



Written By: Katrina L. Coombs | Garden: Olof Hult

OLOF'S Garden

Frances Hodgson Burnett writes in her classic, *The Secret Garden*, “At first people refuse to believe that a strange new thing can be done, then they begin to hope it can be done, then they see it can be done—then it is done and all the world wonders why it was not done centuries ago.” If Burnett observed Olof and Helene Hult’s wildly colorful garden today, she would more than likely reflect on their garden’s whimsical beauty and note that the beauty created became even more impressive simply because the Hults took it upon themselves to plant a drought tolerant landscape. As ecologically aware Los Angeles residents, Olof and Helene inspire, give us hope, and allow us to see, as Burnett suggests, what “can be done” and what we in Cheviot Hills can do to help preserve our valuable water resource.

It’s an 80 degree December day and Olof Hult works steadily cutting back the parkway’s pink-flowered *Gaura lindheimeri*. His front garden explodes with color from South Africa’s Jester *Leucadendron*, the ever flowering Australian ‘Long John’ *Grevillea*, and the deep green *Ceanothus*, California’s native *Lilac*. When asked if his garden interest began in Sweden, Olof smiles broadly, “No, but ever since Business School at Cal (where) I dug out half my yard.” His first yard became a garden and a way to relaxation: a kind of therapy through dirt. Now, the show-piece garden at Troon and Patricia is solely his labor of love, a living memory of shared joy and passion.

Olof and Helene, both Swedes by birth and baptized in the same local church, met and married in the US, then fell in love with designing a climate-appropriate California garden. “She was the one,” he says looking out over the tapestry, “who knew the names for everything.” He revealed her well-worn and researched *Sunset Western Garden* book, a bible of sorts for those who create using the right plant for the right place. “We would

both be down on our knees, but she was the artist, the one who created the (colorful) drifts.” But in the beginning, and with no other incentives, Olof and Helene decided to battle the thirsty established resident—the front yard grass.

Olof chuckles as he reflects back on the housing crash of 2007, “More than once the doorbell would ring and it was a real estate agent looking for inventory. We’d been so busy remodeling our interior that our yard looked as if no one was home.” They killed the lawn in spring and hired men to scrape and ready the soil. With calculated changes in water usage as the goal, Helene’s gardening mantra came into play. “She would say the first year the garden sleeps, the second it creeps, and the third it leaps to remind us to be patience,” says Olof, “all with only 20% usage of our total water volume.” The garden now leaps with “self maintenance and the neighbor plant can grow over the other.” Yet the parkway *Gaura*, one of their favorite finds, are cut back to insure bloom. Olof even discovered *Gaura* for sale near his family’s summer home in Sweden. He grins, “We’ll see if it makes it through a Swedish winter.”

Beauty by definition can be subjective as can the “beauty” of a garden, and therefore the beauty of a landscape is often more than we can see. The Hults have shown us that beauty is smart. The combined drought tolerant plantings act as a hummingbird mecca, a Monarch sanctuary, and the Hults’ way of rescuing a bit of California. And most importantly, it thrives as Helene’s living memory. What they created in Cheviot Hills can be done by all of us—everywhere. “If you look the right way,” Frances Hodgson Burnett muses, “you can see that the whole world is a garden.”

Do you know someone in the neighborhood with a beautiful yard or garden? Contact Joe at joe.schneider@n2pub.com to nominate them to be a Yard of the Month!!

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