

HOME & REAL ESTATE

Friday, June 24, 2005

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Also online at www.PaloAltoOnline.com

**OPEN
HOUSE GUIDE**

Home Front

MEET ANNIE . . . Annie Hayes, owner of Annie's Annuals in Richmond, is the featured speaker at the Garden Club of Los Altos on **Tuesday, June 28**, 1:15 p.m. The group meets at Christ Episcopal Church, 1040 Border Road, Los Altos. Fee is \$5. Annie's Annuals features 3,000 varieties of plants, including unusual annuals and perennials. For information, call (650) 969-2282.

SAY IT WITH CHOCOLATE . . . Cookbook author Lou Pappas will teach a class on cooking with chocolate — including spinach salad with chocolate nibs, salmon Dijon, quinoa with cocoa, chocolate lava cakes and of course, chocolate gelato. The class is **Thursday, June 30**, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., at the Gamble Garden carriage house, 1431 Waverley St., Palo Alto. Bring an apron to this participatory cooking class. Fee is \$40 for non-members, \$35 for members. For information, call (650) 329-1356 or e-mail admin@gamblegarden.org.

SUMMER AT FILOLI . . . A children's petunia planting workshop is among the varied activities planned for the third annual Summer at Filoli celebration **tomorrow**, 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at Filoli, 86 Cañada Road, Woodside. Other treats include scrap-booking workshops, floral-design demonstrations, a petting zoo, storytelling get-togethers and orchard tours. Admission is \$15 for adult members, \$20 for nonmembers; \$5 for children 2-12; free for children under 2. Barbecue picnic lunches available by advance reservation. For information, call (650) 364-8300 or visit www.filoli.org.

TOUR OF LOCAL PONDS . . . A parade of ponds featuring Aquascape

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Send notices of news and events related to real estate, interior design, home improvement and gardening to Home Front, Palo Alto Weekly, P.O. Box 1610, Palo Alto, CA 94302, or e-mail cblitzer@pawweekly.com. Deadline is Thursday at 5 p.m.

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Nicholas Wright

Morgan Bricca recently added a couple pairs of sandals to the mural she painted for Dorothy Hassett in Los Altos. Hassett's mural not only reminds her of her old home, but makes her happy she no longer has to deal with adding chlorine to the pool.

Writing on the walls

Morgan Bricca makes magic in murals

by Carol Blitzer

Making connections. That's what Morgan Bricca values the most about her career switch, from computer network administrator to mural artist. There isn't a day she regrets her decision to leave the stress and begin her artistic journey.

It wasn't always a clear path.

As early as kindergarten, Bricca felt she was really bad at art. When the other kids were drawing stick people, she produced "scribble-scrabble." But in high school she hit an art class that let her express herself. Although she enjoyed the class, she went on to major in economics at University of California, San Diego.

"There's a part of me that's really pragmatic. I didn't think art was practical. Ironically, my pragmatism brought me to art," she said, recalling her last job for a biotech firm. There she was drawn to solving problems and fixing things — sometimes at 5 in the morning when the computers were down.

As a stress reliever she took an art therapy class, where she had a chance to do finger painting and work with Play-Doh. The idea was "to stop judging and to be with your thing," she said.

Soon she started imagining painting a mural on her wall at home. "I did a beach scene with a deck in my condo in San Diego," she said, followed

by a couple of murals for her grandmother. "All of a sudden I was relating to people in a special way."

Looking to hone her skills, she took drawing and painting classes, but found she was often in disagreement with her teachers. "Experience is a great teacher," she found. "You learn on the job what works."

She did polish up faux-painting techniques and learned how to paint like a professional house painter — no messy drips.

When her husband David had a job offer in Silicon Valley, the couple picked up and moved to Barron Park, just a block away from his parents. Bricca finds that painting murals is both a flexible and a fulfilling job, in addition to raising her two pre-schoolers.

At 32, Bricca is passionate about her work — but she's also passionate about what it can buy. She donates 30 percent of her fees to an organization called Trickle Up, which offers small grants to allow people to start small enterprises — to rent a stove to make tortillas, for example. This organization "connected with me on all levels, making a life change with very little," she said.

Although making such a large donation means she's paid "about as much as my babysitter," Bricca is very clear that this is important to her. "I have two young children. There's that pull of 'is what I do so impor-

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Writing on the walls

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tant to be away from them?," she said.

After three years, Bricca is earning between \$1,500 and \$3,000 per mural, which can take about 20 hours to complete.

Recently Bricca was putting the finishing touches on a mural that completely covers a large wall in Dorothy Hassett's Los Altos condominium. Hassett, an employee of the Palo Alto Weekly, found Bricca through mutual friends. While walking in Barron Park, her friend invited her in to see her new mural, a picture of a snorkel and mask hanging on a hook in the bathroom.

"I couldn't get over looking at it," Hassett said. "They were so real. I felt like I could take them off and put them on."

Hassett had downsized a year earlier from a large home in Barron Park. Working from photographs of the back yard, Bricca created a scene that incorporated the swimming pool — complete with cavorting grandchildren. The piece is "framed" with trompe d'oeil wooden beams, so real that a niece just had to reach up and touch.

Hassett looked for a piece of art to place over her living room sofa, but never found quite what she was looking for. "I missed my yard. It's nice to bring it with me," she added.

Using the back-yard photographs as "inspiration," Bricca added the children in the pool after noticing photos on a side table. Her latest touch is a couple of pairs of sandals, doffed before entering the pool.

Even more important than creating art, Bricca finds that personal connection is what really drives her. "People have had tears in their eyes. That means a lot to me," she said.

Most of her jobs are fairly large scale, although she has done one as small as a 3-foot-by-5-foot canvas. In San Diego, she completed a 180-foot wall adjacent to a school where she valued that contact with the kids during recess (one tried to "tip" her with a quarter; another suggested she add a specific animal) almost as much as the painting.

Her least-enjoyable job was in a dog kennel, where she took on the task of painting a mural in a dog run where nothing would grow because of years of dog pee. "I almost had to wear a gas mask," she recalled, but soon she graced the wall with arches and overhanging bougainvillea, a view of the ocean and a touch of jungle.

"I should have done a fire hydrant," she added.

Coming up with ideas for murals is no challenge for Bricca. She usually asks if there is a favorite vacation, or a honeymoon locale, that they would enjoy looking at. She looks around their home and sees what they cherish and what colors they like.

"I meet the nicest people muraling. The thing about paint is you can always fix stuff," Bricca said, noting that she has repainted her



Nicholas Wright

Morgan Bricca uses tips picked up from professional housepainters, and keeps her acrylic paints and brushes on a drop cloth near the mural she's working on.

own murals to reflect changing thoughts. Not long ago she completed a large mural for a woman who subsequently put the house on the market. Now, she's looking forward to painting a mural in her new home.

After she left her hi-tech job, friends commented that she looked so much better. She attributes this to not only finding something she loves, but a pace she's comfortable with.

She definitely approaches painting in a "businesslike" way — she maintains a Web site with samples at www.muralsbymorgan.com and makes a point to jot down her suggestions in writing and show up on time. But her bottom line is: "It's such a gift to find something you love." ■

Assistant editor Carol Blitzer can be reached at cblitzer@pawebly.com.

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