

Aptos Memories

Bruce Silver

The Plan

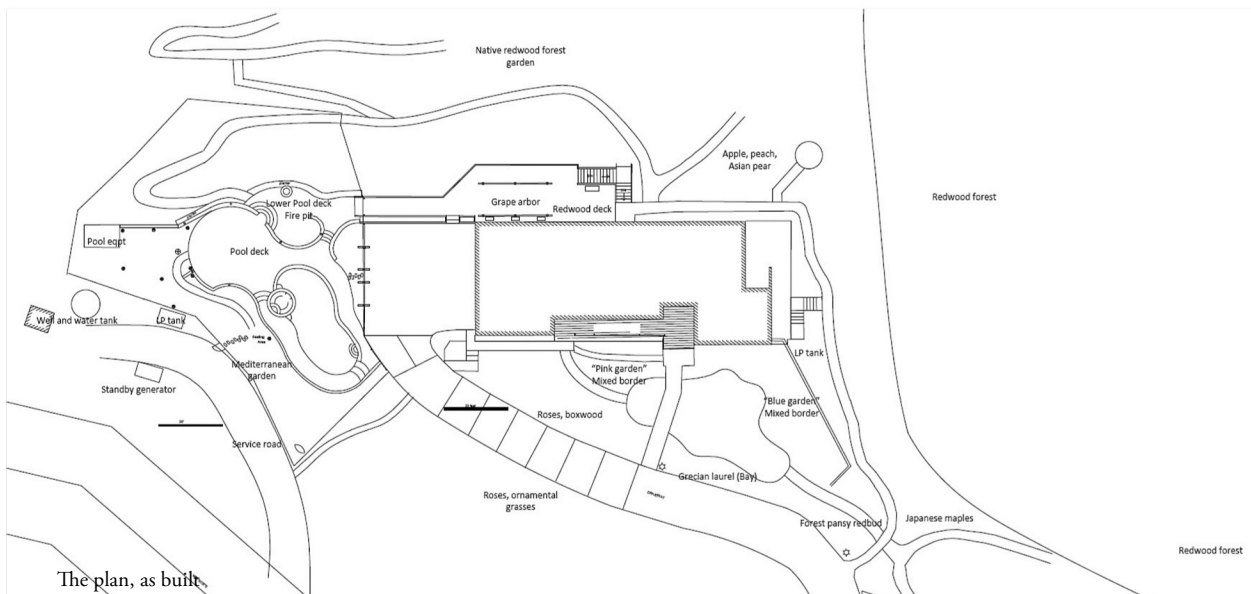
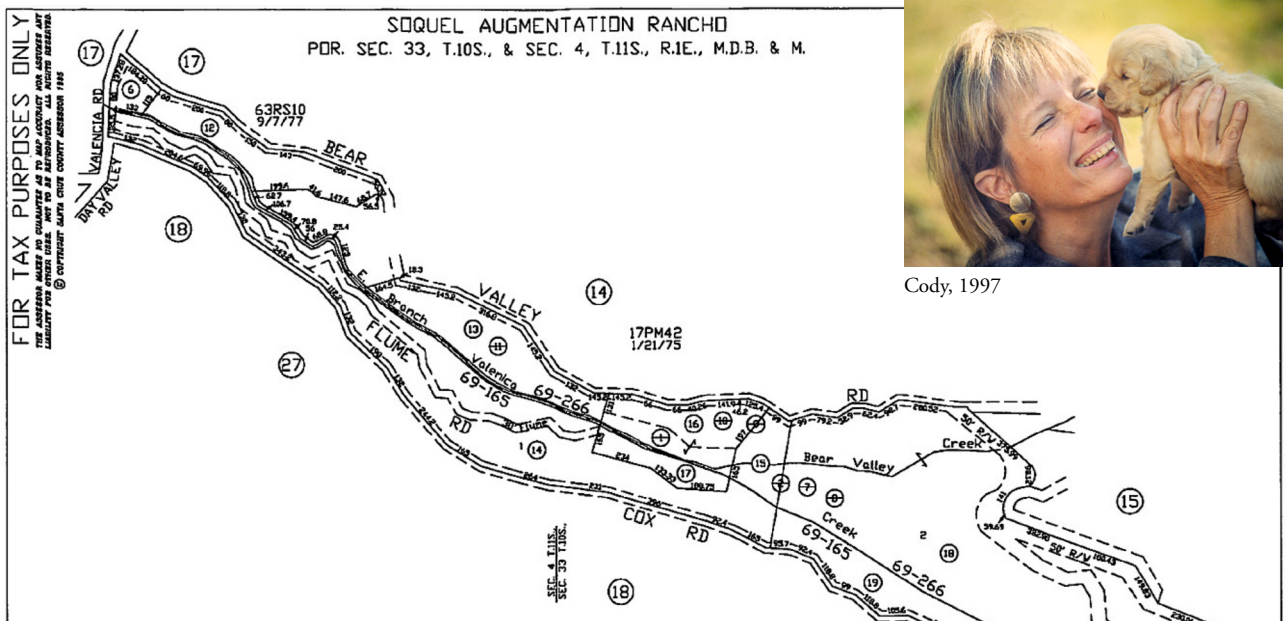
In 1997, the dot-com days, we left Boston for a new life in California. Our kids were grown and moved away. What we wanted was a dog and a place big enough for it to run around in, and Aptos was what we could afford. In the Santa Cruz redwoods 5 minutes from the beach, we got that and more: 22 acres along a half mile of Valencia Creek.

We got our puppy Cody first thing. Now we needed a plan. I wanted to create a special place in the country like my grandparents' in upstate New York where I spent most summers in my youth, a place with trails and gardens, where the kids and grandkids could stay and have lots of things to do.

We hired a landscape architect to create a master plan we would build over five years. It would have a pool, a large wood deck, paths down to the creek and the redwood forest, and acres of gardens.

As you can see from the photo, when we arrived it had none of that. The house seemed to have been dropped into a clearing in the forest.

But as you see from the plan at the bottom, we followed the plan and built that special place. This book tells that story.



The Pink Garden

In front of the house was an existing garden of sorts, with scraggly trees and shrubs. We pored over books of English garden design, and tried to make it look like that. On the right side we called it the “pink garden”, although over the years it got less pink. We later added a gravel path through the middle of it.



Cassie, May 2000



1997



July 1999



May 2000



April 2012



May 2012



November 1997

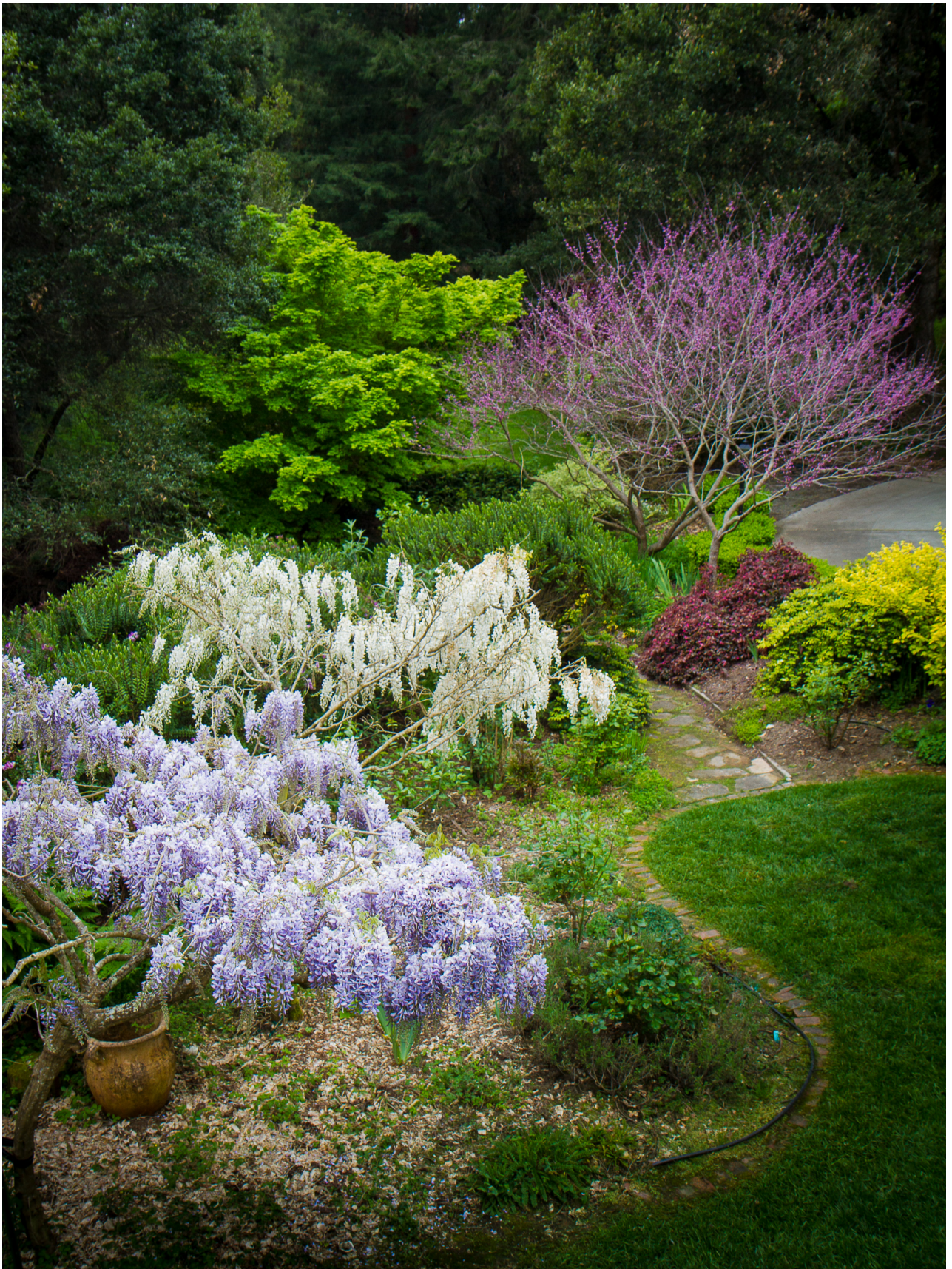
The Blue Garden

On the left side we created the Blue Garden. We tried to find plants called out in the English garden books, but even though everything grows in Santa Cruz, you just can't get most of those plants! In the end we found our own blue garden style, with wisteria, geraniums, roses, redbud, and Japanese maples.

Compare how it looked when we arrived with the same view a few years later.



July 2006



April 2010



1997

The Deck

At the back of the house was a tiny deck on stilts. We wanted to create a large deck as an outdoor room where we could eat in the shade and look out at the redwoods. Local craftsmen milled and joined giant 12x12 redwood beams of the arbor, shaded by grape vines. The redwood deck led down to the pool deck and firepit.



August 2012



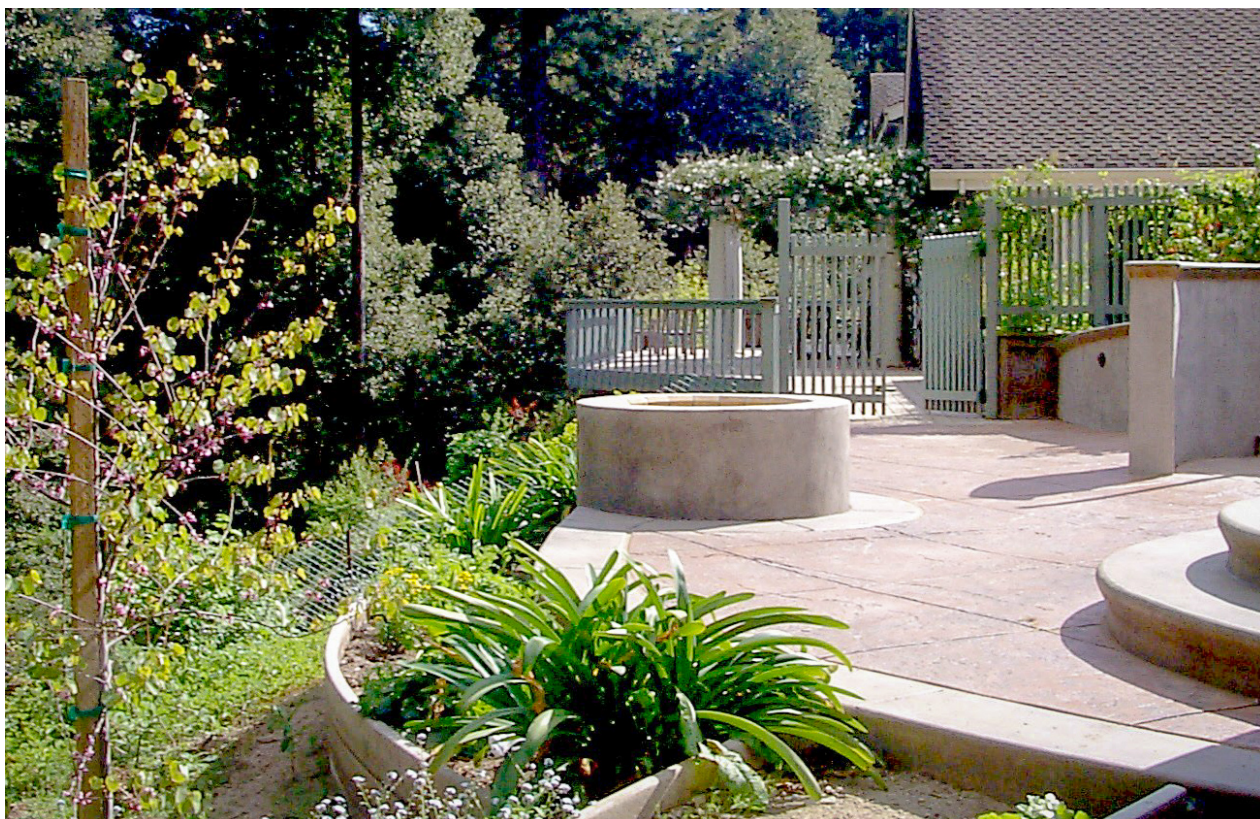
August 2012



August 2012



August 2012



July 2001



The Pool

We excavated the pool and spa out of a scrubby hillside next to the garage, beneath an undulating retaining wall. We planted Mediterranean gardens around the pool and roses over the pool gate. A stamped concrete pool deck and firepit connected to the wooden deck and paths down to the forest below.

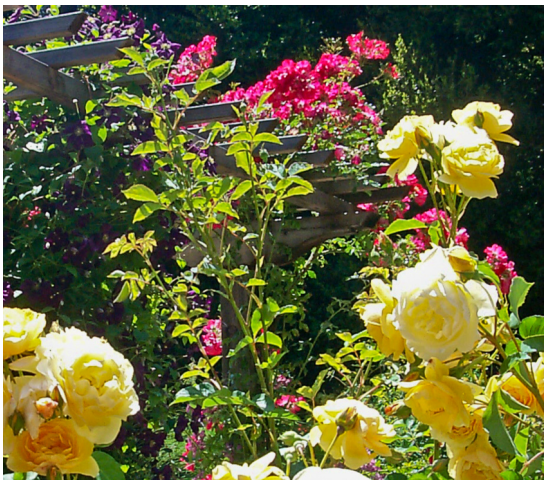
August 1999



April 2010



August 2012



June 2002



June 2002



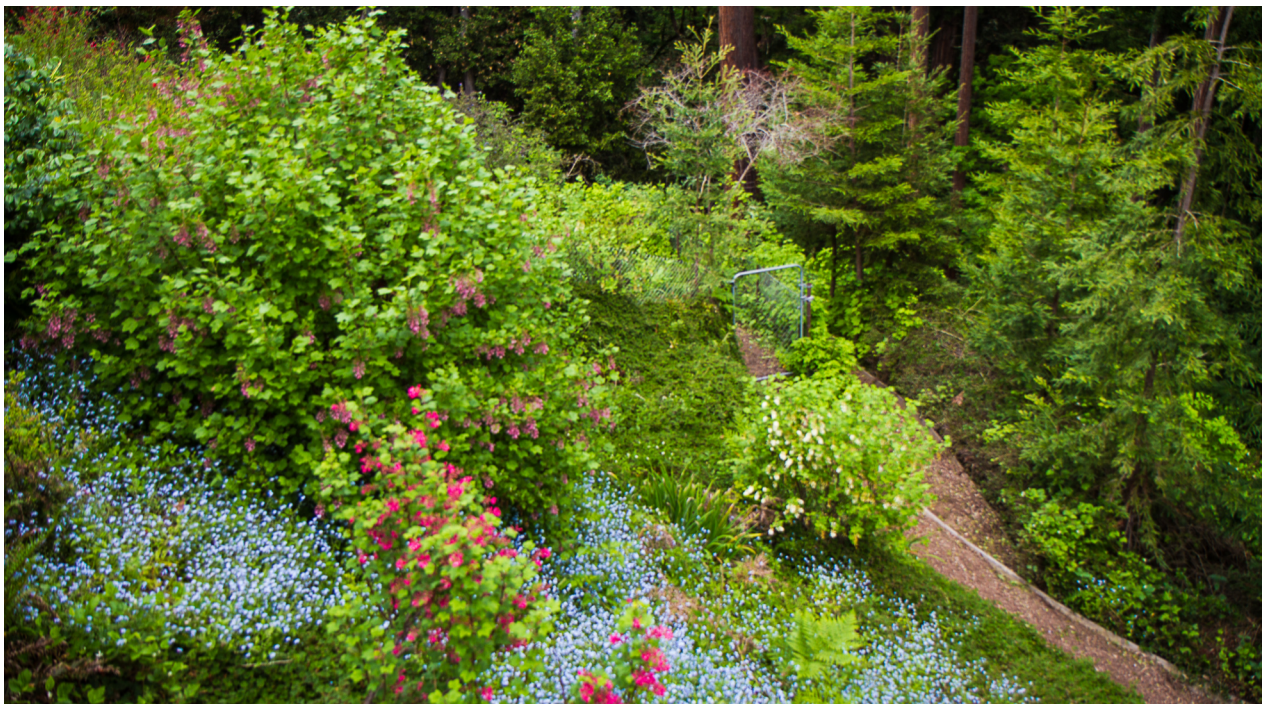
August 2006



April 2012



August 2012



April 2010

The Redwood Forest Garden

We made paths down to the creek through a redwood forest garden, with rubus, flowering currant, redwood sorrel, forget-me-nots, Douglas iris, and dogwood.



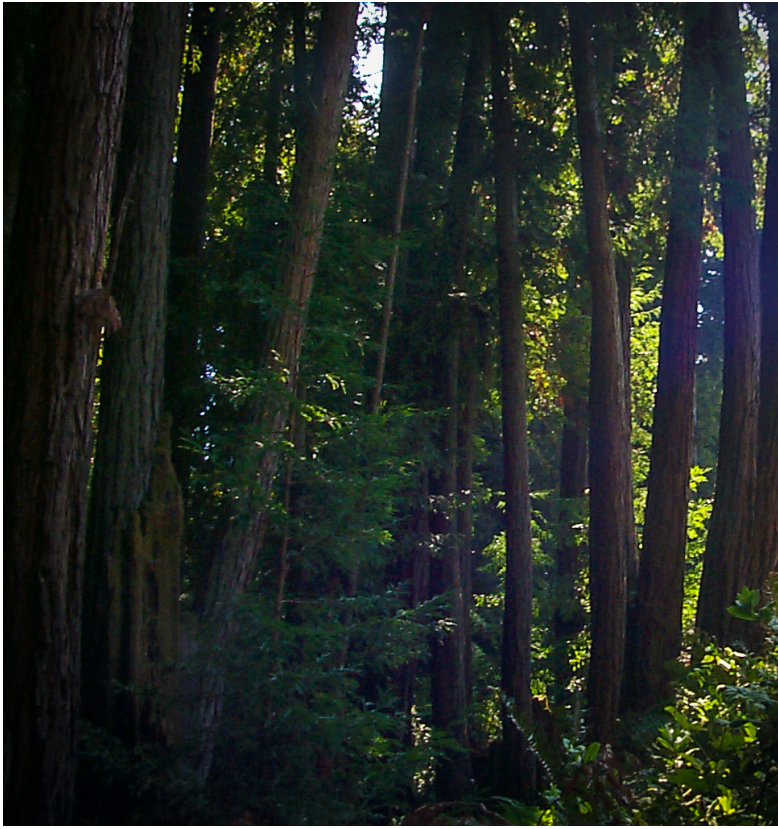
April 2003



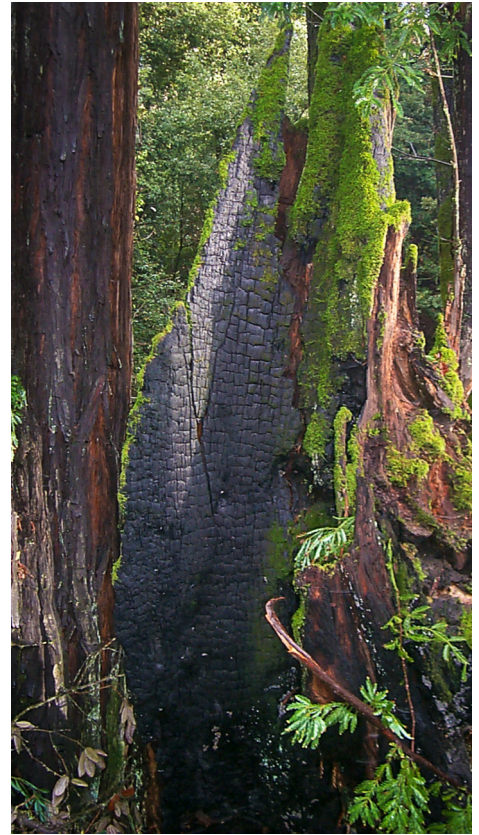
April 2000



April 2012



October 2003



December 2002

Along Valencia Creek

In the 1890s they cut down the old growth redwoods and sent them down a flume along Valencia Creek to the sawmill. Today the second growth redwoods, now 8-10 feet in diameter and 150 feet high, create a magical space for kids and dogs, whether walking on the paths or splashing through the creek.



January 2010



October 2003



January 2010



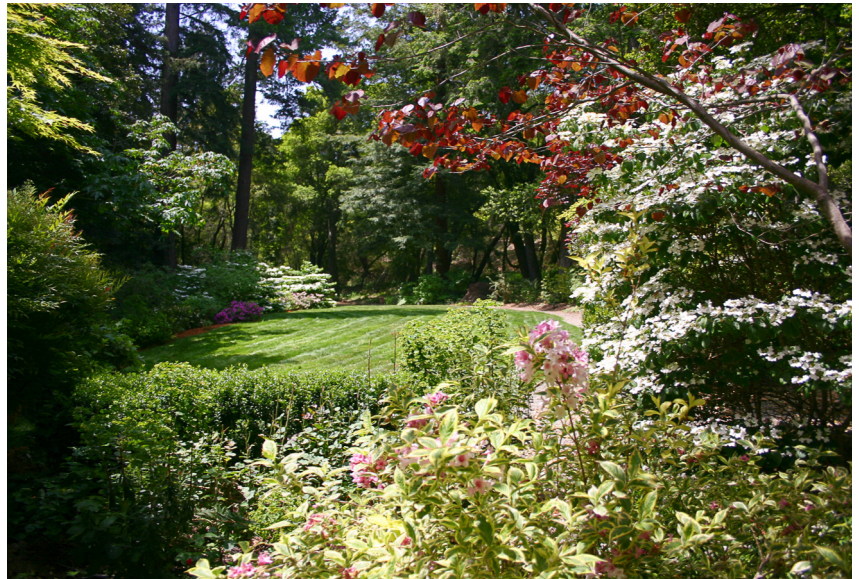
April 2003



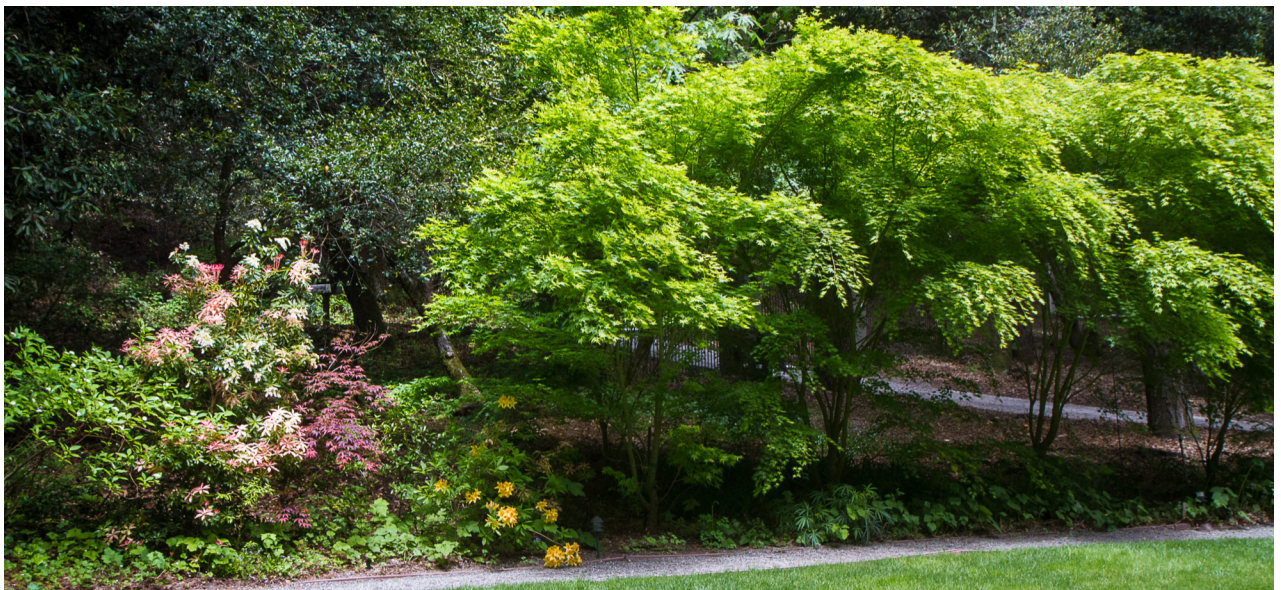
August 1999

The Meadow

With soil excavated from the pool we graded and planted a lawn we called the Meadow, and lined it with Japanese maples, hydrangeas, azaleas, fuchsia, and viburnum.



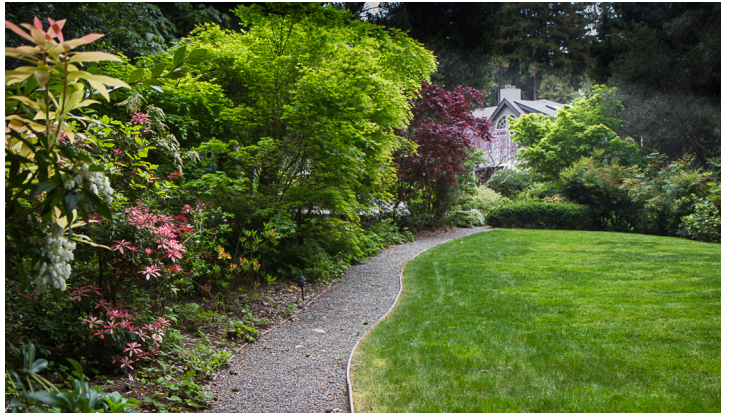
May 2008



April 2012



May 2008



April 2010



April 2010



April 2010



April 2012

In 2003, Jen and Brent got married in the Meadow. In 2006 we learned petanque on a trip to Provence, so we added that at the end of the meadow, along with a quiet place to sit.



April 2012



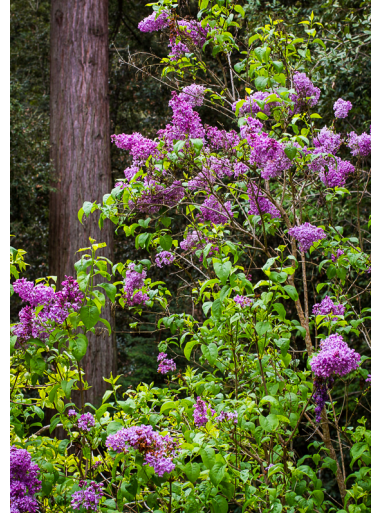
June 2002

Never-Ending Gardens

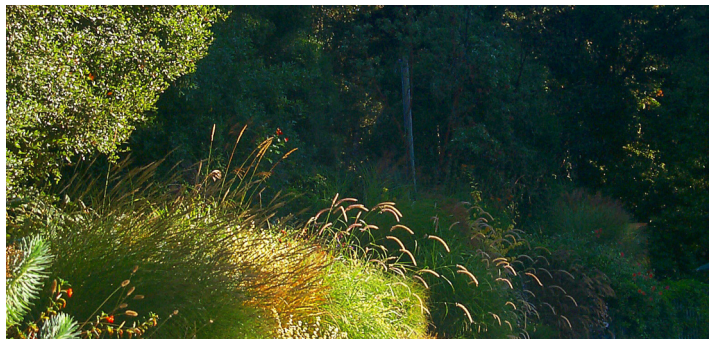
In the Monterey Bay climate, plants just want to grow. Little 5-gallon shrubs and trees soon grew into mature giants. In the end we had 3 acres of gardens, with plants filling every corner of it. We enclosed it in a quarter mile of deer fence and laid a similar length of irrigation pipe. I had to learn the Western Garden Book by heart and pose as a landscaper in order to shop the wholesale nurseries. The photos here are just a tiny sample of the plants in our gardens.



March 2004



April 2010



October 2003





May 2007



May 2007



May 2009

Kitchen

Eventually we tackled the house, taking out a few walls and creating a large open kitchen of Douglas fir, quartz, and stainless steel, with giant windows overlooking the redwoods.



August 2012



August 2012



August 2012



The Rest of the House

We made only minor changes to the rest of the house: new windows, custom fir cabinets in the den, a fantastic master bath with heated limestone floors and the world's best shower. Three fireplaces (and an infinite supply of firewood), a standby generator in case of power outages...

In the end...

... we did create that magical place, for dogs and kids alike. You could walk along country roads, through towering redwoods, or on near-empty beaches. We had a fabulous wedding there. Four dogs called those woods their own. It was beautiful, worth all the effort, and I loved it.

But to be closer to family, in 2012 we packed up and moved to Pasadena.

The house took a year to sell. Not everyone wants a place like that: no beachfront, no ocean views. The effort to maintain it could be overwhelming. Ultimately it was, even for us.

We just got too old to do it.

Epilogue

In 2019, on a visit to Santa Cruz, we stopped by to see what had become of our old house. The people we sold it to invited us in. They had made some improvements to the inside but the outside was a shambles. Keeping it up is a labor of love, and after a few years of drought they had let it go “back to nature”.

So sad. What once was no longer exists, except in our memories.

