

## ART JURY CORNER

### Landscaping to Create Community Character

In a very real sense, the Rancho Santa Fe community owes its existence to its landscape. When the Santa Fe Railroad abandoned its plans for a lumber project after having planted millions of eucalyptus trees, it took advantage of the wooded landscape it had created by beginning the development of the master planned community we know today. The Preamble to the Protective Covenant, recorded in 1928, states that "...*Rancho Santa Fe is unusually attractive and valuable as a high class place of residence because of the rare quality of its landscape, trees and shrubs....*" The landscape elements of the community are still essential to the Ranch's character today. The native chaparral, tall stands of eucalyptus, orange and lemon groves and extensive ornamental landscaping is what creates Rancho Santa Fe's unique character and sets it apart from surrounding communities.

Landscaping is now more important than ever because of the continuing development of the area with new and remodeled homes. The Ranch still retains its rural character, in part, because many homes are screened by landscaping, thus creating the impression of less development than there really is. To retain the community's character, the Art Jury strives to minimize the prominence of new structures, but it is the landscaping that screens direct views of the homes and other buildings. Thus, it is the landscape that dominates the views on the Ranch rather than the structures; this is the defining character of the Covenant area.

The *type* of landscaping is as important to the community as the amount. A home set in the middle of an acre of lawn with few trees or shrubs will be quite prominent from the roadway and its neighbors. It is the Art Jury's intent to provide enough visual screening to reduce a home's prominence and filter any direct views of the house. The proper arrangement of the right trees and shrubs is critical to the creation of a pleasing landscape that reduces the prominence of development. A good landscape plan will provide visual screening of structures by incorporating multiple layers of trees and shrubs of differing species with varying mature heights and shapes. Taller trees within the landscape will reduce the perceived mass and height of a structure by lowering the structure's relative scale and by disrupting the visual mass of a building's facades by casting shadows on the walls and roof. The landscape should have an informal perimeter treatment in keeping with the character of the ranch. If an owner wishes to have areas with a more formal landscape treatment, those areas should be limited to the interior of the lot adjacent to the house.

A dense forest of trees would be one way to provide privacy to a home; however, the homeowner's desire for privacy, and the Art Jury's complimentary desire for screening must be balanced against the danger of wildfire in our community. Too many trees of certain species create the potential for spreading wildfire. The Rancho Santa Fe Fire Department now takes an active role in reviewing landscape plans with the goal of reducing fire hazards, and fire prevention measures do limit the number, type and location of trees that can be planted. The Art Jury works cooperatively with the Fire Department to create mutually acceptable landscape plans. To this end, the Art Jury now requires landscape plans to be reviewed and approved by the Fire Department before they are submitted to the Association. This way we know that the plans we are reviewing are acceptable to the Fire Department.

Creating a landscape plan requires meeting the Art Jury's goal of preserving community character as well as satisfying the Fire Department's requirements for reducing fire danger. We encourage you and your landscape design professional to meet early with the Fire Department and Association staff to identify the parameters for your particular property before embarking on a final landscape design. For further information consult the Association's *Residential Design Guidelines* and the Fire Department's regulations.