

KATHRYN MATHEWSON: GREEN-THUMBED HEALER

By Katie Tamony

Some people never buck the status quo and spend their lives following trends that others set. **Kathryn Mathewson** is definitely not this kind of person. While many landscape architects concentrate their efforts on the latest technical trends, **Mathewson** prefers traditional gardens that are more attuned to personal comforts.

“Too many professional schools still rest heavily in Bauhaus,” she says, referring to the German school of design for architecture, interiors, furniture, and gardens that became popular in America and Europe after World War II. Bauhaus attempted to relate art to industrial technology. **Mathewson** thinks there is a tendency to get too industrial, however, and says that this is especially prevalent in “the starkness of our urban spaces and public sculpture,” where the straight, coolly elegant Bauhaus lines have replaced earlier concepts of lushness and comfort in gardens.

“Bauhaus landscapes are not gardens” states **Mathewson** emphatically. “Gardens are places of healing. In today’s fast-paced society, they are really essential. You can’t buy a garden already made like you do a car. Gardens evolve like life.” **Mathewson’s** philosophy as a landscape architect has been shaped by her experiences as a consultant for the National Park Service, a construction coordinator for Pier 39, and through her own landscape architecture firm and shop, **Secret Gardens**. “I got into it gradually, buying a jackhammer, a truck, taking out concrete and replacing it with green.”

The true garden, says **Mathewson**, displays balance, variety, and craftsmanship. While it adheres to design fundamentals, it shouldn’t be dominated by form. **Mathewson’s** advice to potential clients is to think about the garden elements that make them feel great – pathways, running water, a grove of trees – and to give as much attention to their outdoor rooms as they would to a kitchen or bedroom.

Mathewson’s garden entry in the San Francisco Landscape and Garden Show (see “Events” for further information on this year’s show) is an example of her “gardens are rooms” philosophy. She chose to do a courtyard/porch area that uses a variety of plants to create different textures. Varying textures make small spaces seem larger especially in tight porch areas. “So many people rely on potted flowers that they can add or take out – I try to use permanent plants that undergo seasonal changes” says **Mathewson**. The main theme of her garden entry is cozy warmth. “As the children’s story ‘The Secret Garden’ so beautifully illustrates, a garden with its peace, contentment, beauty and lessons in patience -- heals.”

Northern California Home and Garden Magazine
April, 1990