


Beyond the Garden Walls

By design, courtyards are unique garden areas, enclosed on three or more sides by buildings, walls or natural features, and open to the sky. They feature a combination of hardscape and foliage that complement the home and often make a visual and sensory statement.

By LYNN MACHON • Photos by CONNIE CODY PHOTOGRAPHY



Open Air Sanctuaries

For centuries, courtyards have played a prominent role in almost every civilization throughout the world. In exploring modern residential architecture, the functionality of the design feature is really not all that different than it was ages ago. These days, courtyards are still used primarily for protection or privacy, sanctuary and social gatherings.

Many homes in Serrano neighborhoods feature courtyards of varying sizes, shapes and styles. Most are spectacular simply by being. And even in the most basic form, the mere presence of a courtyard tends to suggest privilege, with access beyond the wall limited to family and invited guests only.

By design, courtyards are unique garden areas, enclosed on three or more sides by buildings, walls or natural features, and open to the sky. They feature a combination of hardscape and foliage that complement the home and often make a visual and sensory statement.

Much different from a patio that opens to the outside world, a true courtyard offers a sanctuary of protection and privacy. It is a peaceful open-air retreat, a hidden outdoor room, accessible only by the homeowners and invited guests.

In many cases, due to shading and seasonal foliage, these enclosed areas enjoy their own climate, further adding to the feel of a true getaway, a destination within a home.

Through intentional design, a courtyard can offer an almost magical experience. With climbing ivy on garden walls, flowing water features, and shadows dancing in a light breeze, a simple courtyard can seemingly come to life. At night, strategically placed uplights and overhead canopy lights can create an entirely different outdoor scene.



Once inside, a visitor feels truly transported to another world. "It's where we sit and relax after a long day," says owner Peggie Ryan-Lanigan.

A Private Resort Experience

Positioned in front of a home, courtyards serve as a transitional design element, a buffer zone of sorts. Often accessible through a decorative gate, they distinctly, yet politely, establish a formal barrier to the personal and private front door within. In a way, front courtyards set the tone for the home and provide an architectural segue from the outdoors to the inner living space.

For homeowners Gordon Lanigan and Peggie Ryan-Lanigan, these inner gardens provide a hidden sanctuary and allow respite from the busy, outside world. "It's where we sit and relax after a long day – like our own private resort to share time together," says Peggie. "We feel very blessed to have this corner of the world to unwind from our busy schedules."

In fact, when the couple bought their home on Southernness Drive four years ago, they collectively credit one design feature as the home's main selling point. "We both

entered the courtyard through the huge wooden doors, saw the fountains flowing, and said 'let's buy this house,'" says Peggie. "The courtyard first drew us in, and then we loved the home, more and more, room by room."

Since purchasing the former DR Horton model home, the couple has lovingly reworked and revamped the landscaping to ensure a lush and colorful escape year round. They utilized the experts at Green Valley Nursery to help design a combination of pottery and plants to balance and enhance the courtyard. Japanese maple trees and an impressive assortment of hydrangeas, azaleas, roses, begonias, star jasmine and numerous other flowers, ferns and grasses, provide color and depth throughout the space.

Peggie and Gordon's favorite feature in their courtyard is a beautiful wall fountain with three waterfalls that noticeably soothes the spirit and begs relaxation. The

addition of garden art such as a Sedona lizard and an assortment of ceramic animals, along with piped-in music and a beautiful fireplace for warmth on cooler evenings, helps complete the tranquil setting.

Like any good design feature, courtyards should not only enhance aesthetically, but be functional as well. In addition to enjoying the space as a couple, Peggie and Gordon regularly use their special courtyard for entertaining. "Everyone is always so comfortable when we have group gatherings," says Peggie. Overnight guests stay in an adjoining casita and can walk out onto their own private courtyard terrace to enjoy morning coffee.

As Realtors, Peggie and Gordon know all too well the elements that make a home distinctive. As Peggie says, "Courtyards are a very special feature for a home. We, personally, would never own another home without one.

Inspired by Napa Valley

Approaching the large courtyard entrance to the home of Dennis and Sharon Treadaway, there's an almost distinctive hush, broken only by the soft trickle of a water fountain off in the distance.

A large stone wall covered in western white clematis flowers begs visitors to discover what lies beyond. Sharon laughs and playfully acknowledges, "It's a little bit of a tease, walking up the winding path to our courtyard gate."

Once inside the decorative iron gate, a visitor truly feels transported to another world. The large courtyard is a sensory pleasure with stone pathways, fragrant flowers, a trickling fountain, and varying shades of greenery throughout. A large canopy of trees gives the hidden garden an even cozier sense of privacy and peacefulness.

"We were inspired by Napa — we loved the rock walls and the quaintness," says Sharon, in discussing the design. They also loved the architectural feel of the Fabulous 40's area of midtown Sacramento. So when they built their home on Greenview Drive in 2000, they incorporated both concepts into a decidedly English Country masterpiece.



The Treadaway's little dog, Sadie.

An artist by day, Sharon enjoys being able to experience the courtyard garden from several vantage points in the home. "I just love it — I go out in the morning and look at all the flowers and simply smell the air," she explains. "Or I enjoy it from my little balcony and hear the fountain as I work." Sharon says she and Dennis frequently meander around with cups of coffee, enjoying the calmness of the space with their precious little dog, Sadie.

BOTTOM LEFT: Homeowners Dennis and Sharon Treadaway have created a sanctuary offering protection and privacy.

Exploring the grounds further, corner vignettes with garden art and splashes of annual color create almost a museum-like feel. An antique iron table and chairs provide seating area and a small birdfeeder attracts a variety of winged visitors.

One of the focal points of the Treadaway's courtyard is a beautiful Carolina Silverbell tree with white flowers that, as Sharon points out, "look like little ballerinas" when in bloom and add to the whimsical appeal of the secret hideaway.

Although a landscape architect originally designed the hardscape and flora scheme, like many courtyards in the area, it has been continually revamped by its owners as the vegetation becomes more established. "I love to garden, and am out there constantly doing my stuff. We like things to look organic, not real fussy." Sharon's favorite natural element is the boxwood hedges, which she says "define the space and look provincial."

The Treadaways are so attached to their courtyard and all it offers, they plan to essentially duplicate it in a new home they are building on Courbetway.



MONTEVINA

AMADOR COUNTY



Montevina continues its long tradition of producing robust, full-bodied Zinfandels and Barbera while experimenting with new varietals and innovative winemaking techniques.

Visit us for complimentary tasting and explore our spacious gift shop.

Open daily 10:00 - 4:30.
Now offering tours
Friday through Sunday
at noon and 2 p.m.



20680 SHENANDOAH SCHOOL ROAD
PLYMOUTH 209.245.6942

CHECK OUT PLANET MONTEVINA AT WWW.MONTEVINA.COM



larly those featuring multiple access points from inside the home.

Watkins sees the outdoor living space as a trend throughout the homebuilding industry. "People want to nest and reconnect at the end of a long day," he says. "People live [in Serrano] for the environment, the trees and the outdoors. They want their home to be special, unique and functional. And they want multiple home options for gathering places."

Throughout Serrano, courtyard examples vary as much as the unique architectural style of the homes themselves -- from English contemporary to Mediterranean old world to Asian flare. Many of these courtyards are truly functional and alluring sanctuaries, but only to those lucky enough to be invited beyond the garden walls. ❏

Features of Historical Significance

Throughout history, the unique design feature of a courtyard has significance in nearly every country and culture in the world.



In China, inner courtyards in structures have long symbolized the connectedness of the family unit. For generations in India and Mexico, courtyards have provided needed shelter for daily activities such as washing and food preparation.

Dating back as early as the 30th century BC, distinct courtyards have been used for protection, tranquility or to serve as a bustling center of activity. In churches, mosques and monasteries, inner courtyards provide sanctuary and a place for reflection. In palaces and castles, they are the chosen venues for ceremonies and prestigious gatherings. In universities and colleges, courtyards provide a central social gathering place.

A Quiet Place To Nest

Architectural trends in the last 10 years reflect the impressive popularity of outdoor living spaces. Several of Serrano's new home builders feature models with both front and inner courtyards to help extend the indoors out.

The appeal of inviting and functional courtyards is precisely what Shea Homes had in mind when introducing its Bramasole "courtyard estate" to Serrano in 2006.

"Our effort to expand the living space is distinctly apparent in this unique Tuscan-inspired floor plan," says Adam Watkins, Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Shea. "The courtyard is large enough to entertain, yet still intimate enough to host smaller private gatherings."

The Shea homes, in particular, the Vivace model, feature an inner courtyard that extends the indoors outward in a comfortable and welcoming way. From a design standpoint, Watkins says, "There are distinctive textures available in a courtyard which provide a wonderful blend of elements. The brick, the fireplace, and the hardscape -- it all comes together very nicely."

Watkins says homebuyers love the flexibility of the courtyard enclosure, particu-



fresh
simple
candid
creative
fun

Connie Cody Photography

custom portraiture for children and families

preserving memories, capturing the beauty of life

appointments 916.996.9364 www.conniecodyphotography.com