



San Francisco Chronicle

More than a view blooms atop Dolores Heights  
Abundant, rocky landscape by Harlan Hand part of 'Open Days'

Alice Joyce

Wednesday, April 27, 2005

Commanding vistas of San Francisco set off Bill and Ilse Gaede's garden in Dolores Heights, where a verdant collection of orchids, clipped evergreens and succulents grows on a multilevel hardscape with rockwork.



A wooden doorway and connecting arbor draped in jasmine and bougainvillea ornament the garden's front entrance, flanked by richly planted beds that soften the look of the concrete sidewalk.

- [Printable Version](#)
- [Email This Article](#)

These streetside beds look good year-round. A backdrop of shapely winter-blooming jade plant grows in tandem with clambering pelargoniums, while combinations of blue, gray and pea-green succulent rosettes draw attention in the foreground.



The Gaedes purchased the property in 1984, and soon afterward, a section of the front garden suffered storm damage, prompting Bill Gaede to contact artist and designer Harlan Hand, who had worked on the landscape with the former owner.

Hand said he had always wanted to create a patio in the damaged area. The new rock used in the patio's construction perfectly matches the garden's older rock because Hand was able to procure it from his original source in the Sierra.

The designer's style is revealed immediately upon entering the garden, where his distinctive rockwork extends to a configuration of interconnecting terraces, with steps and paths throughout.

You could win a \$100,000 backyard makeover\* when you use your MasterCard® at The Home Depot®.

[click here](#)

 

\* awarded as a one-time payment

**ChronicleJobs TOP JOBS**

► | **FINANCE**  
Several openings also available  
[Federal Home Loan Bank of San Francisco](#)

---

► | **FINANCIAL**  
NOW HIRING  
[United Commercial Bank](#)

---

► | **FOOD & BEVERAGE**  
Culinary Experience  
[Thunder Valley Casino](#)

---

► | **GENERATOR TECH**  
Energy Technology Field  
[DTE Energy Technologies](#)

---

► | **GOVERNMENT**  
Several Positions Available  
[City of Nevada](#)

---

► | **GOVERNMENT**  
The Presidio Trust is a Federal...  
[Presidio Trust](#)

---

► | **GOVERNMENT**  
SENIOR ANALYST  
[Napa Court](#)

---

► | **GOVERNMENT**

**getaway** travel deals



Plantings show Hand's collaboration, also, giving rise to a treasury of flora cultivated in layered plantings. "When I bought this place, I tried to count the plants," Gaede said. "When I reached 1,000, I quit!"

As you step inside the main door, a mysterious orchid species appears to the left. Gaede said he does not know the name of the rare orchid but recalls that the plant survived a major freeze soon after he moved into the house. Coming into bloom around May, the orchid produces a tiny single mahogany flower held on an upright stem. After blooming for one week only, it stops. Gaede said he hopes another orchid fancier may be able to identify it one day.

A pond with water lilies and a fountain emerge nearby. Early in the year, azalea 'Sherwood Red' blooms here, bringing the scenery to life. Planted about, Camellia reticulata hybrids clothed in emerald foliage are a reliable asset, and still more effective adorned in showy flowers. Vermilion 'Bob Hope' keeps company with 'Coral Delight.' Magnolia cylindrica adds shimmery white flowers to the mix.

Hand's design incorporates a network of pathways to allow access to all corners of the garden. The setting's high points offer sweeping views of downtown San Francisco and the bay.

Another brilliant stroke was Hand's notion to plant cymbidium orchids in the ground. "Orchids are typically planted in pots. ... Most people think you cannot plant cymbidiums in the ground," Gaede said. All the same, Hand showed Gaede how to do it, using a popular potting mix called Super Soil.

Gaede grows an abundance of cymbidiums and other types of orchids, which bloom lavishly primarily during the winter months. Many plants have been growing for 25 years, and "they just keep going. I thought we'd lose plants when temperatures got down to 28 degrees," Gaede said, "but we covered them up and they made it."

An arbor cloaked in wisteria provides structure in the front garden. Placed by the pathways, elegant laceleaf maples are interesting across the seasons, from their sculptural branches to their fine-textured, beautifully colored leaves.

The topiary outlines of mugho pines are carefully shaped to open their forms and get a sort of view through, Gaede said. "Pruning goes on all year. ... Hand always told me, 'We need to keep things down to scale.' "

From a doorway to the lower garden, one gazes down on an arrangement of plant material that demonstrates Hand's signature color harmonies: drifts of a low-growing, blue-violet succulent and a rare bromeliad, its small bronze leaves splotched in green. Fleshy-leaved specimens of coppery orange, cardinal red and apple green complete the picture.

In easy reach, flowering abutilons and fuchsias commingle with cactus species, aloes, watsonias and yuccas.

At the rear of the property, the former owner, a structural engineer and past president of the San Francisco Orchid Society, built a retaining wall that runs along a sheer drop-off on the edge of the

INFORMATION ANALYST

[Metropolitan  
Transportation  
Commission](#)

▶ | **GOVERNMENT**

Do you have plans this weekend?  
[Coast Guard Reserve](#)

▶ | **HEALTHCARE**

Cardiac Sonographer/  
Supv.  
[San Francisco VA Medical  
Center](#)

▶ | **HEALTHCARE**

NOW HIRING  
[Mills-Peninsula Health  
Services](#)

▶ | **HEALTHCARE**

NOW HIRING  
[Sutter Health](#)

▶ | **HOSPITALITY**

NOW HIRING  
[Classic Residence by Hyatt](#)

▶ | **LEGAL**

Focus on Ukrainian/US Law  
[Law Offices of Daniel  
Horowitz](#)

▶ | **MANAGEMENT**

Community Services  
[Tamalpais Community  
Services District](#)

- [About Top Jobs](#)
- [View All Top Jobs](#)



boundary line.

In this setting, tender Vireya rhododendron specimens find shelter. A tall plant with shell-pink flowers contrasts with the soft coral flowers of a mature plant of smaller stature, growing beneath. Opposite, a white camellia plays off Rhododendron 'Fragrantissimum.' Diverse plantings come into view. Deep purple hybrid Douglas irises, the brilliant tones of echeverias and bird- of-paradise consort with a Meyer lemon yielding nonstop fruit. Left behind by the former occupant, the sculptural profile of a Burmese winged dragon wears a mossy veneer that shows its age.

Visitors are transfixed by the rear garden's exhilarating views. Sited "in the weather shield of Twin Peaks," Gaede says, "There will be nights when you can see the fog roll in all over the city, but we won't have any here. It's a great house to have ... to watch the weather in San Francisco."

---

The Gaede garden at 3660 21st St. in San Francisco is open to the public on May 22 in conjunction with The Garden Conservancy Open Days Program; admission is \$5. Visit [www.gardenconservancy.org](http://www.gardenconservancy.org) or phone toll free (888) 842- 2442 for information or to order an Open Days directory.

*Alice Joyce is the author of "West Coast Gardenwalks" (Michael Kesend Publishing). E-mail her at [westcoastgrdnwalks@yahoo.com](mailto:westcoastgrdnwalks@yahoo.com). Garden Walks appears the fourth Wednesday of each month.*

**Page 1WB**



[Get 50% off home delivery of the Chronicle for 12 weeks!](#)

[Back To Top](#)

[©2005 San Francisco Chronicle](#) | [Feedback](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Contact](#)