



- Home
- News ▾
- Opinion ▾
- Interviews
- Arts & Events ▾
- Food & Drink ▾
- Real Estate ▾
- Special Issues ▾

HUGUETTE CALAND BRINGS ART TO HER GARDEN

Posted by betsygoldman | Apr 3, 2008 | Opinion | 0

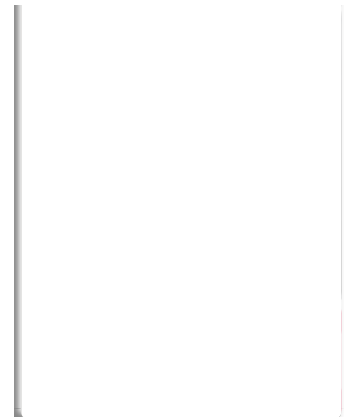


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Huguette Caland has led a storied life. She was born in Beirut, Lebanon and grew up a political elite at the time of the country’s independence from France when her father, Bechara el-Khoury, was president.

During her childhood she was surrounded by Byzantine art, which continues to influence her work as an artist. At the age of 16 she began private lessons with Italian artist Fernando Manetti and then studied art at the American University in Beirut from 1964 to 1968.

Early on, Huguette exhibited signs of going against the grain. She had easy access to but rejected haute



couture clothes in favor of not losing the weight she would have had to in order to fit into them. At the age of 39 she left her husband and three children (who are now in California) in Beirut to start a wandering adventure.

In the 1970s Huguette moved to Paris where, in addition to focusing on her art, she designed a line of her signature caftans for French designer Pierre Cardin.

“It was very scandalous at that time because no one was wearing anything that was not traditional,” she says. Caftans are Huguette’s uniform, whether an elegant embroidered fabric for formal wear or a basic cloth for painting, which, itself, turns into a work of art.

California beckoned in 1988, when Huguette was 57 and most people think of retiring in a few years. Her worldwide journey ended when she built a dream home in Venice in 1997. The 4,300-square-foot concrete fortress filled with natural light houses her residence, an 18-foot-ceiling studio that has one 25-foot wall and is the largest room, plus what could be considered a museum of surprising and delightful art and artifacts. The austere exterior is a contrast to the welcoming sanctuary of life inside.

The walls are a visual testament to Huguette’s odyssey through life and the people she has met. It

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can be overwhelming to take in all the colors, textures, patterns and shapes of the textiles, drawings, paintings and sculptures. Yet, the space is very open and everything is arranged with simplicity.

The yard, situated in the back of the almost 11,000-square-foot lot, is also is open. Large sliding glass doors only physically separate the interior from the outdoors. There is a 75-foot pool where Huguette swims daily.

Huguette’s art influences her garden and vice versa. She starts with an empty canvas.

“Things happen,” she says. “When something screams for something, I put it in. It’s much more cheerful.” She is quick to say that she doesn’t have a “manicured Beverly Hills garden.” She prefers to “have things grow so it’s semi-organized.” As with her art, “I don’t analyze,” she says. “It’s always a surprise.” There are several of her granite sculptures and wood pieces by friend and sculptor George Apostu that might look scattered with abandon but are placed with an artist’s eye.

There is one art piece that tells a story of Huguette’s garden. It’s what she calls a “silent letter.” It’s a narrative with brush strokes. Using no words, she described her garden to a friend who died in Lebanon. “He never got to come visit here,” she



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says.

Although Huguette arrived in Venice well along in life and, at first, took a while to “navigate and integrate,” she has now what she calls a “community home.” It is the ideal setting for parties and special events.

“It would be a shame not to share it,” she says.

Huguette is sharing her home and garden for the Venice Garden and Home Tour on May 3rd. Not one to sit idly by, she will be working on an art project while people are there. “It would be killing to stop [working] the whole day,” she says.

However, she won’t feel bothered if you talk to her or ask questions.

This year’s tour will take place east of Lincoln Boulevard, where Venice’s larger lots showcase gardens by creative landscape designers and architects and green-thumb enthusiasts with a unique spin on horticultural arrangements.

Several homes, such as Huguette’s, that exemplify expressions of the quintessential indoor-outdoor Venice lifestyle, will be open. Those who take the tour will see why the Venice Garden and Home Tour is a signature event in Southern California.

Proceeds from the tour benefit the Neighborhood Youth Association’s Las Doradas Children’s Center



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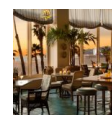
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in Oakwood, giving at-risk youths the opportunity for a brighter future. The tour, now in its 15th year, is a model of how a small group of citizens can mobilize in an effort to improve the quality of life for those in need. Contributions of tour participants are an essential contribution towards realizing this goal.

Information, www.venicegardentour.org/.



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