



LEFT The wrap around deck and path to the east of the garden offer lovely ocean views from various vantage points. Along the path flowering beds with richly colored Achillea 'Terra Cotta', deep blue Salvias and Cranesbills, with touches of yellow Butterfly Weed and White Gaura 'Whirling Butterflies' contrast with the deep greens of a sheltering pine and clipped Escallonia shrubs.

BELOW The dining area sits in a gravel clearing under the shade of a fragrant Mock Orange (*Pittosporum undulatum*). Hydrangeas, ferns, and the white wands of Japanese Anemone in bloom enjoy the tree cover.

LANDSCAPE OF DREAMS

Overlooking Stinson Beach, Landscape Designer Patricia Benner Has Recreated The Beloved Gardens In New Jersey Designed By Her Mother

BY **DIANE DORRANS SAEKS**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MARION BRENNER**

LANDSCAPING HER FAMILY'S GARDEN on a sheltered hillside high above Stinson Beach, Patricia Benner has nurtured lush planting and an exquisite flower palette that evoke the Monet-style gardens of her childhood.

Today a tapestry of purple verbena, blue salvia, purple coneflower, pale mauve perovskia, pink Japanese anemone and palest pink achillea flourish beneath fragrant citrus trees. Sheltered by a low knoll, a pink magnolia tree and swathes of scented jasmine surround her quiet terrace.

"The garden evolved organically, part by design and part by chance," said Benner.

"This is my on-going weekend project and was planted in sections, as my husband and I got to them. He, the irrigation master, and me, and a couple of local assistants, the planting labor," noted Benner. Plants were added in as she snapped up finds from nearby nurseries. Unlike her meticulous planning for clients, nothing was planned or on paper.

"Stinson Beach is in the Golden Gate National Recreation area with Mount Tamalpais towering overhead and Bolinas to the



The hiking trails and meadows of Mt. Tam grace the views above the garden. Fruiting Citrus, silvery Guava and a painterly mix of flower color and texture including silvery, spikey Artichoke, purple spires of Perovskia and energetic hues of yellow and red, enliven the foreground of the view. Pollinators abound in the carefully selected mix of plants.

Gardens

RIGHT A seating area at the west side of the garden is a favorite spot for sunset views and to enjoy a host of California natives including dark green Ceanothus 'Carmel Creeper' and 'Ray Hartman', Myrica californica and Carpenteria californica. These provide a lovely contrast with the soft light green of Peppermint Geranium (Pelargonium tomentosum) and Cranesbill Geraniums. Benner focuses on the colors and textures of greens to add to the visual interest of the planting composition.

north," Benner said. "It's a charming, rugged coastal community with a very laid-back culture and a fundamental connection to nature and the elements. That's why my planting is somewhat informal."

The plant-specific irrigation system she set up allowed her to combine favorite California natives and drought tolerant plants with beloved cottage garden perennials she remembers from her youth. Gravel paths meander through the garden and widen to allow seating areas in natural shelter, where



LEFT Birds at the bird path along the path to the front gate welcome visitors to the garden. The shaded path winds its way through rock edged flower beds abundant with bloom.

the family enjoys white water views of the ocean.

"I learned to garden from my mother, a landscape designer who practiced in suburban New Jersey," said Benner. "From her, I gathered the finer points of planting and tending, and attuned my ear to gentle rhythms of the seasons."

"The best landscape design offers a transformational experience, and my preference in dazzlingly sunny California has always been to highlight the cooling properties of verdant fronds and lush greens" said Benner. "I also love cozy garden hideaways and soothing colors.

Kumquats, pineapple guava, and

Meyer lemon trees she planted now offer gentle shade for her terrace.

"As a landscape designer, I have never had the instinct to bend nature to my will but rather to create a naturalistic palette, like my mother's," said Benner. "My work emphasizes long-term, sustainable and site-specific exterior design. I take a patient, holistic approach, informed by years of research, study, and generational insight. This has given me a hillside garden with pretty foliage and lovely flowers and evergreen trees that are handsome throughout the year. Our slow approach means it will retain its beauty and vigor many years into the future." **CH**

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A harmonious mix of greens and color in the garden contrasts with the dense, dark greens of the forested slopes above the house. Benner creates a play of textures ranging from fine-textured, dainty Gaura 'Whirling Butterflies', to silvery, serrated Artichoke, to soft, dancing wands of Japanese Anemone.