



NEWS FROM HAVERFIELD PARK

STONE BUILDING WORTH ITS WEIGHT

By Barbara Caswell



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I've said it before, but I'll fuss about it again: in a fine country garden, the well equipment needs to disappear. If Joan Crawford lived in Sonoma County, she'd be screaming: "NO MORE BLUE PRESSURE TANKS!"

My "well guy" (an essential staff member for the rural homeowner) says that, although pressure tanks don't strictly need to be indoors, the more sheltered ones seem to give him less trouble. Practicality aside, the appearance of your garden alone may call for a pumphouse.

If you live on Sonoma Mountain, or in an older neighborhood, you might have enough brush or mature trees to disguise well equipment without building anything. But those circumstances also present their own difficulties, chiefly that of getting construction machinery close enough to get their jobs done. Builders hate to deal with

getting around plants, and the plants tend to suffer accordingly.

But out in the open plains of West Petaluma, our prairie-like sandy soils are accessible for easy building. The downside is that everything is totally exposed to you or your neighbors, and landscaping determines a large part of property value. A nice planting might be all you need to obscure tanks, but I went a step further.

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This particular pumphouse was a relatively expensive design, but there are plenty of simpler ones that would accomplish the same purpose of deleting blue tanks and white plastic pipes from the view. Why did I go to the



In the old days of American farming, this would have provided a means of preserving meat for the winter days when game was scarce.

expense of building something so pricey just for a little outbuilding?

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The answer is in that phrase “outbuilding.” Although money can easily be justified in a construction project for living space in the main house, once people are living inside, the outbuildings are what they will see every day.

Real stone was chosen for this project, because the rustic material will age and blend into the garden, separating it from the white clapboard buildings that represent cultivated space for people. As part of the habitat, this building may get vines growing up its sides, and has already interested the barn swallows and phoebes (both mosquito-eaters) who build nests up in the eaves. That’s fine with a stone building: nobody needs to worry about protecting the siding and the older the stone looks, the better!

Outbuildings such as these are a chance to have some fun on your drawing board. First of all you need to complete a list of the things the building must achieve, and this is also a chance to tidy up some loose ends on your property, since a little structure like this can serve several purposes. An outbuilding can incorporate a little jump through window to feed an outdoor cat away from wild animals, a little shed door for a wheelbarrow, or a hidden bike rack.

Once you know what needs to be stored, you can think about appearance. I like to reproduce classic American outbuildings, since they are picturesque in the extreme: ice houses, poultry coops, smokehouses (like this one, although this chimney has been sealed,) stables and smaller animal shelters.

Here are native fieldstone walls, laid by professional masons over a sturdy modern plywood structure with brick patching, done the way old plantation owners used to do, when they made repairs with whatever masonry materials were lying around. A genuine slate roof, lantern porch light, sealed brick chimney, beautiful brick stoop in my favorite herringbone pattern and a custom-made door with iron latch sent in from Massachusetts . . . how

does even a dedicated property owner justify this type of expense? (And believe me, I had to do a lot of justifying to my long-suffering husband on this one!)



For this house, it’s the view. Some people try to buy views when they choose their lots, but that’s only successful until something they don’t like suddenly appears. After all, you can’t control what somebody else does with his property.

I like to build my own views as gardens on my own property, so that I know what I’ll have. For those who object to my “being controlling,” I’ve read that the happiest people are those who believe they have some control over their own lives, so I’m going with the control freak reputation 100%. Once the decision for a scenic building was made, the extra expense of using fine materials wasn’t all that much more.

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ing. Luckily for me, the designer, the property here is so incredibly beautiful that the end result can become a very valuable property indeed. Unluckily for my financier, a high-quality building project can’t be done on the cheap.

In fact, I feel that way about most of beautiful Sonoma County. I hate to see a nice property with potential get downgraded by careless construction or second-rate landscaping. Everybody knows that a view site is worth more; I believe it’s worth designing everything “viewable” right on your own property.

Concept: Designs of the Times
Plans: Bill Bagby Drafting
Construction: Woodbury Building Company
Masonry: KG Masonry
Hardware: Williamsburg Blacksmiths
Slate Roof: Dan Shea