

# EXOTIC and NATIVE



The Seascape Resort and Conference Center's landscape is a combination of exotics and natives.

Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos



# Seascape Resort offers blend of landscapes

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**M**OTHER NATURE didn't mind getting enhanced one bit.

The \$30 million, three-story oceanfront Seascape Resort and Conference Center sits along the Monterey Bay coastline with landscapes from exotic to native that blend to form a picture of natural tranquility.

As you wander down the winding paths surrounding the resort, down the beach trail and back to the resort, you'll cross four different landscape entities ranging from "Coastal Scrub," to "Coastal Prairie" to "Riparian" and the exotic plants surrounding the resort.

"We were always interested in doing the right thing," said Chuck Holcomb, architect and developer of the resort that opened in July. "And, we really got caught up in all of the (landscapes). Once we found we could propagate through cuttings and seeds, we became very engrossed with the project. We do feel we went the extra step to make this project look super special."

Paul Kephart of Elkhorn Ranch in Moss Landing and Steve McGuirk of Madrone Landscape Group in Soquel, the landscape project manager, are credited with much of the success of the native planting in the landscape design.

"Prior to construction," McGuirk said, "the benchland areas on which the resort sits had a

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broad spectrum of the vestiges of native plant communities as well as a large portion of exotic plant species introduced through years of human influence and agriculture. The site was primarily a maze of ecotones (overlapping ecological systems) where the three primary native plant communities existed."

Instead of planting the cuttings and seeds in one gallon containers for replanting, cones and plugs, resembling oversized laboratory test tubes, were used to expedite the growth of the root systems.

The original design intent, said McGuirk, was to create a more vertical approach to the main resort structure, to utilize California native plants and to revegetate them in a more natural condition, to create a planting island around the resort that utilizes bright colorful plantings, and to use plant material that was water-conserving, low maintenance, and not heavily reliant on petro-chemicals such as fertilizers, herbicides and related landscape chemical management tools. At the nearby park, the idea was to provide a landscape that reflected the concerns and desires of the neighborhood, McGuirk added.

McGuirk started a walking tour by pointing to the "Coastal Scrub" plant community, the one closest to Monterey Bay.



Colorful impatiens and dwarf phormium are planted in the swimming pool area.

"Coastal scrub vegetation has survived the agricultural uses of the site by clinging tightly to the cliff edges," he said. "This plant community is represented by such native plants as beach sagewort (*Artemesia*), bush lupine (*Lupinus arboreus*), seaside daisy (*Erigeron glaucus*) and California fuchsia (*Zauschneria californica*)." Stepping back from the cliff edge, the landscape transitions into "Coastal Prairie," represented primarily by

native California bunchgrass species. Here you'll find purple needlegrass (*Stipa pulchra*), California brome grass (*Bromus carinatus*), California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*) and clarkia (*Clarkia* spp.).

"Riparian" is the landscape along the beach trail and down the arroyo that you see from the bridge at Seascape. This plant community exists naturally along the

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# Seascape

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water courses, such as the arroyos and includes arroyo willow (*Salix lasiolepis*), red-osier dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera*), Baltic sedge (*Juncus balticus*) and western sword fern (*Polystichum munitum*).

"You've got to bear in mind," Holcomb said, "that the trail was impassable and there was an eroded barranca full of trash and fallen trees. It's now a nice community access to the beach and all along the trail there is an infusion of native species and wildflowers that has regenerated itself.

"At the head of the trail there was a spring and it was developed into a watering spot for animals. I would say the beach path is the neatest thing we did."

What is common among these landscapes is that they have been replicated and refurbished to provide a dominance of native plants and a reduced number of exotic plants — ones brought through human usage, McGuirk said.

Around the resort itself, McGuirk pointed to the integration of the exotic plant communities from around the world. It is vibrant, lush, colorful and of great seasonal interest. It is meant to be touched, smelled and visually appreciated.

In the planting areas near the swimming pool are colorful impatiens (*Balsaminaceae*) and dwarf phormium (*Agavaceae*). Other plantings around the resort include California fuchsia (*Zauschnerias*), coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens* 'Soquel'), Japanese

maple (*Acer palmatum*), pink escallonia (*Escallonia 'Julilee'*), germander (*Teucrium chamaedrys*), compact viburnum (*Viburnum tinus* 'Spring Bouquet'), strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo*), Italian stone pine (*Pinus pinea*), smoke bush (*Cotinus coggygria*), dwarf heavenly bamboo (*Nandina domestica compacta*), and variegated tobira (*Pittosporum Tobira Variegata*) just to name a few.

In addition, there are Monterey pines (*Pinus radiata*) and Monterey cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*). "The Monterey Cypress is native to only a small region of the Pacific Coast," Holcomb said. "We are blessed to have one of these rare strands on the property."

The long range goal of the management of the resort landscape is to remove all of the most invasive introduced species like jubata grass (*Cortaderia jubata*) and scotch broom (*Cypripis racemosa*).