

~ *Barbara & Don Scoble* ~ *Garden #7*

A once modest one-acre parcel has, over nearly three decades, transformed into a richly layered garden destination known to visitors as both a private retreat and a community gathering space. Barbara and Don Scoble purchased the property in 1997 after Barbara and their daughter, Jennifer, discovered the park-like setting tucked away into its Nevada City neighborhood. For Don, the purchase carried a sense of familiarity. For years, he had passed through Nevada City while driving back to San Francisco from the couple's Sierra retreat near Serene Lakes.

"I'd drive back during the fall colors, seeing the autumn leaves, thinking, 'Oh ... I wish I had some of those to rake,'" Don said. "Be careful what you wish for!"

The property included a main residence and a small adjacent cottage, which would later become known as "Toad Hollow." The name, inspired by a playful reference to *The Wind in the Willows*, reflects the couple's personal approach to the space. Over time, the cottage evolved from simple guest quarters, to hosting dinners for up to 20 guests and now, simply known as The Tasting Room. The Scobles' first major renovation came in 1999, when they prepared the property for Jennifer's wedding reception. With help from a local landscaping planner and Don's vision of a park-like setting, the groundwork was laid for what would become a series of themed garden spaces.

Today, visitors encounter a variety of plantings, including lilac trees, English laurel, azaleas, smoke bush, boxwood hedges, dogwoods and Japanese maples, set among towering redwoods.. The Italian Garden features rosemary and other Mediterranean plantings, along with a bocce ball court installed in 2002 for their second daughter Heidi's wedding. Nearby, the "Americana Zone" introduces a lighter tone, displaying Barbara's touch of whimsical garden art such as roosters, ducks, a coyote and pigs. Closer to the entrance on Martin Street, Don's favorite space, the Zen Garden, offers a quieter setting. The area includes a small pond with a water-spitting dragon, wind chimes and natural stone elements, surrounded by Japanese maple, English laurel and Lily of the Valley.

In the backyard, a 60-year-old Mission fig tree serves as a focal point of the main lawn area. At the front of the property, a 125-year-old school bell - once used at Don's mother's Florence elementary school in Astoria, Oregon - has been mounted in a custom steel frame. The structure bears the engraving "Toad Hollow" on one side and "Barbara and Don" on the other.

The garden remains a work in progress. Don describes his approach as both creative and analytical, noting his recent use of artificial intelligence tools to explore plant compatibility across climate zones.

"It's a kind of creative canvas for me," he said. "I enjoy the process of gardening - seeing what works and what doesn't. It's fun for me on both a scientific and creative level."

Although no other garden weddings are planned - there have been three on the property - this 2026 Garden Tour is the third that the Scobles have hosted.

"We enjoy having friends and guests come in and find their place to rest, reflect and feel safe," says Don.