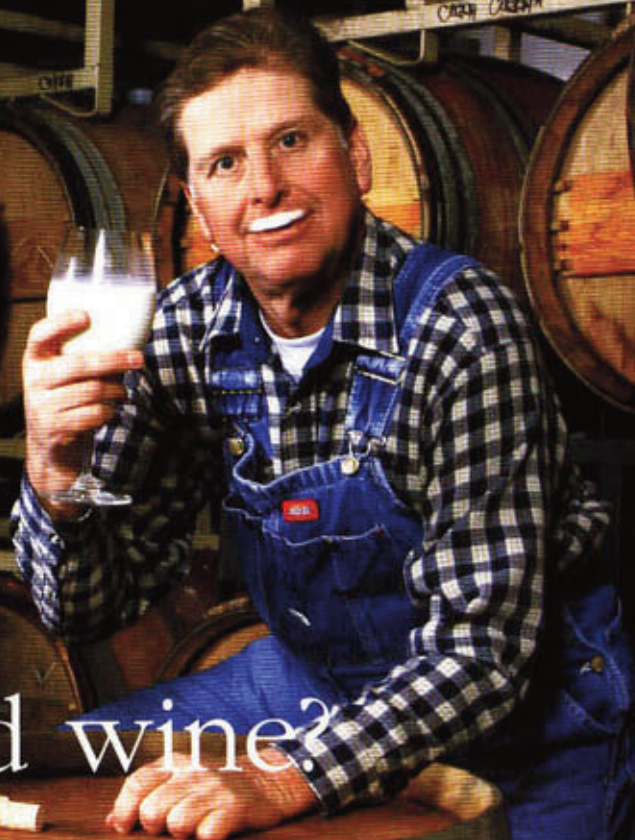


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# Petaluma

magazine



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# Creating artful yards



**"Garden of Convergence" is situated in a garden on a quarter-acre, where the owner created a petite Butchart Gardens. In this piece, creator Suzanne Biaggi explores the continued exploitation of contrasts using a minimalist palette of two plant types. The colors are opposite — green and red — and the stones, reflecting light and water, are set in a circle of black pebbles in opposition to the converging slate pathways.**

*Landscape artists and residents transform yards by designing sculptures, outdoor furniture and adding other three-dimensional art.*

By **Steve Boga**

Suzanne Biaggi sits in a flourishing backyard garden on the California coast. Her chair, table and drawing board are there, but for now she sits cross-legged on the ground, trying to become one with the space.

For the next few months, this is her space. A Petaluma landscape artist, a sculptor, she has the job of decorating the space with...something. It will be a large granite sculpture, but so far that's all she can see.

An hour later she's still sitting there, contemplative as a monk. The next day and the day after that, she'll be back at it again. It will take her weeks to muster even an unfocused vision of what the space will become. For now, she sees a wall here, a flower bed there,

and her sculpture somewhere in the middle, but...where?

## From teaching to sculpting

She began as painter. A fine arts major at San Francisco State University, she was headed into elementary education when she had an epiphany: She hated teaching. She quit everything, moved to Laguna Beach, and began living the life of a painter. "I painted sweet, playful things and people bought them," she said. "I was doing fabulously well but, being young and foolish, I thought that was the time to leave. It was my way of creating fond memories."

After years of travel and soul searching, she applied to graduate school as

a painter and was rejected. "You seem more sculptural," the professors said, and so she applied in sculpture and was accepted.

For Biaggi, it was a rebirth. "I was feeling constrained by two-dimensional painting," she said. "Sculpture is so free. There are no edges, no borders."

Her last painting seems more than a little symbolic. "Although I hate guns," she said. "I borrowed a .22 [caliber rifle] and went up in the mountains. I filled red balloons with red paint and mounted them on a board. Then I blasted away, splattering red paint everywhere. It was a violent goodbye to painting."

## Finding the perfect stone

Biaggi shows several sketches to the client. Once a design is agreed upon, she heads off in search of the perfect stone. She works mostly in granite and basalt, and for days she combs northern California, checking out stone yards in Sacramento, ice-polished boulders near Yosemite National Park. No luck.

"The stone dictates the piece," she said. "I have to collaborate with the stone. To find the right one, I must mingle my history with the stone's history."

It all sounds a tad ethereal, but the medium in which Biaggi works is rock hard. Eventually, close to home, she finds the ideal stone, a huge granite chunk that fits her vision perfectly. "It was what my graduate professor called, 'A scrap from the art gods,'" she said.

Next she photographs the stone from all angles and shows the pictures to the client. The client gives her the go-ahead, but even at this late date, no one really knows what the final piece will look like. That's because Biaggi's artistic vision is necessarily clouded at this point. She sees three granite figures — two big and one small (parental unit?) — yet it will be weeks before she sees much more. "Ultimately clients have to believe in me," she said. "They've seen my portfolio, my work. It comes down to trust."