

A tropical paradise

A lush, colorful garden replaces traditional look

by Carol Blitzer / photos by Marcia Bloom

All the colors are in harmony at Kim Carlisle's Allied Arts cottage, from the persimmon front door and matching Adirondack chairs in the front yard to the VW bug in the driveway.

The orange-red door stands out in sharp contrast to the khaki green exterior, with its off-white trim, that picks up the white on the curved picket fence.

The home's former New England color scheme -- a blue house with white trim and black shutters -- is long gone.

"It got overgrown and tired," Carlisle says, noting that she bought the house in 1987, then moved away. When she came back, "I wanted to remake it in my image," she says, adding that she does a lot of work around developing identity. She recently opened an artists' gallery at Allied Arts Guild, and is also a professional photographer and writer.

Developing an identity for her home in keeping with her own, Carlisle wanted a tropical feel -- based on her background as a native of Florida with a strong love of color, music and Latin culture. She hired landscape designer Marcia Bloom to help with the make-over. The two developed a sense of mutual trust when working on Bloom's brochure and Web site.

The first thing they did was clean up the old garden, replacing plants with an artist's palette of color.

Very little of the old English rose garden remains. Trees still anchor the corners of the front yard, and the large hydrangea made the cut. A row of blue and white agapanthus were moved to the back.

"I didn't want to pitch old plants that we could save," Carlisle says.

Bloom zeroed in a gunnera-leaf fountain, to serve as a focal point for her garden. "I'm not disrespecting the home's original architecture," Carlisle says, but she wanted to "push the envelope and play with it."

Beginning at the street, blooms are mostly white -- with a few pink scattered in. As one approaches the front door, the colors get hotter.

Bloom also helped her create a low-maintenance garden with no annuals. She chose simple pots, clean lines, but vibrant color. Many of the tropical plants are intermixed with Mediterranean ones that can better withstand winter frost. Plants were consciously placed near walls to protect them from wind, or assure they get adequate sun to thrive, Bloom says.

A strip along the front sets the tone with kangaroo paws, yellow or red alstroemeria, black-eyed Susans and red-hot poker. "It hints at what you'll see in the back," she says.

Most of the hardscape remains. Along the side of the house flagstone was added to an old dog run. Tons of ivy were pulled out, making room for a fern and shade garden, as well as a spot for her grandmother's whimsical fountain.

As you walk down the side path, your eye is drawn to the gunnera-leaf fountain, that feeds into a flagstone-lined pond, surrounded by layers of plantings. "I wanted a tropical forestry feel, with a place to sit on the grass," she says.



A gunnera-leaf fountain, made by Little & Lewis, became a focal point for the new back garden.



Before



After



Finding plants that did not clash with the red-orange door was a challenge. Plants farther away from the front door were more likely to be hot magenta pink.

Some of the plants -- such as the calla lilies -- were opportunistic survivors from an earlier era. They fit right in with the purple princess plant, yellow kangaroo paw, tube roses, coral hibiscus tree, purple *Acanthus mollis* and yellow angel's trumpet. *Bougainvillea* grows up a trellis to cloak a neighbor's blank wall.

A large variety of plants were used. The visual feast includes a banana tree, yellow-petaled black-eyed Susan, orange and red cannas, purple blossoms on a potato vine and bird of paradise.

The renovation included some structural changes -- a new roof, gutters, replacing an old lean-to with a trellis over the back door. "I love the look, the lighting patterns and the red trumpet vine. It made that a much happier place," Carlisle says.

Now with a hammock suspended under a tree, Carlisle is enjoying her colorful garden. As she told Bloom, why go to Hawaii when she can enjoy her tropical paradise at home?

Design challenge: Create a colorful, tropical forest with a Caribbean flavor
Unexpected problems: Pond had to be removed and redone because it was both the wrong shape and the wrong color
Size of grounds: 55 ft. by 132 ft.
Year home built: 1932
Time to complete: A month to demolish, about two months to complete
Budget: About \$50,000, \$20,000 for the garden, including about \$5,000 for the fountain



The fence and arbor effectively cloak the modern home next door. The arbor also represents an Olympic platform, meaningful to Kim Carlisle since she was a member of the 1980 U.S. Olympic swimming team that did not get to participate.

Resources:

Landscape designer: Marcia Bloom, In Bloom Garden Design, Menlo Park, (650) 853-1230

Fountain: Little & Lewis Water Gardens, Bainbridge Island, WA, (206) 842-8327, www.littleandlewis.com

Garden art: Sun Studios, 12001 San Mateo Road, Half Moon Bay, (650) 712-7731



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