

A Diamond in the Rough



Photos by Laura Bemis - From the left, Phil Teeters, president of the Gardeners of the Grove, Milt Webb, who presently takes care of the Historical Hotel yard grounds, and Landscape Designer Michael Glassman look at plans of the hotel grounds.

Famous designer, garden group plans makeover for future 'jewel' hotel

By Katie Freeman - Lifestyle & Arts Reporter

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To people passing by, the Elk Grove Historical Hotel and Stage Stop Museum looks like an old brick building mostly hidden by tall pine trees.

A "prison-like" chain-link fence adds to the hindrances blocking the 19th century building from view of drivers on East Stockton Boulevard, said nationally renowned Landscape Designer Michael Glassman, who spoke to the group Gardeners of the Grove on Aug. 18 about fixing up the property.

Rose bushes maintained by Gardeners of the Grove and the Historical Society are prevalent on the property. But, as some members noted, the beauty of the property can't be seen from the street.

"People driving up and down the street don't know it's here," said the group's president, Phil Teeters.

Gardeners of the Grove wanted to give back to the community by fixing up the property.

Teeters asked Landscape Designer Michael Glassman to design a plan to give the historical hotel some "road appeal."

Within minutes of walking onto the property, Glassman had an entire vision for the front, sides and back yard.

He addressed the problem of the trees first. Glassman said he hates to cut down trees but in this case he would recommend cutting down two or three to improve the visibility of the hotel.

Glassman's other ideas included replacing the chain link fence with a wrought iron one, broken up by brick columns echoing the brick on the house. Vines of various types of roses would grow up the fence.

Inside the gate tall planter boxes of heirloom roses in various shades of pink would sync-up with the palatial design of the hotel, he noted.

He knocked on the plastic railing and front porch and told the group that the plastic features should be replaced with cobblestone in keeping with the era of the hotel.

In what may be the big "road appeal" feature the Gardeners were looking for, Glassman suggested a tall wrought-iron, standing water fountain in the middle of the front lawn.

He reiterated the design to the group, allowing everyone to imagine the fence, brick columns, roses and the fountain.

More tall brick planter boxes with heirloom roses and foxglove would sit under the porch. Honeysuckle would grow up the banisters "for scent."

A cobblestone or gravel walkway would allow visitors to meander through the front area and enjoy the flowers and the sound of the fountain, or sit on one of the two white "old architectural" wrought-iron benches Glassman suggested.

He said if benches were at the "jewel" of a hotel "it would be a destination."

Glassman's ideas never stopped flowing.

"People would want to have wedding photos taken here," and fundraiser events as well, he said.

The muddy, grassy space under the kitchen windows on the side of the house would be transformed into an "old fashioned kitchen garden." The produce could be sold as a fundraiser endeavor, he added.

Next to the kitchen garden he recommended growing several rows of wine grapes, so they could eventually bottle their own wine, not to necessarily make a profit, but as an attraction to the hotel.

Glassman had many ideas that would bring the community to the old hotel.

A "Chelsea Garden- like" contest was one idea where local landscape artists could create beautiful gardens in rented planters on the far side of the property's lawn.

Glassman suggested a children's garden area too. Children, or their parents, would rent a plot to plant a "pizza garden," consisting of pizza toppings, or a sundae garden with raspberries and chocolate mint.

He told the group to think about his ideas, which for the most part they seemed to be impressed by as indicated by their smiles and whispered comments like "creative."

Their big concern was raising money for this massive project. Glassman suggested a grassroots approach; setting up donation booths at festivals, organizing a "box lunch" on the property grounds and asking local businesses for free supplies.

"In today's economy people can't give a lot," he said. "But if they do, they want to know it goes to creating a better environment."

The original Elk Grove Hotel and Stage Stop was built in 1850 and the present restored hotel has rooms set up with 19th century through 1950 décor. It is a tourist attraction, especially at Christmas, several Gardeners of the Grove said.

The Historical Society Board will have to review Glassman's design before it can be implemented.

The city of Elk Grove will also have to approve his suggestion of cutting down the two trees.

For more information about the Elk Grove Historical Society visit <http://www.elkgrovehistoricalsociety.com/>