

ART HOUSES

By Award-Winning Local Author, Brad Herzog

When I first moved to Pacific Grove 25 years ago, I lived on 9th Street. Each morning I enjoyed a rare opportunity: I'd step out my front door, glance across the street and marvel at a cottage turned into an artistic creation. It was a daily reminder that we Pagrovians tend to dance to the beat of our own bongo, preferring self-expression over assimilation.

Nowhere is that more evident than in the many homes that have become canvases for imagination. A stroll around PG's neighborhoods is its own kind of art walk. You'll find bright purple picket fences, rainbow archways, mosaic mailboxes, and myriad, quirky front-yard artifacts—an old cannon here, a massive toad sculpture there, a gaggle of whirlygigs and wind spinners.

But I'm partial to two houses in particular that represent artistry with a dollop of eccentricity.

The first is hard to find. It's located in an alley between Sinex and Gibson avenues and Monterey and Carmel avenues. There, behind 403 Gibson, you'll find the **Blue Garden**, an art installation featuring scores of toys and treasures. It's a bit like walking into a Smurf's psychedelic dream. Below a rooftop blue windmill and a neon Blue Moon beer sign is a hodgepodge of cerulean silliness—a panda and a Pegasus, a stuffed unicorn and a small Bigfoot, a triceratops and Thomas the Train. "Who cares about alleys?" Dave Riddle asked himself when he began working on the project 15 years ago. Now I do.

You can't miss my other favorite example of residential whimsy, and many tourists don't. Stroll a few blocks north from the Blue Garden to 9th Street, just below Pine Avenue. The **Butterfly House**, as most Pagrovians know it, has a beautiful story behind it. In the 1990s, a retired school counselor named J Jackson began adorning his house in myriad colors. The reason: His wife Sonja started to lose her sight due to a degenerative art disease. She could only see bright colors. By the time he passed away in 2020, he had covered every inch of the house's exterior—not only in hundreds of handcrafted butterflies, but also every conceivable hue. For Sonja, who works at the Blind & Visually Impaired Center of Monterey County, it's not just a home. It's a love letter from her late husband.

That's the house—and the story—that lifted my spirits from across the street every morning. And, believe me, I'm not a morning person. But it's hard to be a grump when you're staring at an explosion of butterflies.

Of course, isn't that the point? Ever since we lived in caves, we have understood that creative expression can catalyze a community, connect people, inspire civic pride. But these Pagrovians conjured up these creations with a simple yet profound goal—to elicit grins from passersby. As the saying goes, you can change the world by making one person smile. Maybe not the whole world, but certainly their world.