

Our November speaker, Sasha Duerr, traveled from the San Francisco Bay Area to present us with an intriguing program about the slow fashion movement and the integral part plants have in it. She is an artist, designer and professor who works with organic dyes and alternative fibers, and she advocates for the creative reuse of materials. At the California College of the Arts (CCA) in Oakland, she holds a joint appointment in textiles and fine arts, and is the founder of the Permacouture Institute (www.permacouture.org), which promotes the use of regenerative design practices for fashion and textiles. Duerr's lovely presentation focused on the making and use of plant-based dyes and was illustrated by slides featuring projects from her book, *Natural Color* (Watson-Guptill/Random House 2016).

Duerr began her program with a brief autobiography, which included growing up in Maine and Hawaii with plenty of exposure to nature. She studied to become a painter at Middlebury College in Vermont, where illnesses from exposure to paints led to her experimentation with natural dyes and pigmentation. She completed her thesis at CCA in Slow Food and Slow Textiles and currently focuses her teaching and studies on what she calls the "alchemy of the landscape", including how it can be applied as seasonal color in the fashion world.



Photo: Katelyn Toth-Fejel

She showed us project ideas using dyes made from ingredients foraged seasonally, including spring color derived from roses, fig leaves, quince branches and avocado fruit; summer hues extracted from fennel, passion vine, aloe and loquat; and winter dyes made from citrus, as well as from cones and branches of redwood, pine and spruce. Her slides featured textiles, clothing, and also tablecloths and napkins, which were shown paired with seasonal foods.

Duerr's interest in natural systems for color and textiles led her to establish the Permacouture Institute in 2007. One idea the organization focuses on is whether products and systems are natural or artificial, and how to begin adjusting our perceptions to include more of the natural. For example: integrating by-products of items we already use for other purposes before discarding the remainder, such as a pomegranate, wherein we use the seeds as a food source, but typically discard the rind, which can be used as a dye color source. This type of creative thinking led to her work with cooks, where she experiments with using their left-over food scraps to dye fabrics.

After hosting a number of popular "Dinners to Dye For", where she culled her "compost colors" from sources such as onion and citrus peels and avocado pits, Duerr teamed up with Kelsie Kerr to collaborate on a Berkeley-based farm-to-table enterprise where they demonstrate the relationship between recipes and biodiversity. This

on-going relationship led to a full year of workshops, wherein Duerr experimented with a large variety of plants in ways that have been lost to us, including medicinal textiles.

Duerr explained how dye colors are dynamic - shifting at different times of day, with seasonality and through their processing. She created a seasonal color wheel for the Bay Area, showing dye color sources for different times of the year. As a teacher, Duerr regulates what students put into their dye pots to avoid toxicity, and is careful to only pass along proven processes, including disposal of the dyes. By using all parts of the plants she finds when foraging locally, she continues to learn about fiber durability, color fastness and the chemical effects of different plant-based ingredient combinations. She is always seeking new uses for plants as color sources beyond dying -- as paints, or to create surface designs.



She finished her presentation by talking about local plants that people interested in learning about natural dyeing could begin experimenting with, such as manzanita, black walnut and assorted fruits. She also shared a color wheel that she created for the Los Angeles area, prints of which were available for purchase, along with copies of her book, *Natural Color*.

✪ Sabine Steinmetz

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SHARING SECRETS RESPONSES

Do you use any botanicals for holiday decorating? Which ones & how?



I've used the dried up stalk of the *Hesperoyucca whipplei* "Our Lord's Candle" - (never even considered the aptness of that name for my use), as my Christmas "tree" for the last 3 years. It doesn't go bad, still has a few dried seed pods on it, and spines that make it easy to hang ornaments onto, as well as a string of tiny lights. After removing the ornaments I can wrap a large sheet over it and store it in the attic for another year. The best thing is that it's natural and visually interesting.

- Florence Nishida

I plan to sneak out nearby my house and cut some fresh eucalyptus sprouts for a door wreath and also to use as table decor. I usually use the juvenile foliage in the watersprouts from the base of the big *E. globulus* trunks. I also have a secret spot off a nearby highway where I can access toyon berries, if the birds haven't eaten them all.

- Anonymous

I usually invite my neighbors for a wreath-making night - we've been doing it for probably 30 years. The bulk of the form is leaves from my neighbor's Magnolia 'Little Gem' that I planted in that yard just for this purpose. The owners at the time asked me for a shade tree and I gave them something to make us both happy. After the Magnolia leaves, it is straight "della Robbia" style with nuts, acorns, fruit, dried blooms, rose hips, clusters of oak leaves, toyon berries, etc. from our own property. Whatever I can find to add.

There's also a Tecate cypress whose clippings get made into a single long streamer for the fireplace mantle. A barn owl calls that tree home each winter and I don't want to take too much away.

We put up a Christmas tree outside on the backyard patio that we can view from any of three windows. It's a tepee made from the longest trimmings off the stone fruit trees and whatever else is sturdy, long and narrow in the yard. Just strip the leaves, bind the top with jute twine and then encircle it in lights. I'm trying solar string lights this year. During the day it can look pretty funky but it is always so pretty at nighttime.

As an aside, my juniper berries are very popular for holiday cooking. I have a great recipe for cranberry sauce made with juniper berries and gin.

- Catherine Pannell

SCHS ANNUAL APPEAL

To our generous membership:

Last month, we published our annual year-end appeal for your tax-deductible donations to help support the Southern California Horticultural Society in its mission to offer educational and inspiring gardening experiences to its membership.

We would like to thank those of you who have already contributed, and encourage any of you considering a donation to please give as you can. Following are some sponsorship objectives we are hoping to achieve:

- **Intern Sponsor:** Allows deserving students to intern at a local public garden.
- **Oral-History Sponsor:** Our goal is to document stories from members who have contributed so much to the horticultural world.
- **Speaker Sponsor:** \$500 covers speaker and travel costs, plus you will be invited to dinner with a speaker and the SCHS Board.
- **Meeting Refreshments Sponsor:** \$20 covers cost of coffee and related supplies.

With appreciation,
Steve Gerischer, President SCHS

Donation form can be found on-line at:
socalhort.org