

Little jewels in the high desert

By Flo Barnes | For The New Mexican

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Photo by: Photo courtesy of Charles Mann

The Santa Fe Botanical Garden's 16th annual garden tour, showcasing gardens from the grand to the cozy, is meant to share ideas on high-desert gardening as well as delight the senses.

June 5 is billed as "Variations on Vintage Gardens," while June 12 roams from "South Capitol to the Summits." Each day also features one venue where the home's interior — as well as the garden — is open. On June 5, there will be a luncheon at a Delgado Street residence (tickets purchased separately).

The fundraising tour supports the Leonora Curtin Wetland Preserve, the Ortiz Mountains Educational Preserve and the planned SFBG garden at Museum Hill.

"Santa Fe is filled with the unexpected. You get to experience these magical settings when you didn't think anything was there," Cathy Gronquist, Santa Fe Botanical Garden board member and tour volunteer, said.

"I'm learning what a harsh environment this is, how precious water is and how we have to use it wisely," said Gronquist, who lived 27 years in London.

According to tour organizer Rosemary Minard, "It works out the same every year: We start out with a couple of good ideas and try to cluster locations so people don't have to drive all over."

The Delgado Street property of Judy and Pete Talbott, site of the June 5 luncheon, is an emerald oasis studded with white creeping daisies, iris, roses, pink honeysuckle and yellow columbines.

To view the inner sanctum of the Talbott's garden, one ducks under a Lilliputian door embedded in an adobe wall.

Three different types of pear trees stand 40 feet tall and are more than 100 years old. According to Judy Talbott, who does most of the gardening, they give a "ton of fruit" each year.

Talbott also is caretaker of exquisite magenta Japanese peonies, or tree peonies, and is quite attached to an expressively gnarled little cherry tree.

A wooden bridge over the acequia leads to a petite well house; rustic arches abound, draped with white clematis and bird feeders. During an early-May visit, a row of yew trees in the backyard were alive with the chirps and rustling of birds.

Talbott estimates she saw 100 Western grosbeaks and 12 Western Tanagers visit the yard this spring. "I'd never seen that many together. They came within a day or two of their appearance last year," Talbott said.

Also on the June 5 tour is the garden and interior of a secluded cottage on East Alameda Street owned by interior designers Paul Rochford and Michael Violente. The structure was originally part of a community of old farms and orchards along the Santa Fe River.

During a recent visit, spectacular yellow Spanish broom appeared to bloom from an adobe wall, while four massive cottonwoods seemingly stood guard over the charming front lawn.

The grounds feature delicate Siberian iris, lilacs, roses, lilies, cransbill geraniums, moonbeam yarrow, Greek yarrow, delphiniums and hydrangeas.

A side walkway opens onto a petite back patio with a flowing pattern of brick and river rock. Ornamental pear trees and grape vines give a sense of upward movement.

"It's the bones of the structure to have interesting stone patterns because six months out of the year there's no green and often the houses are surrounded by walls. It's like a little jewel — paradise in the desert, a Persian garden," Monika Hellweger said.

According to the garden's designers, Hellweger and Azul Cobb of Carlotta from Paradise, the patio design was influenced by the narrow corridors between wine storage buildings at Andalusian wineries they saw in Southern Spain.

Of the cottage interior, Santa Fe native Rochford said, "We like to mix antiques and clean-lined contemporary furniture. It's certainly not minimalist, but not cluttered. Both of us have had the experience of living in much larger homes. We like the intimacy of smaller rooms. It's comforting and comfortable," he said.

The sky and wind are an undeniable presence at Robert Drewry's home high off of Ski Basin Road. The property on the June 12 tour showcases a collection of dwarf conifers and Japanese maples along with a waterfall, koi and lily pond and rustic gazebo with a stunning view.

"My mother was always interested in Oriental decorations and my wife was born in Osaka," Drewry said. "I've always admired Japanese gardens; they're oriented around conifers, and Japanese maples have a delicacy. I like the varied texture of it. Japanese gardens are minimalist but deep in symbolism."

One unusual specimen there is the Harry Lauder's Walking Stick tree. "It's twisted and contorted and can be a bush or a tree depending on how it's grown," he said.

In early May, Kendall McCumber of McCumber Fine Gardens, who helped design the landscape, pointed out piñon trees, weeping Norway spruce, ginkgo trees, weeping cherry trees, shrub roses, iris, petite tulip varieties, purple salvia, white thyme and mother of thyme. McCumber said she utilized ground covers such as geraniums with a lot of color.

The Drewrys have split their time between Dallas and Santa Fe for the past four years. "When we moved in, the backyard was undeveloped and wild. Part was very, very steep and rocky. We've always had gardens, so we terraced and landscaped and improved the soil. You never get finished gardening," Drewry said.

"All gardens are a place of peace and contemplation and quiet and beauty and meditation. Gardens have different meanings to different people. We love the view. The sunset on the Jemez in the late afternoon is absolutely beautiful," he said.

The art-filled home, as well as the gardens, of Marc and Peggy Harris will be open on the June 12 tour. The couple has owned the house on Waldo Street for five years but live most of the year in California.

"I'm a painter and consider the whole house to be a work of art," Marc Harris said. "We have a formal recessed summer room. Peggy has an amazing way of fleshing it out with color and shapes that make it interesting. There's a terrace feel. The focal point is an apricot tree that's been there a long time," he said.

Peggy Harris does most of the garden work. "I like the architectural aspect. We share a vision of outdoor rooms, the hardscape. I'm very much into evergreens and box hedges which can create form and shape. They're outdoor rooms furnished with flowers," she said.

IF YOU GO

What: Santa Fe Botanical Garden Tour

When: Sunday, June 5 ("Variations on Vintage Gardens") and Sunday, June 12 ("South Capitol to the Summits"), both days from 1-4 p.m. Luncheon and garden viewing at Delgado Street property 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. June 5; \$25. Limited seating, reservations required; tickets must be purchased by May 31.

Cost: In advance, \$35 one day or \$65 for both; day of event, \$40 one day, \$75 for both. Age 16 and under free.

Tickets: Through The Lensic (988-1234), at www.ticketsantafe.org/tsf or at the tours.

More information: www.santafebotanicalgarden.org