

The background of the cover is a painting in a style reminiscent of Vincent van Gogh's 'Olive Trees with Yellow Sky and Sea'. It features a deep, textured blue sky with horizontal brushstrokes. Below the sky, there are rolling green hills with clusters of dark green trees. In the foreground, a field is filled with yellow and red flowers, possibly poppies, with a path or stream winding through them. The overall style is expressive and colorful.

Sotheby's
Preview

November 2007

Janet Feinberg Schindler discusses green fences – a growing trend



LEFT:

Bougainvillea cascading over an ivy-covered wall delineates the property-line in Sea Cliff

OPPOSITE:

The green fence of bamboo, planted within a rhizome barrier, disguises the mass of the adjacent building

'Something there is that doesn't love a wall'; so begins Robert Frost's poem 'Mending Wall', in which he gently mocks his neighbour's unwavering belief in the well-known proverb 'good fences make good neighbours'. Similar sayings exist across most cultures; for instance, in Britain the maxim dictates that 'a hedge between keeps friendship green'.

Nevertheless, there are times when a fence can be a barrier and an expression of spite, as exemplified by the actions of Charles Crocker, a railroad baron living in San Francisco shortly after the Gold Rush. Crocker wanted to build his Nob Hill mansion and grounds on an entire city block, but a neighbour refusing to sell his small property frustrated these plans. In retaliation, he erected a 40-foot high fence that enclosed his neighbour's small plot entirely, cutting off light and air.

This action, which effectively put the house 'at the bottom of a well', as reported in the newspapers of the day, led to the creation of laws limiting the height of fences in California. State Legislature subsequently adopted the current 'spite-fence' statute that declares it a private nuisance to maliciously erect or maintain any fence or structure in the nature of a fence, unnecessarily

exceeding ten feet in height for the purpose of annoying the owner or occupants of adjoining property.

In line with the heightened ecological consciousness of the 21st century, a trend is growing for green fences – plants and shrubs that create a vertical garden and a visual delight, virtually exempt from height limits. Green fences significantly soften the solid mass of tall buildings and create a unique urban garden in any small area.

Such an effect can be admired today in San Francisco's Corona Heights, where a 30-foot building looms over the narrow front garden of a small cottage set back from the street. To mitigate the tunnel effect, the owners have cunningly installed a 20-foot tall bamboo hedge underlain by yellow Abutilon and Zebra grasses, virtually obliterating the wall and creating a tranquil open-air retreat.

While there will always be 'Something there is that doesn't love a wall', Robert Frost would likely agree that green fences make great neighbours.

Janet Feinberg Schindler is a freelance writer & realtor for Sotheby's International Realty.

