

## "BIRTH OF A NASCENT"

## ROCK GARDEN

## I



Here begins the tale of a fabulous garden in the making, which modesty forbids the owner or designer from telling. The reporter, who lives nearby, from time to time tours this nascent wonderland to chronicle its development.

Ted "Griffith" Kipping, our chapter's past president, is the owner. Harland Hand, widely acclaimed for his own extraordinary garden, is the designer. Konrad Gauder, stone mason, woodworker and sitar player, crafted the adjustable waterfall and ponds.

On the southwest slope of Mt. Davidson, the City's highest hill, in the picturesque Glen Park district, the garden shares a 100-foot by 50-foot double city lot with a Victorian house and separate garage. The lot, level when the Kippings acquired the property, is now on multiple levels, allowing more surface space for plants (the real reason collectors prefer rock gardens?)

The view, in the Italian Renaissance fashion, borrows adjacent landscape. Looking south from the higher levels, you see two unusual buildings, the Victorian conservatory on Monterey Boulevard, now painted red and green, and a Russianate Victorian house with a strange showercapped tower. Trees surrounding the conservatory include the rare Chilean wine palm, a date palm with poison spines and starlings, and two araucarias, the "bunya-bunya" and "Norfolk Island Pine." In the distance looms San Bruno Mountain.

During a visit in September 1985, the reporter observed large clay hills, topped by strange-looking cats probably drawn to the site by the fresh dirt and gravel and cat-lover Pat Kipping's handouts. Nasturtiums sprouted from the muddy mounds, along with other local weediferous flora. Piles of stones awaited placement by the master mason, Hand. The reporter tried to visualize the final effect, sensing an inchoate masterpiece in this chaotic piling of dirt and stones.

By early spring, the mudhills and rockpiles had been moved into pleasing arrangements of drywalls, paths and open areas, in an amphitheater-like design, with pools and bogs at the lower levels.

Despite such visible progress, it is clearly a race against time and a war against weeds. The front and side yards of the manse were clogged with plants, seemingly from every continent and family, in all forms and shapes, overgrown in their tiny pots. Hundreds of species and cultivars awaited planting or composting. Some of these orphans of the storm await the resettlement of a mysterious Mr. Grimaldi, in whose yard they once dwelled.

A month later, the reporter encountered a path of Hand's distinctive steps, an enchanting waterfall, ponds, a marsh, and a sidepath leading to the vegetable patch. She tried to imagine all this dirt and rock covered with myriad miniature plants, trees, vines, succulents, herbaceous perennials, bog plants and cloud forest orchids, as the globe-hopping Kippings foretell.

Harland Hand, the designer, described the Kipping Garden as "the most complicated garden ever designed" for a small, urban setting. "Complicated" because of the many microclimates -- marsh, ponds, "desert," shade, sun and dry screes, rockeries, berms, shade garden, greenhouse, vegetable garden (with three raised and boxed beds), espaliered miniature fruit trees, a "Niwiki" (bonsai-type trees) area, two lawns, and a waterfall. There are hand-sculpted concrete steps and four-wooden-and-concrete benches, designed by Hand.

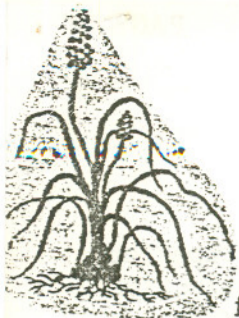
Hand noted the many delays in getting the Kipping Garden underway. The bulldozer bogged down in the mud, stalling excavation for six months until the ground dried out. By that time, Hand was in the throes of back pain from two automobile accidents -- which he hastened to add were not his fault -- and recovering from major surgery. Eager to get on with the task, he directed the bulldozing despite the pain.

Hand has set rocks upright around the mounds of dirt, instead of half buried on a slant, the method usually recommended in rock garden books. The rocks can be covered with plants or left exposed. This allows a wide range of planting possibilities while maintaining the underlying design of the mounds. Soil mixes can be put around the rocks, amended or modified as needed to accommodate the cultural needs of the plants Ted selects. The low plants on the mounds will counteract the Stonehenge effect of the upended rocks. He has urged Ted to keep the contours of the mounds in mind when planting. The mounds, and not the surrounding rocks, are the drama.

The challenge of creating a visually strong and horticulturally sound framework for growing and displaying exotic plants attracts Hand to designing gardens for plant collectors. He likes to see what the owner does after the elements of the design -- berms, rock walls, cement steps, benches, etc. -- are in place.

Hand knows the challenge of growing a great variety of plants in a small area. This is Ted's challenge, though, as Hand will bow out when he completes installation of the structural elements. Curious to see how the plantings transform the structural design, he wonders, can it work both as design and as a place for growing a collection of exotica?

(continued on page 3, at bottom)



## HARLAND HAND'S

### FIVE FAVORITES

[First in a series of local horticulturists' five favorite choice-but-easy rock garden plants for the Bay Area.]

Harland Hand is an innovative garden designer with a masters degree in painting and sculpture and many years of horticultural expertise. His own half-acre garden in El Cerrito holds well over 2000 exotic plants.

Hand considers the following five plants as foundation plants, basics in the gardens he has designed and especially in his own.

#### 1. Reiter's Thyme

This semi-woody, dark green thyme makes neat, tight growth which shades out weeds. A low maintenance ground cover which will take foot traffic, it spreads over concrete and will cascade over rocks. It takes shade or full sun, and should be pruned if it outgrows its bounds. Hand has had the same plant in place for 30 years. The flowers are insignificant, but the rich green color makes an excellent foil for other plants. Easy to root from cuttings. Available from Yerba Buena Nursery.

#### 2. Muscari armeniacum

Grape hyacinth, harbinger of Spring, is embossed in gold on Harland Hand's business card. Hand characterizes muscari as "modest, with elegance and charm" and finds it useful throughout the garden. Muscari has graceful foliage and attractive floral spikes in a beautiful sparkling blue, and blooms over a long period in the Bay Area. It multiplies regularly. Prefers sun but will bloom in semi-shade. No fertilizing is necessary. Pocket gophers are the only problem Hand has encountered.

#### 3. Viola odorata 'Royal Robe'

This rich purple violet is very fragrant on warm days, and blooms from September through May. Flowers appear above the leaves, and may even appear before the leaves do, as the plant is deciduous. This violet has a dense habit, with exposed roots that will shade out weeds. It takes a variety of soils, no fertilizing is necessary, and it is good as a cut flower. While it is a vigorous grower, it is easy to control, as it does not produce seed. Cuttings are available at nurseries or through mail order.

#### 4. Iberis sempervirens

Delicate crisp pure white flowers contrasting with blackish green leaves distinguish this low, mounding candytuft. The cultivar 'Snowflake' is particularly lovely and is available in six-packs at local nurseries.

Iberis blooms most of the year in the Bay Area, will take sun or part shade, and needs no fertilizing.

Iberis will hold soil on erosion-prone slopes. It should be cut back after heaviest bloom to keep it neat. It seldom self-seeds and roots readily (although slowly) from cuttings.

#### 5. Echeveria elegans

One of the best landscape echeverias, Mexican snowball is a light bluish-gray succulent that looks white in contrast with dark green foliage, and is very dramatic when grown in mass. It will pile up, so no dead leaves show, unlike other hens-and-chickens. It spreads well, prefers good drainage. No fertilizing is necessary.

Two problems are beetles and the need to cut off the flower stalks to maintain a neat appearance. Although the flowers are brilliant and attractive when the stalks are drooping, when the stalks become vertical, they look untidy.

Hand describes the flower color as "baby toes pink," and finds this an interesting contrast to the glaucous foliage.

END



"BIRTH OF A NASCENT"  
(continued from page 4)

"Can a collector's garden also be artistic?," he asks. Hand had not visited Ted's former garden of impressionistic and wildly colorful California natives where Ted, Ted said, "painted with flowers."

Ted "Griffith" Kipping has the imagination, drive, horticultural acumen and hands-on dirt-gardening skill to pull off this tour de force. Does he have the time to do the necessary weeding, pruning, and snailbaiting?

"BIRTH OF A NASCENT" continues in the next issue with an aerial view of the Kipping Garden and an exclusive interview with Ted Kipping, in which he tells why he hired a garden designer, how he intends to fit so many plants and climates in the limited space, how he will esthetically harmonize such a great hodgepodge of plants, and how he will find the time for "shibumi."

## "BIRTH OF A NASCENT"

## ROCK GARDEN

## II

Ted "Griffith" Kipping, naturalist, horticulturist, sensei macro photographer and tree shaper, once again takes up dirt gardening. Cheered on by wife Pat and baby Kirk, Ted is creating a horticultural jewel box in the scenic Glen Park district of San Francisco.

This is Ted's third garden (not counting Golden Gate Park and Strybing Arboretum, where he served in the corps d'élite). We anticipate a distillation distinctively Ted -- original, colorful, horticulturally worthy.

The garden shares a 100-foot by 50-foot double city lot with a Victorian house and separate garage. The multiple levels are reached by a path of Harland Hand's distinctive hand-sculpted cement stepping stones, with side paths leading to an elevated vegetable patch behind the garage and a staging area behind the house.



AERIAL VIEW OF KIPPING GARDEN  
Note upper & lower lawns, waterfall, koi pond, marsh, Hand footpath, berms & part of "gutter bog"

The main path will end at a "fake" gate on the boundary fence, where through trompe l'oeil, Ted can imagine himself in the garden of the Monterey Conservatory, where he dreams of training exotic vines like *Tropaeolum speciosum* up the rare Chilean wine palm and poisoned-spine date palm.

The Kippings will regulate the adjustable waterfall, crafted by stone mason and sitar player Konrad Gauder, by a "dimmer switch" in the house, so that water can trickle or rush through the channels chiseled in the large flat rocks and drip or cascade into the pool.

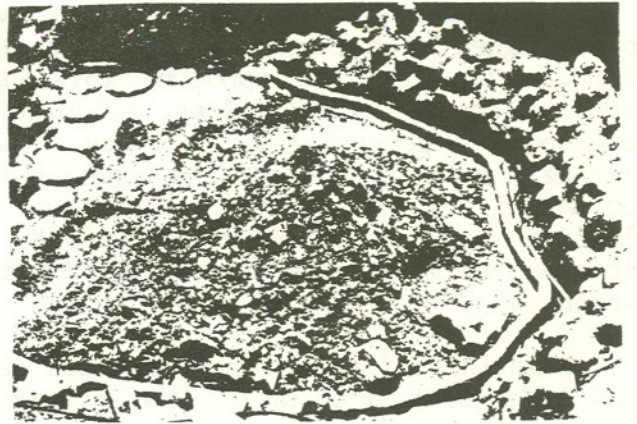


Here continues the tale of a fabulous garden in the making. The reporter, who lives nearby, from time to time tours this nascent wonderland to chronicle its development.

On this pool will float water hyacinths. Brilliantly colored irises will grow in the deep boggy sides. With characteristic generosity, Ted will stock the pool with koi for the neighborhood cats.

Ted will house his bonsai collection, exotic vines, and a bromeliad and orchid cloud forest (to be automatically misted twice a day) in a narrow strip between the house and the side fence.

The lower of two lawns is surrounded by an unusual "gutter bog" edged with San Francisco cobblestones laid by Konrad. Runoff from the rock-studded berms and subirrigation from a holey pipe will create a narrow semi-circular bog for the plants Ted cannot fit into the sides of the waterfall pool, the marsh area, or the minibogs he will create here and there.



"GUTTER BOG"  
Note row of San Francisco cobblestones, holey pipe, & rock-studded berms

The reporter imagines Ted stretched flat on the staging area, arms pendent, or perched on the rim of the gutter bog, arms ascendant, as he accesses the various nooks and crannies where soil pockets will hold alpines, small herbaceous perennials, bulbs, little grasses, sedges and other gracile genera. In this vision, baby Kirk and two playful cats romp nearby while Pat takes a brief respite from household chores.



TED FINDS TIME  
FOR SHIBUMI

In early June, this reporter found tons of sieved soil awaiting placement around the rocks and cement stepping stones, and what looked like a giant sandbox atop the vegetable hillock. Irrigation and misting pipes protruded from berms and rock walls, murky water filled the ponds and bog.

The front yard and steps were even more clogged with plants than on the last visit. The reporter pondered this vast array of trees, shrubs, vines, succulents, herbaceous perennials, alpines, all seemingly rare and choice, and wondered how Ted would fit it all in. The task of planting out this plethora before it perishes in its pots would daunt most gardeners.

Fighting off mosquitoes, a black cat, and Ted's demonstration of the automatic misting system, the bedraggled reporter at last got answers to the readers' persistent queries.

Why did Ted hire a garden designer?

As his "fantasy plant list" expanded to cover acres instead of the 100-foot by 50-foot lot, Ted recognized the need for objectivity. He became "too greedy," so he employed Harland Hand to design a garden which would provide many microclimates as well as usable space for the "human interface" -- lawns for the child(ren)'s play, a vegetable patch for the vegetarian Kippings, places to sit and admire and be educated.

What is the concept of the Kipping Garden?  
The mood?

Ted envisions the garden as a "rocky promontory poking out of a cloud forest," where warm sunny days and cool misty nights will allow him to grow a wide range of plants. Eventually it will be a demonstration garden, a "pleasant place for plant people" to examine hortensial jewels and attend classes and lectures. The mood of the garden will be "quiet exaltation."

How will Ted aesthetically harmonize such a great hodgepodge of plants?

Ted's primary objective is to work ecologically with "the microhabitat requirements of the plants." Aesthetics is secondary. In response to this reporter's skepticism (she had seen Ted's previous gardens and his "eye-gasm"-provoking slide shows), he advised her he will later "fearlessly fine-tune" for color harmony.

But for now, Ted is intent on planting what he has already collected, preparing the lawns, and putting into operation his computerized irrigation and misting system.

How will Ted go about planting all that stuff out front?

Ted will first plant trees, scandent shrubs and vines from the cloud forests of the various continents and island nations of the world. Then he will work with the fussy plants and those which further define space. After that, he will plant neutral plants adaptable to a wide range of environments. Eventually, one to two thousand species or cultivars will inhabit the garden.

How will Ted find the time to weed, much less for shibumi?

By devoting one-half hour per evening, "eight nights a week," Ted will tend seriatim the garden's various areas. Shibumi, the indefinable excellence or the appearance of effortless grace Ted aspires to in all his endeavors, may be elusive on such a schedule.

But Ted "Griffith" Kipping clearly thrives on the challenge of accomplishing the difficult and undoable. Fulfilling his elaborate plan will be a remarkable accomplishment.



LIKE ROCKY, "BIRTH OF A NASCENT" will return. We shall revisit the Kipping Garden next spring.