

Project Description

Project Identity and Location

The Evans Residence (historically known as “Little Court”). Pasadena, California

Purpose of Project

In 1903 a home was built along the banks of the Arroyo Seco...nestled prominently in the midst of many acres and with dramatic views of mountains and valleys in all directions. It was named “Little Court”. Fast forward over one hundred years and the original residence has grown substantially while the gardens have been reduced to just over two acres from the original forty. Pastoral views have given way to a mature canopy of Coast Live Oaks, Olives, Arbutus, Eucalyptus, Bay, and Citrus. Our clients set out to restore both the home and gardens aware that major challenges existed. A large portion of the front yard had been subdivided away, the front door had been moved to the original rear terrace, and the gardens read more as fragments than a unified place. We were thrilled to work with those fragments as they were designed by Paul Theine (1920’s) and Florence Yoch (1930’s) and were largely worthy of saving. An overall goal emerged to honor the historic underpinnings of the home and grounds while making sense of the shifts of time. The clients, a family of six, wanted Little Court to work for family life as well as becoming a place to share with friends, neighbors, and the broader community.

Role of the Landscape Architect

We were engaged by the client to prepare a Master Plan. They lived in the home during a three year construction project necessitating breaking down the work effort into a series of smaller phases. We worked closely with the client, the restoration architect, arborist, tree moving experts, rosarians, and a stellar team of artisans to realize zones that merge seamlessly with existing materials and plantings. The new gardens heal old wounds, introduce new systems such as drip irrigation and LED lighting, and create a new flow that greatly enhances the ability for the family to enjoy the property and share it with others. Fountains punctuate axes, the front door lives up to the promise of the journey to find it, and the various terraces and courts all link together in a cohesive framework.

Significance

We observed at Little Court how the forces of nature and time conspire to return the work of landscape architects to a natural state in in very short order. Little Court had been carved away and deeply neglected for several decades. Our restorative efforts have elevated the landscape to new heights while honoring the legacy of the practitioners who have touched the gardens before us. In the past two years the gardens have been open to the public for three tours including The Garden Conservancy’s Open Days Tour this past May. The clients have been incredibly generous in sharing their home with the community which, in turn, allows a positive understanding of the role of landscape architecture.

Special Factors

Working with a footprint left by pioneers of landscape architecture in Southern California was a unique challenge. We needed to affect simple and bold moves to make sense of what remained of the original gardens...and we needed those changes to look “meant to be”. Adopting the language of what was there before vs. imposing our own tuned out to be just what was needed at Little Court.