

In brief

NAME The Moss garden.

WHAT Private coastal garden designed by Gary Ratway.

WHERE 200m from the Pacific Ocean, near Mendocino, California, USA.

SIZE Four acres.

SOIL Sandy loam, infertile, dry in summer.

CONDITIONS Strong sea winds, mild temperatures all year.

SPECIAL FEATURES Sunken Garden, Heather Garden, Orchard Garden, Sanctuary Garden.

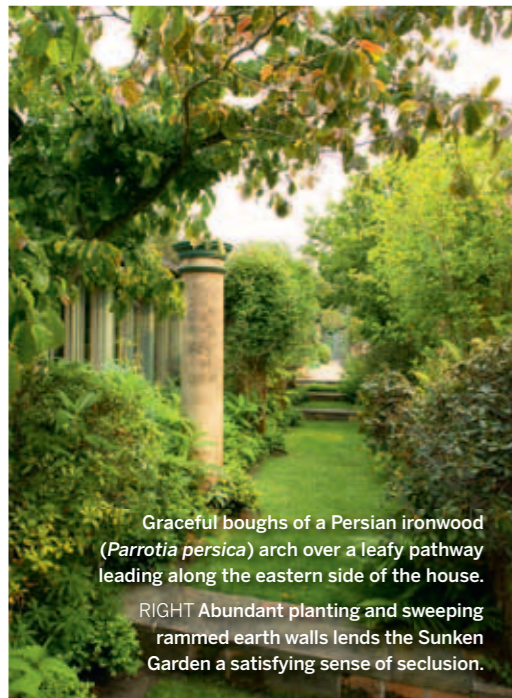
GARDEN PLAN See page 78.

The peaceful Sunken Garden is sheltered from sea winds by bishop pines (*Pinus muricata*), Monterey cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*) and purple-leaf plum trees (*Prunus cerasifera* 'Krauter Vesuvius').

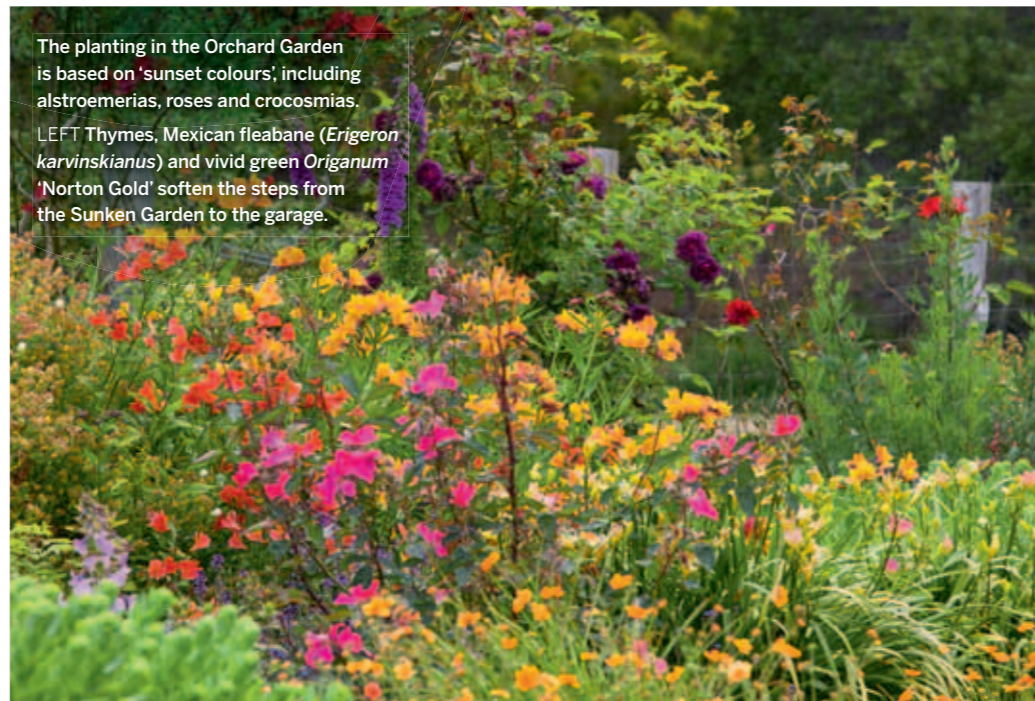
Life's a breeze

A spectacular new garden in California makes the most of its coastal location, looking vibrant and colourful despite sea winds and dry summers

WORDS KATE FREY PHOTOGRAPHS CLAIRE TAKACS



Graceful boughs of a Persian ironwood (*Parrotia persica*) arch over a leafy pathway leading along the eastern side of the house.
RIGHT Abundant planting and sweeping rammed earth walls lends the Sunken Garden a satisfying sense of seclusion.



The planting in the Orchard Garden is based on 'sunset colours', including alstroemerias, roses and crocosmias.
LEFT Thymes, Mexican fleabane (*Erigeron karvinskianus*) and vivid green *Origanum 'Norton Gold'* soften the steps from the Sunken Garden to the garage.



Californian garden

Gary's bold planting includes this group of purple *Salvia nemorosa 'Caradonna'*, orange *Kniphofia 'Bees' Sunset'* and acid-green horned spurge *Euphorbia cornigera*.

When Buddy and Nancy Moss bought their cabin on the Californian coast, there were spectacular views over rough, golden bluffs and the dark Pacific Ocean – but no garden. The Mosses took great care to extend the timber cabin sensitively, retaining the weathered feel of the original. The land around it, though, has been completely transformed. Where once there was an open meadow, the garden is now defined by rammed earth walls and columns created from the site's soil – mossy green in winter and reddish in summer. The walls and columns frame a series of gardens surrounding the house, many inspired by the travels of the owner.

The walls, house and ocean create a series of micro-climates; both mood and growing conditions change rapidly as you explore. Gardening on California's north coast is difficult, as the garden's designer Gary Ratway freely admits. Almost unrelenting salt-laden winds, summer fog and nutrient-poor, sandy loam soils tend to hamper growth. Water can also be scarce; just two litres a minute flow from the site's well, not much for a four-acre garden. "There are no blousy delphiniums, just plants that grow in dry conditions," says Gary. The garden's lushness is achieved using organic methods. Gary has added tonnes of compost to maintain fertility.

A long gravel drive brings you down to the house, which is protected by a low rammed-earth wall softened by lavender (*Lavandula x intermedia 'Provence'* and *L. x intermedia 'Grosso'*), *Lithodora diffusa*, Australian rosemary (*Westringia fruticosa*) and Australian pepper (*Drimys lanceolata*). The house itself has provided inspiration for many of the design details found throughout the garden. The large, curved green bay window in the master bedroom was the model for a series of arched green gates, including the garden's entrance. Through this gate lies a path bordered with planting in a cool palette of yellow, blues and purple, from catmint (*Nepeta racemosa*

'Walker's Low') to *Salvia nemorosa 'Caradonna'* and *Geranium 'Mavis Simpson'*. The entrance path leads you to the Sunken Garden, the most formal space on the property, inspired by English gardens. One of the most magnificent views of this garden is from inside the master bedroom. A pair of fastigate yews (*Taxus baccata 'Fastigiata'*) frames a central fountain, rill and pond. The walls form a strong structural element, but are filled with billowing plants in glowing colours. Together these create a radiant softness. They include orange *Kniphofia 'Bees' Sunset'*, purple *Salvia nemorosa 'Caradonna'*, lavender-blue *Geranium 'Johnson's Blue'*, lime green

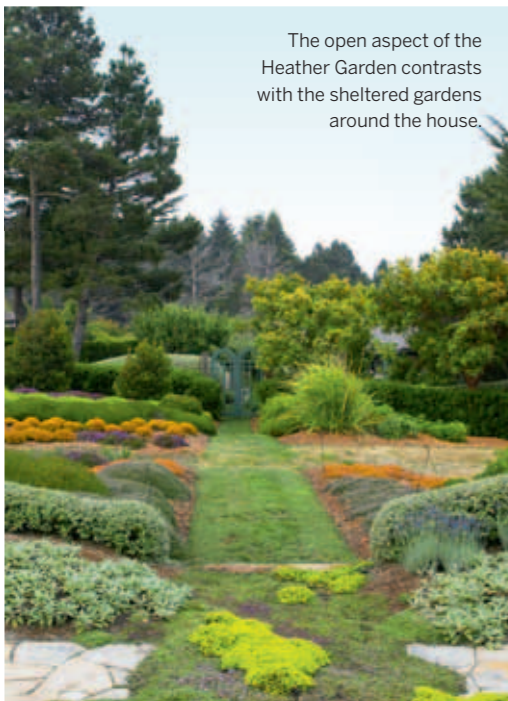
“ There are no blousy delphiniums, just plants that grow in dry conditions ”

Euphorbia x martini, silvery blue *Eryngium alpinum 'Amethyst'*, lilac *Nepeta racemosa 'Walker's Low'* and pale pink *Rosa 'Bourbon Queen'* on a column. The shelter of each step leading out of the Sunken Garden holds an array of delicate-leaved plants revelling in the tiniest of micro-climates (see picture on opposite page). Mexican fleabane, golden marjoram,

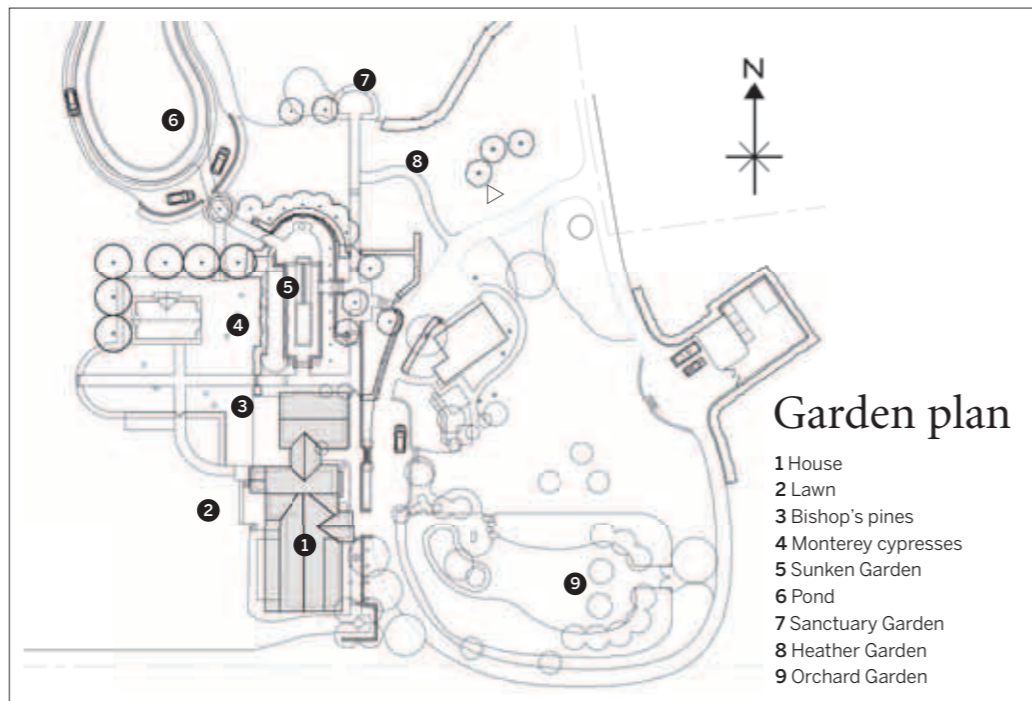
alliums, salvias, thymes and self-seeded plants thrive here. A rounded, grey hedge of tree germander (*Teucrium fruticans*) and strawberry trees (*Arbutus 'Marina'*) surges above the top of the wall, providing additional shelter. Purple-leaf plums (*Prunus cerasifera 'Krauter Vesuvius'*) also act as a windbreak, and set off the glowing colours of the planting. Sombre Monterey cypresses (*Cupressus macrocarpa*) and bishop's pines (*Pinus muricata*) frame the scene. The coastal side of the house reflects the strong climatic presence of the ocean, with incessant, drying winds. It is bordered on the north and south by the State Park's carpet of rough, golden grasses, sewn like worn



The lawn is bordered with brick-red *Euphorbia griffithii* 'Fireglow' and drifts of aromatic lavender (*Lavandula x intermedia* 'Provence') and *Santolina* (*S. chamaecyparissus* and *S. rosmarinifolia*).
LEFT Vibrant *Achillea* 'Feuerland' opens cherry-red and turns apricot, then orange and finally yellow as the season wears on.



The open aspect of the Heather Garden contrasts with the sheltered gardens around the house.



GARDEN PLAN BY GARY RAYWAY



Californian garden

▷ velvet over the bluffs. A short mown lawn, unirrigated in summer and green in winter with the rains, forms the main feature, with rough grasses at its edge. The fence bordering the lawn is planted with rosemary, *Teucrium*, lavender, santolinas and brilliant red *Euphorbia griffithii*. Against the house's long, low porch are white chrysanthemums, *Lithodora diffusa* in the deep blue of the ocean, and *Taxus x media* 'Hicksii' in a low, undulating hedge. There are no walls here, only the wind-blown grasses.

The Heather Garden to the north of the house (pictured above left and opposite) was inspired by a trip to Scotland and has layers of low planting, with delicate leaves and

purple, raspberry and white flowers elegant against the foggy skies. The garden flows out towards the rounded tussocks of the park's native grass and scrub lands and in the low, early evening light, the two areas join.

The small Sanctuary Garden at the end of the Heather Garden is laid out around a stone bench sheltered by a wax myrtle hedge. Thymes grow underfoot and lavender 'Mitcham Gray' catches the colour of the sea.

Vibrant colour

The Orchard Garden (pictured on page 76) is separate from the rest of the gardens. It has a central lawn with an orchard of apple and plum trees, and borders of roses

and perennials on the perimeter. Here the colour theme is 'sunset'. There are no grasses. Instead roses and effusive perennials mingle – alstroemerias in red and orange, salmon-coloured watsonias, *Phygelius x rectus* 'Winchester Fanfare', sanguisorbias, salvias, daylilies, catmints, *Geranium russeliana*, *Penstemon* 'Garnet', *Erysimum* 'Bowles's' Mauve' and roses such as deep-red *Rosa* Altissimo (= 'Delmur') and peach-to-pink *Rosa x odorata* 'Mutabilis'.

The gardens around the house may be varied in mood, but there is a sense of unity between them. After all, each is the product of one of several micro-climates defined by both the house and the rammed-earth walls. □

The Heather Garden

Drifts of contrasting heathers and delicate foliage bring drama to a sloping space exposed to ocean winds



Calluna vulgaris
'Martha Hermann'
A dense low mat of iridescent green foliage that is an outstanding foil for other heathers. Withstands unrelenting breezes and is long-lived. White flowers in summer.



Calluna vulgaris
'Winter Chocolate'
A year-round stand-out. Chocolate and golden in winter, with creamy salmon-red tips in spring and a pleasing range of oranges, pinks and yellows in summer.



Calluna vulgaris
'Silver queen'
Handsome woolly-grey foliage throughout the year, with pinkish purple flowers in summer. Outstanding for contrasting with other darker foliage.



Erica x darleyensis
'Furzey'
Magenta-purple flowers grace this heather well into the late spring on the coast. Deep green foliage and a tight form contrast well with upwardly blooming callunas.



Cryptomeria japonica
'Nana'
This is a reliable coastal conifer as a companion for heaths and heathers. Truly dwarf, this plant is still under 60cm tall after 17 years in the garden.