



PRESIDIO MINOR

MODERN SHAPES COMBINE WITH LUSH DECIDUOUS PLANTINGS AT A SAN FRANCISCO HOME.

BY JOANNE FURIO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN SUTTON PHOTOGRAPHY

ABOVE
Bluestone paving runs between lush planting beds that are anchored by Japanese maples.

In most large-scale house renovations, the garden is designed in conjunction with the house or after the renovation is completed. In the case of a shingle-style Edwardian house in San Francisco's Park Presidio district, that sequence was reversed. The garden was created first.

"The garden was overgrown and the lawn was struggling," says Scott Lewis, ASLA, of Scott Lewis Landscape Architecture in San Francisco, who was brought in to do the makeover. "The homeowners were ready to change the appearance of the garden based on the changing needs of their family."

Children who once needed to play on the lawn or ride the zip line that ran from the wooden shed to the house were now older. So the adults could claim the space for entertaining, while indulging the wife's penchant for plants. The garden contained many large favorites she had collected.

Lewis could have created a traditional garden more reflective of the house's historic style. But he had already worked with the couple and knew their taste. He had designed contemporary gardens for their contemporary house in Stinson Beach.



LEWIS REPLACED THE LAWN WITH A CRISP GEOMETRIC WEDGE OF BLUESTONE PAVING, WHICH LEADS THE EYE TO THE BACK OF THE GARDEN.

ABOVE

The garden was renovated before the house. Wider openings and trim new doors and windows frame picturesque views.

“We knew it was not going to be a Pacific Heights clipped boxwood garden,” he explained, referring to the formality that is typical in a nearby San Francisco neighborhood.

Lewis began the renovation of the long and narrow yard, some 50 feet by 25 feet, by replacing the lawn with a crisp geometric wedge of bluestone paving. The smaller end of the wedge is closer to the house, creating a wide swath of pavement near the middle, which is the sunniest spot. The wedge also leads the eye to the back of the garden, which connects to the Presidio, San Francisco’s

historic park that had once been the site of a Spanish fort, and its skyline of trees.

Lewis decided to keep the old picket fence that separates the house property from the park, which helped set up the interplay between the contemporary and the traditional. “It has a wonderful patina,” Lewis says, “and is the delineation between the wilds of the Presidio beyond.”

Another element that remained was the wooden shed, but it was not untouched. After the homeowner transformed the shed into an artist’s studio with ample

windows, Lewis had a metal frame added over the exterior that allows it to be covered in ivy without damaging the structure. Now the so-called green cube is a focal point, adding a sense of romance and whimsy to the garden.

An ipe deck and steps were added, connecting the living room to the garden, anchored on one side by a board-form concrete planter, a more contemporary architectural choice.

Lewis could have easily filled the garden with the Mediterranean and semitropical plants most designers are inclined to work with in this temperate climate. Instead, he took his cue from the single specimens the wife wanted to keep, which include a European cranberrybush (*Viburnum opulus* ‘Sterile’), a Japanese snowball bush (*Viburnum* →

SITE PLAN

IMAGE CREDIT
Courtesy Scott Lewis
Landscape Architecture

STUDIO 1
An existing lath-covered storage shed became a family art studio.

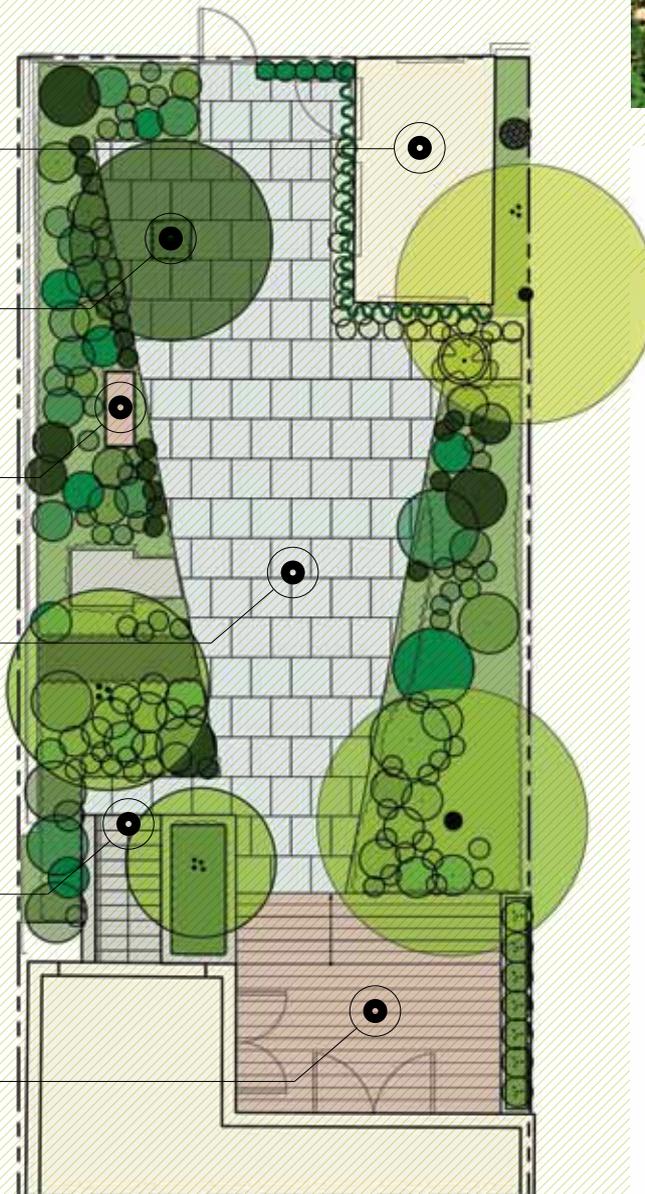
TREE 2
A Yoshino cherry (*Prunus x yedoensis*) mediates between the garden and the park beyond.

BENCH 3
A stone seat is set within a lush planted area.

TERRACE 4
Grass was replaced by stone pavers with pervious open joints.

STAIRS 5
A basement entry is delineated by a board-form concrete planter.

IPE DECK 6
The deck connects the home to the stone-paved terrace.



ABOVE RIGHT

From left: White blooms of 'Mariesii' viburnum; *Cyrtomium falcatum* with 'Humpy' mugo pine; and native white bleeding heart with *Asarum caudatum* and 'Honorine Joubert' anemones.



PLANT LIST

TREES

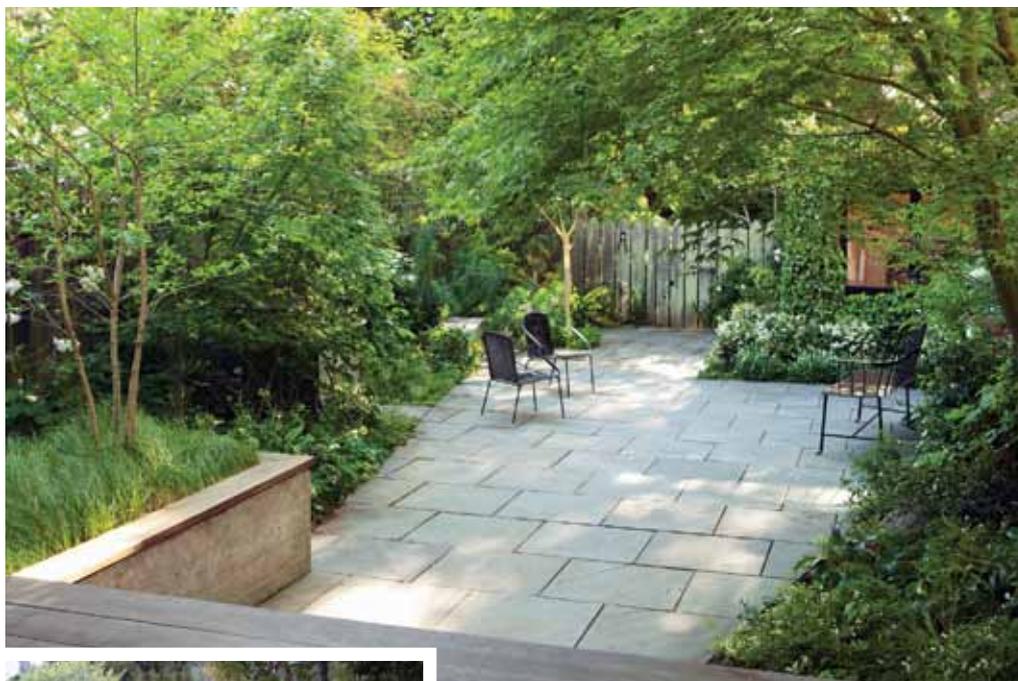
- Acer palmatum* (Japanese maple)
- Crataegus crus-galli* var. *inermis* (Thornless cockspur hawthorn)
- Pinus thunbergii* (Japanese black pine)
- Prunus x yedoensis* (Yoshino cherry)

SHRUBS

- Cryptomeria japonica* 'Little Champion' (Japanese cedar)
- Corylopsis spicata* (Spike winter hazel)
- Pinus mugo* 'Humpy' (Dwarf mountain pine)
- Rhododendron* 'Fragrantissimum' (Fragrant rhododendron)
- Sarcococca ruscifolia* (Fragrant sweet box)
- Styrax japonicus* (Japanese snowbell tree)
- Tsuga canadensis* 'Gentsch White' (Canadian hemlock)
- Viburnum opulus* 'Sterile' (European cranberrybush)
- Viburnum plicatum* var. *tomentosum* (Doublefile viburnum)
- Viburnum plicatum* var. *tomentosum* 'Mariesii' (Japanese snowball bush)

GROUND COVERS, PERENNIALS, VINES

- Acorus gramineus* 'Variegata' (Variegated Japanese sweetflag)
- Aegopodium podagraria* 'Variegatum' (Bishop's weed)
- Anemone japonica* 'Honorine Joubert' (White Japanese anemone)
- Asarum caudatum* (Wild ginger)
- Bergenia* 'Bressingham White' (White bergenia)
- Carex pansa* (Sanddune sedge)
- Cyrtomium falcatum* (Japanese hollyfern)
- Deutzia gracilis* 'Nikko' (Dwarf white deutzia)
- Dicentra formosa* 'Alba' (White western bleeding heart)
- Galium odoratum* (Sweet woodruff)
- Geranium sanguineum* 'Album' (White cranesbill)
- Hedera helix* 'Hahn's Self Branching' (English ivy)
- Helleborus argutifolius* (Corsican hellebore)
- Helleborus niger* (Black hellebore)
- Heuchera x brizoides* 'June Bride' (June Bride coralbells)
- Sarcococca hookeriana* var. *humilis* (Dwarf fragrant sweet box)
- Viola odorata* 'White Czar' (White sweet violet)
- Watsonia* 'Snow Queen' (White bugle lily)
- Woodwardia fimbriata* (Giant chainfern)



ABOVE (AND INSET)
A struggling lawn was replaced by a geometric bluestone terrace.

RIGHT (AND INSET)
Changes in the windows, shingle stain, and trim flatter the new garden.

IMAGE CREDITS (INSETS)
Courtesy Scott Lewis
Landscape Architecture

← *plicatum* var. *tomentosum* ‘*Mariesii*’), a Japanese snowbell tree (*Styrax japonicus*), and a Sally Holmes climbing rose (*Rosa* ‘*Sally Holmes*’). The rose, along the southerly side, is well established and creates a colorful privacy screen in summer.

Lewis continued the theme with a wide range of woody shrubs and perennials. Rhododendron (*Rhododendron* ‘*Fragrantissimum*’) is planted close to the deck to take advantage of its perfumed flowers. An oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*), giant chainferns (*Woodwardia fimbriata*), and doublefile viburnum

(*Viburnum plicatum* var. *tomentosum*) surround the artist’s studio. A thornless cockspur hawthorn (*Crataegus crus-galli* var. *inermis*) was selected for the concrete planter to balance the existing Japanese maple that frames the house.

Because the homeowner’s plants are fairly large—and the garden is small—Lewis massed ground covers such as sweet woodruff (*Galium odoratum*) beneath them.

To help unify the space through repetition, the palette was restricted to green and white—the only variant being

the yellow-white of the Sally Holmes blossoms—and emphasized texture. So in one bed you’ll find flowering hellebores (*Helleborus niger*) hanging over a ground cover mix that combines the lettuce-like leaves of bergenia (*Bergenia* ‘*Bressingham White*’) with the sweet woodruff and the heart shapes of sweet violets (*Viola odorata* ‘*White Czar*’).

One of the more exotic shrubs, a spike winter hazel (*Corylopsis spicata*), has sculptural, pendant-like branches with delicate leaves. When the leaves fully open in summer, the shrub conveniently screens the family’s Viking grill.



ABOVE

The strong forms of the garden are softened by plants like *Carex pansa*, which hangs over the edge of a planter box.

INSET

An existing shed became an architectural focal point.



THE VERDANT GARDEN HAS A FORESTED LOOK THAT CHANGES WITH THE SEASONS.

The resulting verdant garden has a forested look that changes with the seasons, revealing interesting branch formations, plus an opportunity to always have something in bloom.

“This kind of garden was going to get more year-round interest using deciduous plants,” Lewis says, “and you can layer the textures more easily because you can see through them. The homeowners, because of their knowledge of plants, totally understood that.”

Selecting such plants was somewhat nostalgic for Lewis, who grew up in Illinois and appreciated the “loveliness of the bare branching patterns of the deciduous forest in winter.”

A year after the garden was completed, Malcolm Davis, a San Francisco architect, renovated the house, making it more modern. He created larger openings to the garden to bring the outside in—and vice versa. A steel-and-glass wall with French doors opens up from the living room onto the deck, and a larger dining room window captures the picturesque backyard scene. The black of the steel frames and balustrades that line the upper-floor terraces pick up on the dark pavement and garden furniture from the homeowner’s collection.

Modernist circular chairs recycled from 50-gallon metal drums, found at the city’s celebrated Flora Grubb Nursery, mix with a more traditional love seat by Munder-Skiles and Loll recycled plastic Adirondack chairs. Contrast comes in the form of a red cast-concrete pot by Mary Martha Collins, whose containers also decorate the Stinson Beach house. The furniture is arranged in the nooks and crannies created where the wedge intersects with the shed and large trees.

“When you come in the front door and see straight through the house to the garden, there is total integration between front and back,” Lewis observes. “I think it’s a nice marriage.” ●

JOANNE FURIO IS A BAY AREA WRITER WHO SPECIALIZES IN DESIGN, GARDENING, AND ARCHITECTURE. HER WORK HAS APPEARED IN *THE NEW YORK TIMES*, *DWELL*, AND *SAN FRANCISCO MAGAZINE*, WHERE SHE’S A CONTRIBUTING WRITER.

Project Credits

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT SCOTT LEWIS LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE, SAN FRANCISCO (SCOTT R. LEWIS, ASLA, PRINCIPAL; MARTHA A. FOLGER, PROJECT MANAGER; JENNIFER A. DE GRAAF). **ARCHITECT** MALCOLM DAVIS ARCHITECTURE, SAN FRANCISCO (MALCOLM DAVIS AND QUINN MORGAN). **LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR** HIEN LANDSCAPING, SAN FRANCISCO. **GENERAL CONTRACTOR** JEFF KING AND COMPANY, SAN FRANCISCO. **CAST CONCRETE POT** MARY MARTHA COLLINS, CALIFORNIA. **SPECIMEN AND SPECIALTY PLANTS** SWEET LANE WHOLESALE NURSERY, SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA; PACIFIC NURSERIES, COLMA, CALIFORNIA; FOREST FARM NURSERY, WILLIAMS, OREGON; W. C. FIELDS NURSERY, SANDY, OREGON; AND GERANIACEAE NURSERY, MARIN COUNTY, CALIFORNIA.