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### DESIGNERS BRING LANDSCAPE IN TUNE WITH NATURE FOR SAN JOSE SYMPHONY BENEFIT SHOWCASE GARDENS

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FOR the landscape designers working on this year's San Jose Symphony Showcase house in Saratoga, it's been one problem after another.

"Snails ate the vegetables," moans Karola Zanjani.

"Too wet and cold for flowers to bloom," worries Heidi Johnson.

"Where's the sun?" asks Darco Ernesto Putic.

Yes, El Nino is making no exceptions for the San Jose Symphony's Showcase, which opened this week. Long after they thought they could relax, the landscapers are still working.

Zanjani has planted new vegetables; Johnson is replacing the non-bloomers; and Putic is simply going with the flow of rain.

"It's been a challenge," says **Virginia Saso**, one of four designers working on the one-acre setting surrounding Showcase '98, the Saratoga retreat of Tim McNeil.

While the 30 designers working inside the house had to deal with restrictions imposed by McNeil, resulting in a decidedly masculine bent, the exterior designers have been dealing with Mother Nature.

When the landscapers arrived, the land was nearly bare except for weeds, asparagus and mint. Putic took on the major landscape and the others tackled 10 big raised beds along the sunny south side of the house.

Here's a look at what the four designers created for this year's showcase, which continues through June 8.

#### THE BUTTERFLY GARDEN:

Remaining flexible has helped Johnson, of Yamagami's Nursery in Cupertino. For one raised bed she wanted to show the large variety of plants that entice butterflies and hummingbirds to gardens. Unfortunately, she says, "it's been so cold and rainy that things refused to bloom in time, so I went out and picked up a whole new set of flowering plants."

The honeysuckle vine, for instance, grew so slowly that Johnson added a white potato vine (*Solanum jasminoides*) to cover the trellis because it grows rapidly and makes a delicate white filler. There are examples of perennials, annuals, and herbs including day lily, French lavender, blanket flower, coneflower, butterfly bush, trailing lantana and more. "Most of the plants provide nectar," she says, "but some of them provide a host for the caterpillars."

The only flowers that cooperated by blooming more or less on schedule were the roses, which fill a second 20-foot-long raised bed. But the roses "have fungus on the leaves. They are giving us flowers, but less than normal," she says. "It's a good chance to figure out which roses are truly disease resistant."

To show ways roses can be used in the garden, there are climbers, miniatures, ground covers, container and tree roses. Plants that make nice companions to roses are lantana, woolly thyme, verbena, catmint, Santa Barbara daisy and sweet alyssum. Especially eye catching is a gorgeous white rose called "Sally Holmes" climbing a spiral metal trellis.

#### THE VEGETABLE GARDEN:

Zanjani's major headaches have been the snails. "I've been trying to hand pick the snails but they attacked the cauliflower, so it had to go before the show opened because it didn't look presentable," she sighs.

Zanjani, of KZ Designs in Saratoga, planted two long, narrow raised beds, 36 inches high by 32 inches wide, that are visible from the house.

The showcase living room is decorated with a somewhat African theme, with warm colors, particularly dark reds and golds, so she has incorporated those colors into her landscape. "When you look out the living room window, this is what you will be seeing," she says, pointing to five bamboo tepees planted with Japanese cucumbers, snow peas and beans she expects to twine up by early summer.

One bed has 20 different vegetables planted very close together to compensate for their small size.

"The owner is a semi-vegetarian, so the two beds provide a very nice vegetarian diet, including strawberries for dessert," she says.

The other bed has dwarf citrus underplanted with strawberries and rosemary.

Zanjani says that "the weather definitely has had an effect on the availability of vegetables. In order to get a head start, I recruited a vendor at the farmers market to dig up vegetable plants for me."

She particularly wanted the broccoli to flourish. It didn't. "I thought about getting a bunch of broccoli at the grocery store and just sticking it in the middle of the broccoli leaves," she confessed. "Instead I used a stone bunny rabbit next to the plant for accent."

#### THE HERB GARDEN:

Luckily for Virginia and Louis Saso, the weather hasn't been as rough on herbs, making things easier for the two well-known herbalists, who enlisted the help of their son's Tom Saso Landscaping to create two 20-foot-long raised beds of herbs.

Louis Saso, 81, is especially excited about the raised areas.

"These are wonderful. I've never seen beds like this. The plants are right at eye level. You can enjoy the colors and fragrances up close and it's so easy to work at this level. I wouldn't mind going home and building the same thing," he says, referring to the raised beds that home owner McNeil inherited when he bought the house.

The owners of Saso's Herb Gardens in Saratoga planted 35 kinds of herbs, chosen for their fragrance and textures, in the two beds. "I brought them along carefully so we'd be sure to have things in bloom," **Virginia Saso** says, although she admits, "I'm surprised how much is in bloom."

Among the flowers and fragrances: a variety of scented geraniums; lavender grosso for potpourri; Spanish, English and French lavenders; St. John's wort; Vietnamese coriander; Australian tea trees; and an assortment of salvias. Everything is labeled.

#### EVERYTHING ELSE:

A bare, muddy slope greeted Putic when he arrived at the showcase site the first day.

Since then he has done extensive landscaping, working with the owner to install a 20-foot-high waterfall with five cascade pools and a 40-foot-long koi pond. There are seven koi in the pond, along with the addition of a toad house (he's still looking for a toad), as well as a resident turtle and two Mandarin ducks in a center island.

The stream from the fountain meanders through the property and then is recycled back to the waterfall.

Putic, who owns Waterbirds in Menlo Park, says he wanted the waterfall and stream "to feel like it's always been a part of the property" with a natural balance of flora and fauna. Because he wanted an instant finished look, he used larger plants. "But they will be divided and spread out as the landscape matures," he says.

Everything is newly planted, even the big birch trees: pink and purple rhododendrons, purple hydrangeas, dozens of ferns, low-growing maples, flowering ground covers, Iceland poppies, Mexican primroses, purple wisteria in containers and orchids in the entryway. There are also cannas, callas, delphiniums and ornamental grasses.

Interestingly there is not one blade of lawn anywhere in the landscape.

"The idea was to be as natural as possible -- part of the land, not an intrusion into it," Putic says. "It's a fairly easy-care maintenance. You have to trim things and pick up leaves, but it's not high maintenance."

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