

Datebook

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Barkin loudly:
"New Normal's"
Ellen Barkin not
afraid to speak
her mind **F4**

HOME & GARDEN



Photos by Liz Hafalia / The Chronicle

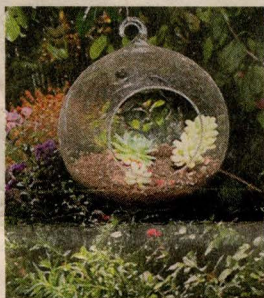
The dog- and child-friendly Olinger garden will be on Saturday's Portola neighborhood garden tour offering peeks at 22 plots.

Backyard surprises in S.F. sun-belt tour

By Joe Eaton
and Ron Sullivan

Ruth Wallace remembers knocking on doors in her Portola district neighborhood, asking strangers about their gardens, to organize a tour as a fundraiser for a new branch library. That was five years ago; this year the tour, which takes place Saturday, has 22 stops and gardeners are calling her to volunteer.

Residents, attracted to this southeast corner of San Francisco in part by its large backyards and sunny climate, are turning the Portola into San Francisco's new garden district, with McLaren Park as a sprawling



Portola Garden Tour

Tour 22 gardens from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday. Tickets: \$25, or two for \$40. Proceeds benefit the Portola Garden District Scholarship for students of City College of San Francisco's Environmental Horticulture and Floristry Department. To purchase, call (415) 585-8399 or go to www.portolagardentour.com.

public centerpiece.

The district's gardens have wildly various slopes, exposures and sizes but are mostly invisible from the street. That last fact makes for a tour full of surprises. We previewed a handsomely landscaped and creatively planted hillside lot, a sustainable child- and dog-friendly space and a plant collector's paradise.

Vestiges of the Portola's past are everywhere. In the last century it boasted 19 nurseries, most owned by Italian families. The remains of the Garibaldi family's University Mound Nursery are still there, with *Portola continues on F6*



Randy Holman's garden offers variegated foliage. Geraniums, above, mix with *Equisetum hyemale*. Inset: Succulents at the Olingers.

JOHN KING
Place

A smart addition from City College

Ambitious buildings often debut at the most awkward possible time. The Chinatown/North Beach campus of City College of San Francisco is the latest case in point.

The 14-story tower that now anchors Portsmouth Square had its ceremonial opening Friday as the 86,000-student system is threatened with the loss of accreditation because of managerial and financial problems. The



Liz Hafalia / The Chronicle

City College's 14-story tower provides a visual gesture to Chinatown.

first meeting held by trustees in a companion four-story building included a vote to bring in a state trustee to oversee operations.

In this context, it is difficult not to view the \$138 million campus as an albatross. But from the urban design perspective, or as a manifestation of San Francisco's cultural dynamics, look on it as something else: a smart addition to the landscape no matter what comes next.

The complexity of the task that faced the architectural team of EHDD and Barcelon & Jang can be seen from the upper floors of the boxy tower at *King continues on F2*

HOME & GARDEN

Tour offers a bounty of surprises in hidden yards

Portola from page F1

die-hard roses growing through the broken panes of the greenhouses. There's still a Maltese contingent, and at least one Maltese cross incised into a sidewalk.

Retiree Robert Henderson and Department of Public Works staffer Mindy Linetzky have a view that includes the greenhouse ruins from their personal Hanging Garden: a steep, narrow slope terraced for ornamentals, herb and vegetable plots; seating that includes an antique porch swing; and, on the lowest level, pear and plum trees: "We wanted to be able to stand on the terrace and pick the fruit."

'Windy location'

"It's a very windy location," Linetzky said. "That's why we have a lot of grasses on the patio — to catch the movement of the wind." There is, however, enough sun for sizable tomatoes, succulents, even the odd orchid tucked in with the veggies: "It's a matter of what's achievable — what you can do with your space and your finances. You don't have to be *Dwell* magazine."

A few blocks away, Michael and Cheryl Olinger designed for their relatively flat space, two young sons, two golden retrievers and sustainability: a modest, rompable lawn of drought-tolerant grass, raised beds for edibles and ornamentals, and a rain-water-harvesting system.

Cheryl Olinger, a Sears Holding Corp. executive, is finishing a handsome mosaic mural along the raised bed for fingerling potatoes, strawberries, sometimes pumpkins. There's an outdoor

"The landlord said he was selling, and I realized I was married to the garden."

Randy Holman

screen for movie nights.

Michael, a general contractor who comes from a family of avid gardeners, cherishes the canna lilies that his mother brought from upstate New York. He salvaged a couple of 300-gallon galvanized tanks; they're under the deck, with downspouts feeding them; a drip system irrigates the plants. Another tank is next to Jack and Henry's "clubhouse," which will next get a living roof.

Designer Randy Holman has another of those long, narrow lots, but a level one. He started working on his intense, colorful garden as a tenant before he bought the house: "The landlord said he was selling, and I realized I was married to the garden." Holman is a collector and an experimenter: "I look for obscure things — plants a little on the edge."

Gardening gene

Ornamental grasses dance with standard-pruned roses and lots of variegated foliage. One favorite grass is a bronze stipa whose threadlike flower heads catch the sun like tinsel. A wind-break of three smallish eucalypts keeps the space warmer and, interestingly, so does the strip of synthetic turf replacing a too-demanding tiny lawn. "My next-door neighbor gets frost, but I don't," Holman said.

Like Michael Olinger,



Photos by Liz Hafalia / The Chronicle

Cheryl Olinger and Hunter (Dobie waits outside) in her children's "clubhouse," which opens to the garden.



Randy Holman, reflected in a garden mirror, likes to experiment with "plants a little on the edge."



Holman says gardening runs in his family: He inherited these begonias from his grandmother.

Holman has the gardening gene. In the shade of his patio are begonias he got from his grandmother and an epiphyllum that originated with his great-grandmother. The latter must be a vegetable Rasputin: "It's survived a lot of moves. Once I found it stuffed in a box."

"The garden tour is a community-building effort," Mindy Linetzky said. "You meet your neighbors, discover you

have things in common, and they begin giving you cuttings." The tour long since hit its target for the library, but, said Wallace, "no one wanted to give it up." This year's proceeds are going to San Francisco City College's environmental horticulture department.

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