

Trees—He Plants 'Em, She Picks 'Em

By MARGARET KOCH
Sentinel Staff Writer

When Eleanor Van Rensselaer's children left home to go to school, she went back to school—for fun—to study art and handicrafts.

As a result she has published two books and a third will appear this month.

Mrs. Rensselaer, who is the wife of a distinguished horticulturalist, also works with trees and plants—but in a very different way. She enjoys creating "new designs for those who enjoy creating unusual beauty with natural decorations."

She takes rocks, seed pods, old iron mail boxes, wire, cones, shells, broken glass and dried bits of odds and ends and puts them together in fascinating ways.

For the past 12 years she has taught women the art of using natural materials in classes at Montalvo Art center at Saratoga.

Mrs. Van Rensselaer has several strict rules: "I never use dyes; I never combine artificial with natural materials, and anything I use must be widely available."

She is now opening a series of five Wednesday classes starting this week at Chamberlin galleries, 325 Ocean street. Interested persons may call her at 475-6712 for further information.

Semi-retirement brought Mr. and Mrs. Van Rensselaer to Santa Cruz. He was advised several years ago to take "long weekends" for his health. The couple established a weekend "hideaway" near Santa Cruz Yacht harbor and have since come to love this area. Van Rensselaer is retiring as director of the Saratoga Horticultural foundation (see adjoining story).

50, helping to found a Plans and Planting committee, writing a book entitled TREES OF SANTA BARBARA, and generally encouraging wise planting. He is now interested in compiling a record of Santa Cruz trees for future reference.

He recalls with amusement an incident in Santa Barbara when a businessman wanted to remove an ancient California sycamore, complaining that it was a "dirty tree."

Van Rensselaer's answer: "Do you know any tree that is NOT a dirty tree?"

He also pointed out that it would take only 30 minutes to remove the sycamore but at least 100 years to replace it.

After listening to such irrefutable logic the tree owner threw up his hands, said "Oh, hell, you win!" and cancelled cutting plans.

Van Rensselaer also has been instrumental in devis-



AT HOME with their Lhasa Apso, rare dog from Tibet. His name is Singhi, meaning "little lion," according to the Van Rensselaers. Maunsell and his wife, Eleanor, met when both were students at UC Berkeley.

Mrs. Van Rensselaer's interests include weaving, ceramics, silver jewelry, leather tooling, some wood carving and heavy metal work. But her favorite pastimes are teaching and writing about the many uses of natural materials.

There are more than 100 of her ideas in the forthcoming book. Others have been incorporated into decor in their home at 250 14th avenue. One "living arrangement" is truly alive:

"The birds built a nest in it," she pointed out. It was originally used by Sunset magazine as an illustration.

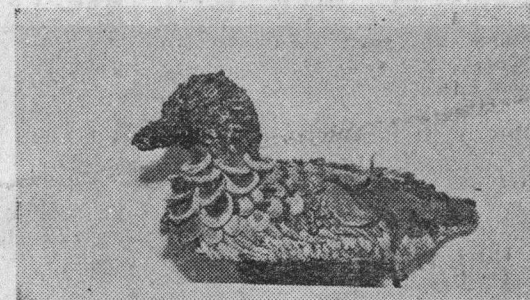
Two awkward situations in the Van Rensselaer home have been remedied by her clever ideas and handiwork. One bedroom window looked out on a "no-view," so she disguised the outlook with Japanese paper and pressed leaves. Now she calls it her "herbarium."

In the kitchen she was faced with 38 large, shiny

chrome cupboard knobs which she disliked heartily. She glued tiny pieces of broken beach glass to cover them with an attractive mosaic-like design.

Most interesting are her "living" succulent wreaths. The idea of a living wreath intrigued her. She thought and worked at it until she had tried salad tins, florists' wire wreath forms, bent chicken wire and metal foil. Finally she worked out a combination suitable for hanging or lying flat.

Mrs. Van Rensselaer's books are DECORATING WITH PODS AND CONES and DECORATING WITH SEED MOSAICS, CHIPPED GLASS AND PLANT MATERIALS. This last was a Garden Guild Book of the Month selection. Her new book is entitled NEW DECORATIONS WITH PODS, CONES AND LEAVES. Pub-



DUCK covered with seed pods, cone petals and other dried natural materials.



HANGING "living" wreath, an idea featured in Sunset magazine, was originated by Mrs. Van Rensselaer.

SCHS Teacher To Be Speaker

Miss Ethel Young, Santa Cruz High school teacher, will be the speaker when the Santa Cruz alumnae of Delta Phi Epsilon meets Thursday

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ning — tree-wise — can go a long way toward preserving Santa Cruz' charm.

"Luther Burbank used to say that more different kinds of plants and trees will grow in the Santa Cruz area than anywhere else," he recalled.

Van Rensselaer was active in Santa Barbara from 1934-

ing "first aid" measures for sick city trees. Very often when pavement is laid down too near a tree's root system, it will go into a decline.

The restoration method includes boring holes two inches in diameter at intervals around the sick tree, then pumping sand, water and fertilizer in through them.

"We have gained some amazing results when trees haven't gone too far downhill," he noted.

Among his many achievements are serving as director of Santa Barbara Botanic Garden and as a park commissioner there, lecturing at Santa Barbara University of California and state college, serving as co-founder of the Saratoga Foundation, as president and general chairman of several annual National Shade Tree conferences, president of the American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboretums, founder of the Western Street Tree foundation and charter



OLD MAILBOX serves as planter box.

member and director of the Western Horticultural society.

He has co-authored a gold medal award book entitled CEANOTHUS with Howard E. McMinn, and has written many articles. For his writings over the years, he is one of two men in the United States to receive the International Shade Tree conference award.

Back in 1937, Van Rensselaer was instrumental in having the redwood, Sequoia sempervirens, adopted as the official California state tree.

The honors, gold medals, plaques, scrolls and gold watches that have been presented to Van Rensselaer would fill a page all of their own. He also lists 17 affiliations with top horticultural organizations, and he is one of seven living persons to hold the Horticultural Hall of Fame award. (A posthumous award was made to Luther Burbank.)

Van Rensselaer is perhaps proudest of his work with ginkgo and magnolia trees. Through years of research and experimentation, the fine "Autumn Gold" color of the ginkgo has been perfected. And the size and conformation of the magnolia grandiflora are now under control.

These were both problems of "unpredictability" before Van Rensselaer tackled them.



LIVING WREATH has central, separate planting of aloe in tree fern bark. Eleanor Van Rensselaer created the idea for the "living" succulent wreaths.

fisher is Van Nostrand company, 24 West 40th street, New York.

She worked on the newest book for nearly three years, not counting time out for visits from their grandchildren. Now she is looking forward to more time for foraging expeditions along the Santa Cruz beaches.

There is a treasure store waiting there for Eleanor Van Rensselaer.

at 7:30 p.m. at the home of Mrs. Donald May, 168 Archer drive.

Miss Young will discuss her work with the high school students interested in entering the teaching field. All members planning to attend should contact the hostess at 426-3291 or Mrs. Joseph Kennedy at 423-3450.

Goodwill Sale Is Saturday

The Santa Cruz Goodwill auxiliary has slated its annual Christmas sale of decorations, antiques and jewelry for Saturday, November 5, at the Goodwill Industries plant, 350 Encinal avenue. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., according to Mrs. Audrey Searle, chairman with Mrs. Harvey Anderson.

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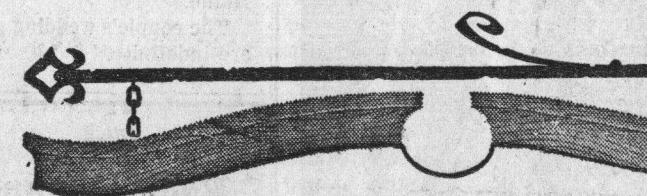
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BRIDAL SHOWER, BUT DON'T HAVE THE ROOM?