

Sotheby's Preview



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Janet Feinberg Schindler discusses the importance of water features in an urban garden



ABOVE:
In San Francisco's Levi Plaza Park, a man-made waterfall creates a natural environment that is both inviting and relaxing

OPPOSITE:
At the Henry Residence in the city's Pacific Heights district, strategic plantings around the walled brick courtyard are enhanced by both the visual and acoustic effects of water

Photographs by Karin Purcell Larson

Water is an intrinsic part of the daily rituals of all societies. Whether used in religious ceremonies, bathing, drinking or in garden design, water is integral to life. In a city landscape, the sound of moving water soothes the assault of the urban environment and creates a sense of serenity.

In downtown San Francisco, the magnitude of noise pollution is profound: the incessant discord of cars, sirens, motorcycles and cable cars creates a cacophony that is impossible to escape. However, in Levi Plaza Park, designed by Lawrence Halprin, a large granite fountain and stream surrounded by trees and shrubs successfully masks the street noise. Levi Plaza is a tranquil haven for workers who enjoy the calm created by the waterfall.

In some urban residential settings, the addition of a water element can mean the difference between usable and unusable outdoor space. In San Francisco's popular South of Market neighbourhood, where many condominiums are built so close to the freeway or Bay Bridge where you can almost feel the vehicular vibration, outdoor patios and decks feature views and vistas, but rarely provide the quiet necessary for relaxation. The addition of a small fountain and potted trees can muffle much of the city sounds.

In San Francisco's world-famous residential area, Pacific Heights, homes situated on the north side of the street which feature spectacular Golden Gate views rarely accommodate a south-facing garden. On the coveted north side of 'The Gold Coast', the Henry residence features a small south-facing courtyard that is separated from the sidewalk and street beyond by a six-foot wall. Remarkably, the satyr-faced fountain silences the sounds of the street and creates a tranquil extension of the living room. Barbara Henry remarked that when she entertains, her 'guests are equally drawn to the Golden Gate view and the peaceful garden courtyard'.

In today's increasingly stressful times, the introduction of a water element, whether in the urban landscape, on a city deck, or in a residential enclave, can transform your environment and your outlook.

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