood,¹⁹ alluding to French gardens; and the bottom terrace presented a broad rectangle of lawn with a small pool at one end and garden house at the other, a reference to English garden traditions.



Eleven flights of stairs connected the terraces, acknowledging the water parterre at the Villa Gamberaia in Florence.²⁰

Yoch's plan was succeeded the following year by two detailed lists of plants, referenced by botanical name and specific location within the garden. The lists consisted of a mix of hardy plant material, as well as more tender bedding plants and borders that required a higher level of maintenance and care.²¹ Evidence discussed later in this article suggests that the lawn area was planted in dichondra, a high-maintenance, low-growing broadleaf ground cover.

In 1941 Albert and Harriet Doerr purchased the Bryner property and engaged Yoch to return and simplify the garden because of the wartime decrease in staff. During this period, Yoch became particularly concerned with designing low-maintenance gardens and she prepared a nineteen-page set of written recommendations that dealt with such issues as "watering systems, methods of trimming trees, and for the long-range care of individual plants."²²

By 1960 the Doerrs were living in Mexico. Mrs. Doerr and Yoch developed a correspondence about designing a garden for the Doerrs²³ there, but Yoch did not travel to the site, a remote location where Mr. Doerr was engaged in restoring a family copper mine.²⁴ At about the same time, Yoch and Council were preparing to retire and they moved to Carmel. Lucille Council died in 1964. Yoch remained in Carmel until her own death in 1972.²⁵ Albert Doerr also died in 1972 and Harriet returned to their Pasadena home and garden.

In 1978, Harriet Doerr consulted Shellhorn about the options of either selling off the garden portion of the property, or altering it to make it easier to manage. Shellhorn recommended preserving the garden. She endeavored to respect Yoch's original planting design and show regard for Yoch's subsequent concern with designing low-maintenance gardens, while also preserving the garden's original structure. In a letter to Yoch's biographer, Shellhorn wrote, "All of her gardens had a certain architectural



This page: Lower lawn terrace with garden house in background, 1996. Photographed by Peter Christianson Valli.

Opposite: Decomposed granite path on the lower terrace, an existing coast live oak on right, 1996. Photographed by Peter Christianson Valli.



design basis, at least in part. There were walls, steps, pools, paving, and formality in many areas even if the planting was informal. Many of the gardens seemed to be Mediterranean in character, with cast stone copings, roofing tile walk borders, Italian pools and fountains, olives, Citrus, Italian cypress, etc. Then there were the perennial and bulb gardens and borders which borrowed from the English. She used many varieties of flowering Crabs, Chinese magnolias, flowering Quince, and other flowering and fruiting trees and shrubs. Often the formality was purposely interrupted by the out of balance tree and other subtle touches.”²⁶

Shellhorn maintained the garden’s original structure; her files show only one formal plan for refreshing the upper patio, and numerous informal sketches show a significant amount of detailed thinking about planting substitutions. For example, the search for a jacaranda tree prompted Shellhorn to draw out the ideal number and placement of branches for the tree she envisioned. She visited the garden several times a year to supervise landscape repairs and address small changes. Her files reveal careful research and investigation into newly available plants that fulfilled changing needs in the garden. When formerly available

brick, stone, and gravel sources disappeared, she found and adapted new materials that matched the original. Wooden benches that had been designed or selected by Yoch finally disintegrated and Shellhorn searched for suitable replacements that would respect Yoch’s original design specifications.

Shellhorn exercised restraint in putting her personal imprint on this garden, and in doing so she not only preserved it but maintained the intent of the original design. The small changes she did make lent cohesion to the garden. This author explained those changes in her book, *Ruth Shellhorn*:

“During the late 1970s she substituted high-maintenance perennials surrounding the lawn and rose garden with bushy, frequently-blooming Fielder’s White and Alaska azaleas. These sun-tolerant hybrids proved a judicious choice when an attack of oak root fungus began to claim the garden’s major shade providers. As the oak trees succumbed, they were supplanted with deciduous trees resistant to the fungus, such as jacaranda, liquidambar, and evergreen pear. Chinese holly replaced viburnum hedges, and orange jessamine

replaced toyon. Shellhorn managed to retain Yoch’s subtle textural effects, and the white line of azaleas strengthened the axial relationship between the pond and the garden house.”²⁷

Over the years, Shellhorn continued to maintain the garden, making additional adaptations and alterations. When preparing for a garden club tour in the spring of 1980, she found rock cinder mulch to match the existing gravel around the rose island, placed fifty years earlier. She planted ‘Transcendent’ and floribunda crab apples in the upper terrace and reseeded the dichondra lawn. (The lawn of dichondra was in place until about 1992, replaced with turf at a later, unknown date.)²⁸ When neighbors installed a swimming pool in the late 1980s, Shellhorn planted a bank of puka; its dark, leathery leaves worked as a screening shrub that preserved the garden’s privacy.

In 1988, after having worked on the Doerr garden for ten years, Shellhorn replied to further inquiries from Yoch’s biographer, writing, “Florence was one of a kind. The fact that so many of her gardens are being lovingly cared for to preserve her designs is a real tribute. I had lunch with Harriett Doerr last Tuesday, and I went over the garden with



her, making suggestions. I have tried, in my recommendations, to preserve the spirit of the garden Florence created.”²⁹

In the summer of 1992, Shellhorn prepared a plan for the upper patio to include a semi-formal brick area with benches and a bird bath. Given that the connecting paths were of decomposed granite, and perhaps to spare the expense, it appears Shellhorn and Doerr decided to forgo the brick and continue the use of decomposed granite into the courtyard. An aging cedar tree was designated for removal, some flowering crabapple trees were rearranged, and the area was to be planted with a new ginkgo and more flowering crabapple. Photographs in 1994 show the structure of the courtyard design intact and with plant material consistent with Shellhorn’s plan.³⁰

These small adaptations by Shellhorn were designed to keep intact Yoch’s original design intent.

In 1996, eighteen years after Shellhorn began her work, Harriett Doerr wrote a wistful essay about her love for this garden.³¹ She sent a copy to Shellhorn, affectionately thanking her for recommending the preservation of the garden. Shellhorn’s care for the garden was an admiring tribute from a student who owed much to the encouragement of her mentor.

She felt the opportunity to implement Yoch’s lessons of meticulous maintenance was an honor; together they had created and preserved a legacy that is now shared.³²

Florence Yoch died in 1972. Her papers are housed at the Huntington Library. <https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8cn792r/>

Harriet Doerr died in 2002. Her papers are housed in the Department of Special Collections and University Archives at Stanford University Libraries. <https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf1w1001tk/>

Ruth Shellhorn died in 2006. Her papers are housed at UCLA Library Special Collections. <https://oac.cdlib.org/search?query=ruth+shellhorn&tx=0&ty=0>

Kelly Comras is a Fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects and a member of the California Bar Association. She served as the first staff landscape architect for the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area; taught park planning and design at UCLA, and is a national ASLA and SCCASLA award winner. Comras’ present practice focuses on research and publication in the field of cultural landscape.

She is a founding member of The Cultural Landscape Foundation’s Stewardship Council; has served as president for the California Garden & Landscape History Society; and lectured at Harvard Graduate School of Design, Modernism Week, Library of American Landscape History, Society of Architectural Historians, and others. Her book publications include: *Ruth Shellhorn*, University of Georgia Press, 2016; a chapter in *Women, Modernity, and Landscape Architecture*, Routledge, 2015; and a chapter in *California Eden: Heritage Landscapes of the Golden State*, Angel City Press/Los Angeles Public Library, 2024. She regularly contributes to such publications as *Landscape Architecture Magazine*; and *Eden*, the quarterly journal of the California Garden & Landscape History Society. kellycomras.com

Robert M. Fletcher was a gifted landscape architect, teacher, and photographer. He graduated with a BA in landscape architecture from UC Berkeley in 1977, then established a private practice in Los Angeles. Fletcher was a member of the American Horticultural Society, Southern California Horticultural Society, The National Trust, and the California Historical Society. He



also taught in UCLA Extension's Landscape Architecture program and lectured frequently. He died in 1995. This author and the landscape history community at large are indebted to Fletcher for the images he created and generously shared. Photographs of gardens designed by Fletcher can be found at the Smithsonian. <https://www.si.edu/object/archives/sova-aag-fle?destination=object/archives/components/sova-aag-fle-ref17>.

Peter Christianson Valli is a professional photographer with a portfolio that includes architecture, landscape, interiors, and portraiture. His work has appeared in numerous journals, including *Architectural Digest*, which include photographs for an article about Harriet Doerr's garden in the November, 1996 issue that appear in this *Eden* article. <https://petervalli.com/>

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by Kelly Comras

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Opposite: Upper patio, 1996. Photographed by Peter Christianson Valli.

Above left: Garden house in lower garden, 2012. Photographed by Kevin Johnson.

Above right: Decomposed granite path separating the lower lawn from the pond. 1996. Photographed by Peter Christianson Valli.

This page: Harriet Doerr on upper porch overlooking garden, 1996. Photographed by Peter Christianson Valli.

Opposite: Porch in winter, 1987. Photograph by Robert M. Fletcher. Courtesy Burton and Patricia Fletcher.





Endnotes

¹ Local literary acknowledgement of the contributions of women as landscape architects came as early as 1931. Two years before Shellhorn began practicing, architect Myron Hunt wrote a supportive, if somewhat condescending and myopic, foreword in Winifred Starr Dobyns, *California Gardens*. He said, "The profession of landscape architecture is fortunately attracting an increasing number of able, highly-trained, much-traveled and experienced women, who handle with firmness and decision those broad background essentials of the good garden, -the ground plan and the mass planting. They also have what seems an inborn interest in that other essential element of continuing success, -the planting and the yearly renewal of the annuals and perennials whose blending colors make the jewels of a garden." His view of the capabilities of women landscape architects may have been somewhat limited but he, nonetheless, did put forth this written statement of awareness of the professional role women had begun to play. Winifred Starr Dobyns, "Foreword," *California Gardens*, Allen A. Knoll, Publishers, Santa Barbara, 1996, 12.

² James J. Yoch, *Landscapeing the American Dream*, Abrams/Sagapress, 1989, 3-20. (J. Yoch)

³ J. Yoch, 93-107, 144-46, 148-150.

⁴ Shellhorn, interview by author, December 6, 2004.

⁵ Shellhorn, interview by author, November 3, 2004.

⁶ Shellhorn, letter to James J. Yoch, April 20, 1981, in author's collection.

⁷ Shellhorn, interview by author, March 20, 2006.

⁸ Shellhorn, interview by author, November 17, 2004.

⁹ Bullock's Maintenance files, Ruth Patricia Shellhorn Papers, UCLA Library Special Collections.

¹⁰ Shellhorn, interview with author, November 3, 2004.

¹¹ David C. Streatfield, *California Gardens: Creating a New Eden*, Abbeville Press Publishers, 1994, 9-10.

¹² David C. Streatfield, email correspondence with author, Mar 27, 2013.

¹³ J. Yoch, 140.

¹⁴ James J. Yoch, email correspondence with author, March 26, 1988.

¹⁵ James J. Yoch, correspondence with Shellhorn, May 2, 1988.

¹⁶ Michael O'Brian, correspondence with author, undated. Also see: <https://player.vimeo.com/video/122132174>, and *Progressive Architecture*, August 1953, 79-86.

¹⁷ Ann Scheid Lund, *Historic Pasadena: An Illustrated History*, San Antonio, TX: Historical Publishing Network, 1999, 124; J. Yoch, 51-54.

¹⁸ Lund, *Historic Pasadena*, 124.

¹⁹ J. Yoch, 195.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ J. Yoch, "Revised Planting Plans, February 9, and July, 1929," 192-194.

²² J. Yoch, 21, 54.

²³ Yoch, letter to Harriet Doerr, early 1961, J. Yoch, 136-137.

²⁴ Harriet Doerr wrote three best-selling novels about her time in Mexico. The first, *Stones for Ibarra*, was published in 1984, when she was 74 years old.

²⁵ J. Yoch, 174-175.

²⁶ Shellhorn, letter to James J. Yoch, April 20, 1981.

²⁷ Shellhorn, interview by author, December 16, 2004; Comras, Ruth Shellhorn, 203-204.

²⁸ Shellhorn, letter to Harriet Doerr, April, 1992.

²⁹ Shellhorn, letter to James J. Yoch, May 2, 1988.

³⁰ Shellhorn, "Upper Patio Plan for Mrs. Albert Doerr," July 16, 1992. UCLA Library Special Collections.

³¹ Harriet Doerr, "A Writer's Landscape," *Architectural Digest* 53, November 1996, 54-58, 63.

³² Descriptions about Shellhorn's alterations to the Doerr garden after 1978 are drawn from the author's book, *Ruth Shellhorn*, University of Georgia Press/LALH, 2016, 199-207.

YIPEE YI-KIYAY UKIAH

BY THEA GURNS

Attendees at the Ukiah conference
marvel at the Montgomery Woods.
Photograph courtesy Eleanor Cox.





ROUNDUP

CALIFORNIA GARDEN AND LANDSCAPE HISTORY SOCIETY ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2023

• OCTOBER 13-15, UKIAH, CALIFORNIA •

California Garden and Landscape History Society held its annual conference October 13-15, 2023, in Ukiah, “the heart of Mendocino County.” We journeyed to appreciate the landscapes and gardens of Ukiah, a small town nestled in a river valley between forested hills. To this participant, the weekend was one of the society’s sweetest gatherings. Low-key, informal, it was a roundup of like-minded friends with the intention to listen and learn. Those embedded in this local California culture were recruited to best convey historical occurrences and help us gauge their impact on the landscape. Experts did so in a manner pleasant and unfussy.



FRIDAY

Happy hour at the clubhouse adjacent to Todd Grove Park opened the conference, an occasion important to CGLHS conferences in which we meet new members and renew established friendships. Dinner was prepared and served by proud farmer and executive chef Ellery C. Clark, who proclaimed our meal truly farm to table. Salad greens, dill herbs, and root vegetables came from Potter Valley farms. Wines, too, originated locally, one of the offerings produced from grapes cultivated by our featured evening speaker. One of our conference convenors, Patrick O'Hara, handpicked those. CGLHS member Patricia Cullinan provided citrus table arrangements clipped from her own garden. With *Eden* editor Steven Keylon providing DJ services, the barbecue dinner assumed a fiesta feel.

Glenn McGourty, dinner speaker, provided a brief history of Mendocino agriculture and horticulture. McGourty has lived and worked in the region for a stretch of time, first as UC Farm Adviser and then as 1st District Supervisor, Mendocino County. Possessor of a wealth of information about the locality, he had much to impart about the natural and cultural history of the region.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Mendocino County is small in area, two-thirds the size of Connecticut, with a population of 90,000. The region is diverse geographically: mountains, oak and redwood forests, the Russian River, several fault lines, serpentine and sandstone rocks, and arable land in the valley where Ukiah is located.



"Ukiah" is from the Indigenous language meaning "deep valley." Indigenous tribes have a long heritage and lived experience of managing fish and game for sustenance and sustainability; They caught salmon, dried seaweed and hunted deer and elk. They were extraordinary weavers, utilizing 250 plants in making baskets and other goods.

With the advent of Europeans, the large native population was made small by a kill policy and by jamming survivors into a small patch of reservation. The 250-year war against resistant Native Americans is the longest war on the land.

The first Europeans to arrive came by ship, with a lumber crashing on coastal rocks and wrecking. Yankee clippers carried provisions to the north coast on a route that also ran drugs from India to China.



Opposite: Speaker Glenn McGourty provided a brief overview of the agricultural and horticultural history of the Ukiah region at the Friday evening dinner reception. Photograph by Jesse Lattig.

Top, left: Guests mingled before dinner with cocktails and appetizers. Photograph by Steven Keylon.

Top, right: The Friday evening dinner was catered by Ellery C. Clark, "who proclaimed our meal truly farm to table." Photograph courtesy Jesse Lattig.

Bottom: CGLHS member Patricia Cullinan provided citrus table arrangements clipped from her garden. Photograph courtesy Steven Keylon.



This spread: On Saturday morning, attendees gathered at the Grace Hudson Museum and Sun House. Despite the cloud cover, eclipse glasses were passed out, and everyone was dazzled by the eclipse, which was visible through the clouds. Photographs courtesy Janet Gracyk, Steven Keylon, and Jesse Lattig.



1850 saw trees logged from local forests, with dairy and agriculture feeding mining camps. San Francisco utilized the hops grown in Mendocino County.

In 1876 Ukiah incorporated. Trains came to the town and left loaded with butter and grain for delivery to cities. By 1900 interior coastal valley farmers were growing pears, hops and grain. From a highpoint of 1,500 acres of grain grown, acreage for grain is now down to none.

Around 1950 hops disappeared and wine grapes appeared. The challenging climate ranges from 116 degrees to snow, unlike

the Mediterranean wine growing region that Santa Barbara enjoys. Arable land sits inland with fog, wind, heat, and cold. Wine grapes are responsive to soil, and the thin soil and elevated land around Ukiah looked like home to Italian grape growers. The dominant Crémant and Tuscany grapes come from northern Italy.

Today cannabis grown in the Mendocino-Humboldt triangle has had an impact on environmentally sensitive land through bulldozing and taking large amounts of water. McGourty calls it not agriculture but commerce with outlaws in business.



SATURDAY

Keith Park gave the presidential welcome, thanked the conference committee, acknowledged participants' travel, and encouraged members to step up and become active in the organization.

At this point attendees trooped outside to a patio, the better to observe a lunar eclipse. Although special glasses were thoughtfully provided, they proved unnecessary due to heavy cloud cover. As the moon eclipsed the sun, the group gave a collective "oohh."

Grace Hudson Museum and Sun House

After lunar wonderment, Director **David Burton** welcomed us to the Grace Hudson Museum and Sun House. Hudson was a painter in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her family were abolitionists and of a progressive tradition. Joining the great Anglo-American drift across the country, her parents left Kansas for a California homestead. By 1865, they settled in Potter Valley during a period of growth and industry when the lumber trade, salmon fisheries,

and railroads flourished. Hudson studied art at the San Francisco School of Design for five years, then returned to Ukiah.

Around her, the Indigenous people were being dispossessed and killed. Hudson had the will and the time to artistically document native Pomo culture from 1880-1890, a period unique in Ukiah history. She turned her artistic talent to painting portraits of Pomo people and documenting scenes of Pomo life.

On permanent display in the museum is Grace Hudson's fine art and a collection of Pomo basketry. A 1911 Craftsman-style bungalow outside the museum houses the Sun House, a living history museum of Hudson's life with an interpretive agenda managed by the Grace Hudson Museum and the City of Ukiah.

Ann Baker a landscape architect specializing in ecological design of natural and sustainable landscapes. She informed us that the gardens at the Grace Hudson Museum are a work in progress.

Her initial visit came in 2008 to walk the ground. She subsequently went all-in with a \$3 million dollar construction grant.



This page: Andrea Davis, garden manager for the Grace Hudson Museum, accompanied us on our garden walk-through and served as an invaluable guide. Photographs courtesy Eleanor Cox and Jesse Lattig.

Opposite, top: Detail of door inside Grace Hudson's "Sun House." Photograph courtesy Steven Keylon.

Opposite, bottom: Tim Buckner, Executive Director of the Historical Society of Mendocino County, delivered a lecture on Ukiah's early history. Photograph courtesy Eleanor Cox.



She and her team, including former Grace Hudson Museum Director Sherri Smith-Ferri, set to work. Design criteria included acknowledging nature, living beings, and heirlooms. PGAdesign Landscape Architects prepared some of the technical drawings.

Baker's concept was of wild gardens reflecting the surrounds of chaparral, grasslands, savanna and other ecosystems. Utilitarian needs were for an arbor leading to a space for performance and celebration, with an outdoor classroom and basket circle, and including a daylighted zone for cooking with a prep, serving and demonstration counter. A bed for stormwater in the garden was designed for treating stormwater before it enters a culvert masquerading as a stream.

Garden and story design needed an entry corridor with direct relationship between painting gallery and garden. Room was required for lots of people to walk into and gather in the garden where plants are still young and delicate.

Visitors on the edge of the entry see into the garden, then pass through a sound barrier to lose themselves in a grove of trees, a weir structure, planted bioswale and a permeable paving system. Without any effort, watercress materialized, birds came to sing and critters emerged. Elderberry attracts butterflies, oaks give acorns. Biodiversity developed.

Plant roots and leaves provide material used by Pomo basket weavers. Iris is especially prized, and here associates with grey willow, sedge, tar weed, manzanita, berries,



tiger lily, azalea, monkey flower, Zauschneria, and soapwort. Pinole time is summer.

Perennial grasses, soapwort and native wildflowers grow in the meadow, a place of ephemeral beauty. Stones sacred to the Pomo people were donated by Caltrans, and the heaviest boulders came from private landowners.

Accompanied walk through house and gardens.

A Hopi sun symbol carved over the entry into the Grace Hudson Sun House conveyed the era of Arts and Crafts. The stone-and-wood structure was entered through a deep front porch and led to an interior of small rooms with small windows. Period art, furniture and fabrics were showcased. Of special interest was the painting studio, Hudson's small working area which is well-lighted with larger windows. Her husband's study transmits the impression of a scholar at work.

Grace Hudson Museum Director David Burton gave us the curator's tour of the art and basketry exhibit. We viewed Hudson's

fine art portraits of Pomo people, some shown within scenes of daily life. A canvas hanging on the wall depicted a basket in the background, and across the room that same basket was displayed in a protective glass case.

Andrea Davis, garden manager for the Grace Hudson Museum, accompanied us on our garden walk-through and served as an invaluable guide, delineating areas landscape architect Ann Baker had described in her presentation which we now appreciated in true dimensions, their purpose and utility in the plan evident both to the working of the garden and to Indigenous culture. As the gardens have grown, she has managed planting choices and care.

A lunch buffet was provided by Eddie's Cocina, including a full taco bar accompanied by considerable chatter on the patio by the garden.

Tim Buckner, Executive Director of the Historical Society of Mendocino County, gave us Ukiah's early history after lunch. He showed an arable land map of 1970,





This spread: Alice Lincoln-Cook, a Karuk Tribe member, taught us Indigenous basketry, and had examples available for guests to study. Photographs courtesy John Martin and Janet Gracyk.



fifty-three years ago. With ridges near the ocean, Ukiah is a river settlement along fault lines. Yearly, the land receives thirty-four inches of rain with water runoff to the sea. The maritime climate allowed a temperate rainforest where evolution was a melting pot of birds, insects, fish, microbes, critters, plants, lichen, and geology. Land raises caused gorgeous canyons. Springs in the area serve as an economic driver as Vichy water offers the same composition in California as in France.

Buckner ended by saying 10,000 years of Indigenous stewardry passed on by oral teaching and by demonstration broke down in 177 years of colonization. 80 percent of the population was gone in twenty years. In his estimation, what was destroyed, what

was lost is more important than what was built. Growing trees demonstrates acknowledging the land, not cutting trees. He sees hope for reforestation and urges us to take action to help.

Alice Lincoln-Cook a Karuk Tribe member, schooled us on Indigenous basketry. Lincoln-Cook is an engaging educator, artist, basket weaver, and current Board president of the California Indian Basketweavers' Association. We learned baskets are used in ceremonial dances. In daily family life, baskets are woven to meet an array of needs: for catching fish, catching quail, for baby rattles, as seed baskets, gathering baskets, and gift baskets. Redbud, willow, and whitebud baskets hold water and are used for cooking and to hold family





Above, left: Author and historian Dot Brovarney introduced attendees to Ukiah horticulturist Carl Purdy. Photograph courtesy Steven Keylon.

Above, right: Grace Hudson Museum Director David Burton gave guests the curator's tour of the art and basketry exhibit. Photograph courtesy Janet Gracyk.

Bottom row and opposite: Saturday night dinner was at Cultivo, in downtown Ukiah. Photographs courtesy Janet Gracyk and Jesse Lattig.

goods. She told us baskets are living things and must be used to remain alive.

Gatherers are aware of the impact on the land system when they collect iris root and clam shell for beads. In classes Lincoln-Cook teaches, she tells where, when, and how to gather materials. To us, she conveyed her powerful commitment to advancing the basketry art and in preserving the culture. Baskets, she feels, connect to the landscape beyond their use.

Prior to her talk, she laid out a sample of baskets and encouraged us to examine and touch them as a way of encountering their reason for being. She gave a vivid demonstration of what prior speakers told us. Her biography in conference material conveys insight to her artistry and to her activism with the Following the Smoke program.

Dot Brovarney, Mendocino-based author and historian, brought to our attention a horticulturalist of whom I had not heard, the "Wildflower Dean." Carl Purdy was a native plant collector, primarily



focused on wildflower seeds and bulbs. While important to the area, his influence extended beyond the boundaries of Ukiah. His mail-order business supplied rare perennials and shrubs worldwide. Luther Burbank visited, as did renowned wildflower artist A.R. Valentien. For Brovarney, Purdy's career illustrates that ordinary people can do extraordinary things. His legacy lies in others continuing to do his work. Several of us found Purdy's story intriguing enough to buy his autobiography, "My Life and Times."

Dinner. We journeyed to Cultivo, a restaurant, in downtown Ukiah, for happy hour and dinner. Over a glass of Old Vine Zin and an excellent salmon plate, I listened to accounts of where our companions came from and of what landscape and garden history interest drew them to this part of California.

SUNDAY

A remnant of attendees met early at the Mendocino County Agricultural Building, a renovated 1930s WPA structure. If you looked closely at the office walls, framed news articles told the long career history of Friday's speaker, County Supervisor Glenn McGourty. He showed up Sunday morning to introduce **Steve Jahelka**, naturalist and interpreter with California State Parks. Jahelka recounted the history of Montgomery Woods' establishment as a State Natural Preserve. He shared that he feels a deep connection to the woods much as did Latina botanist Ynez Mexia that led her to spearhead the grove's conservation in the 1920s. For Mexia in her time and Jahelka today, the woods offer peace and a place for spirit healing.

We broke up into two carpool groups. Convenor Eleanor Cox organized Tour A



This spread and following page: On Sunday morning, Steve Jahelka, naturalist and interpreter with California State Parks, took one group on an ecological tour through a tall stand of old-growth coast redwoods. Photographs courtesy Eleanor Cox and John Martin.

to Montgomery Woods. Jahelka led participants on an ecological tour through a tall stand of old-growth coast redwoods. We were warned: the initial trail is steep and demanding.

Convener Janet Gracyk accompanied Tour B's visit to Observatory Park in town. We heard a short history of the international observatory installed here in 1899 to study polar motion. With the observatory's purpose now outmoded, we were left to stroll the grounds, admiring the planted herbs and trees and spotting posted plaques denoting planetary distances.

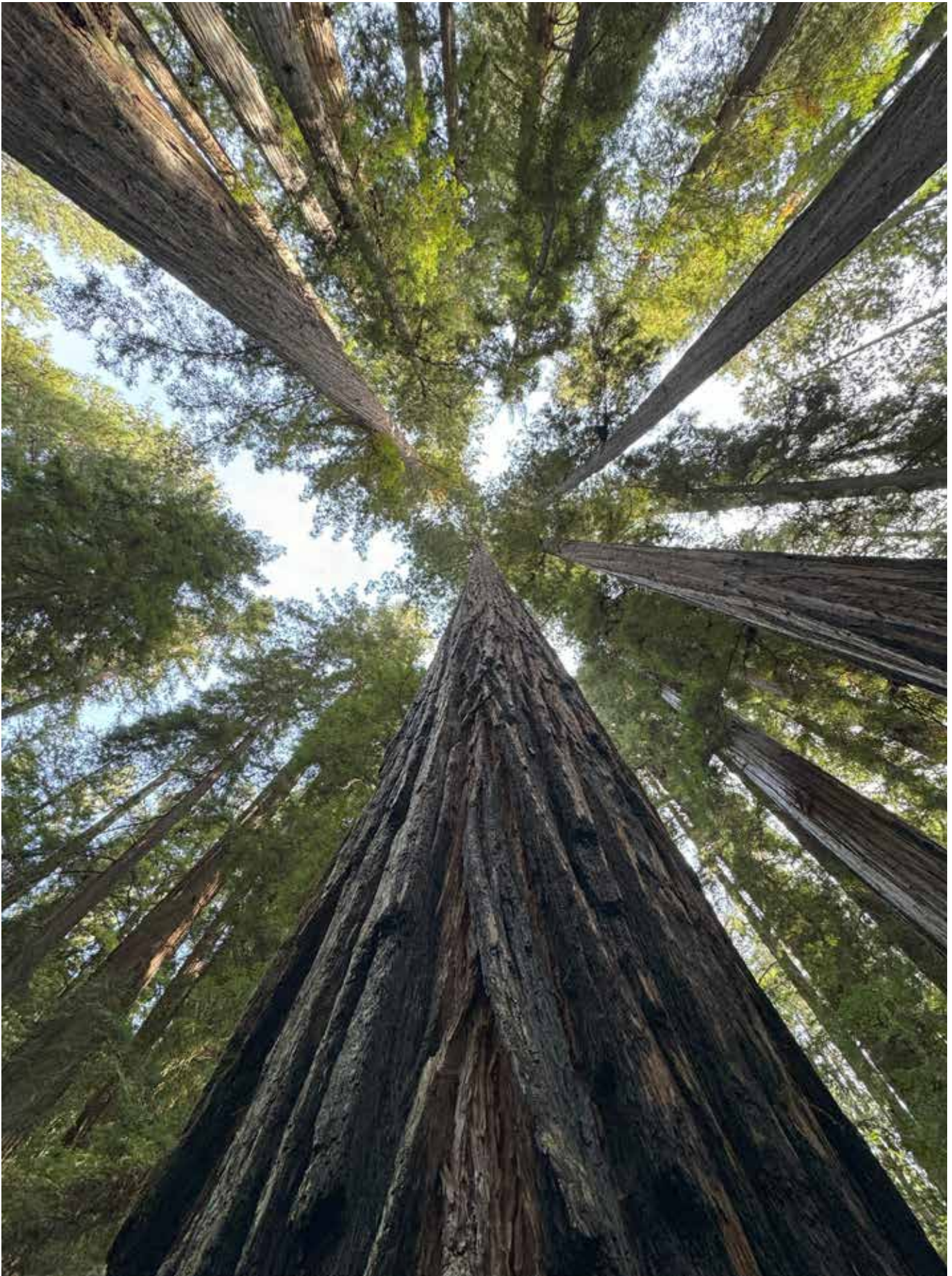
Explore After waving goodbye to Tour A, we joined B group, the tamer option. Later we explored Ukiah, sightseeing on an impromptu expedition of "Notable Trees in Ukiah." Downtown we encountered the Pumpkin Festival, a street fair straight out of the 1950s—landscape! history! Ecstatic kiddies swirled and bobbed on old-school rides and took chances in the carnival booths. Lunch came from a diner of the type known to Richie and the Fonz, and the food was good.

TOP THREE CONFERENCE TAKEAWAYS:

1. Eyebrows were raised when the meeting location was announced. *Ukiah?* The region proved a revelation and worthy of the journey. We learned Mendocino County lies at the northern end of Mediterranean California and looks to the Pacific Northwest. Indeed, we were lucky in timing our visit to catch the golden autumn moment found burnishing counties more southern in the state along with experiencing the rough landscape of a forested river valley. Trees in the wild!

2. Further revelation came with realizing what an early and important horticultural hub existed in the area. Perhaps other members knew of Carl Purdy and how he willed himself into becoming an influential horticultural collector and distributor, but he was new to us.

3. This conference proved remarkable in that no conveners lived in the immediate area, demonstrating that our annual gatherings can be shaped and managed from afar. I imagine the event was structured through phone consultations, emails upon





emails, and in-person visits coordinating arrangements. Conveners kept the lowest of profiles of a piece with the simple, unpretentious gathering. Quiet and laid back, our conference reflected the surroundings. Conference Ukiah was loose enough to allow social mingling so important to forming and shoring bonds within which we move forward together. The compiled material on offer was invaluable in lending insight and dimension.

SIDEBAR:

It is always good to pay attention to conveners' recommendations. Monday was a travel day, and we hit two suggested Mendocino County high spots: Simply Succulents Nursery (Reader, we bought) and one of the better botanical gardens I have trod through, Mendocino Botanical Garden. Here the draw was Joyce Demit's well-established and maintained heritage rose garden, her legacy. We were drawn down paths to the rocky seashore and crashing waves made all the lovelier by rainy skies.



Top and middle: After the two tours, some attendees stayed on to explore Ukiah, seeing some of the “Notable Trees in Ukiah,” while also encountering the Pumpkin Festival, a street fair straight out of the 1950s. Photographs courtesy Jesse Lattig.

Below: The CGLHS board of directors met Friday morning at a home which had a garden designed by landscape architect, Florence Yoch. Photograph by Steven Keylon.



News

CGLHS WINS 2023 GOVERNOR'S AWARD!

The California Garden and Landscape History Society is excited to announce that our organization is a 2023 recipient of the Governor's Historic Preservation Awards!

Awarded by the California Office of Historic Preservation and California State Parks, the award is the only state-sponsored program that recognizes the efforts of historic preservation organizations. The award is intended to celebrate community-based, grass roots efforts to document and promote California's unique and varied heritage.

In the award decision, CGLHS was cited for its "fundamental principle that people will protect the historical and cultural landscapes and gardens they have learned to understand and appreciate." With our quarterly journal, *Eden*, the Tours and Talks program, and various partnerships across the state and country, we are proud to receive this recognition of our efforts and look forward to the various initiatives of our future.

Thank you to Kelly Comras for her initiative and persistence in completing the application!

Along with fellow recipients, the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, Historic Shipyard at Pier 70, Rooted in Richmond Tour App, Save Our Heritage Organisation, and the Ah-Ha' Mut-ta-ti'e Traditional Cultural Property Report, CGLHS received the award at an in-person ceremony on Tuesday, February 27, 1:00-4:00pm at the Stanley Mosk Library and Courts Building in Sacramento.

We sincerely thank all our members for their continual support; we could not do this without your dedication and care for our shared landscapes. Thank you!



From left: Armando Quintero, director for the California Department of Parks and Recreation; CGLHS board members Danny Hughes and Kelly Comras; *Eden* editor Steven Keylon; CGLHS president Keith Park; Julianne Polanco, State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). Photograph courtesy of California State Parks.





HANNAH CARTER JAPANESE GARDEN UPDATE

Jim Caldwell, one of the late Hannah Carter's sons, gave a talk in March at the annual conference of the North American Japanese Garden Association. He reviewed the saga of UCLA's heartbreaking sale of the garden to a private entity. As some of you will recall, the sale included a requirement that the owners maintain the garden for thirty years and allow the Carter family to attend a yearly, on-site maintenance review to ensure compliance.

Hard to believe, but ten years have passed already, only twenty to go. Jim explained that the present owners either never occupied the property, or used the property only to live in while they built

another house nearby. The Carter house is now empty. Jim still goes on a walk-thru once a year. He noted that the artifacts that UCLA removed from the garden had been returned, and that the garden is being kept intact, though the pruning of specialty trees, like the black pines, is not being done to a very high standard.

Jim and his family still hope to find a solution that would entail a purchase of the house and garden by an entity that would preserve the property and open up the garden for visits.

Is there anyone out there who might step in?

—Kelly Comras



CALIFORNIA GARDEN
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HISTORY SOCIETY

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Front cover: Clusters of wisteria blossoms hang from porch rafters at front door of residence, 1996. Photographed by Peter Christianson Valli.

Back cover: Rose terrace and lower lawn terrace, viewed from upper porch, 1996. Photographed by Peter Christianson Valli.