

## Loving living at 29 Rock Ridge Road, Woodacre

While growing up Santa Clara Valley, I saw its fertile fruit orchards plowed over for freeways and look-alike housing developments. Gas stations and malls appeared at every turn. In Woodacre, I found a place that is unique, beautiful, and safe from urban sprawl.

Descending White Hill into the San Geronimo Valley, at first glimpse of the lofty hills and cows grazing on Flanders Ranch, I feel a letting go. Tensions from traffic and turmoil “over the hill” dissolve as I drive through the redwoods framing San Geronimo Drive. Seeing the vast expanse of hills and valley, it’s not hard to imagine the Miwok fishing, hunting and gathering here in abundance for centuries.

As a historian, I have enjoyed learning about the historic property at 29 Rock Ridge Road. Harvey M. Toy, San Francisco hotel owner and co-founder of the Lagunitas Development Company, picked this location for his Craftsman-style summer home, built in 1928. He and his family and guests would walk up the path from the Maillard train stop to enter the home from the flats.

When I first walked in the door, I was drawn to the many windows, the originals shimmering in the sun. I’ve loved living in a tree house, surrounded by greenery frequented by blue jays, woodpeckers and squirrels. The solid redwood structure, stone fireplace and serpentine stone façade have also made me happy, their natural beauty and strength a reminder of years past.

With more than ample storage in the basement and beneath the studio, I could gather household supplies and art materials without running out of room. The grounds have allowed me to work on large projects best done outside the studio and also enjoy the spacious terrace for entertaining.

When I purchased this property in 2003, the owner gave me a map identifying all the plants in the front and south terraces. Inspired by the lovely garden, I became a Master Gardener so that I could maintain its beauty. I soon found that gardening is not my thing. I ended up writing gardening articles for the *Marin IJ* instead of digging in the dirt. Now most plants in the garden are native, deer- and drought-resistant. Someone with a green thumb will enjoy bringing the terraces alive again with flowers and veggies.

The Lagunitas Development Company advertised Woodacre as “rolling hills, verdant valleys, murmuring streams and virgin forests, coupled with ideal climatic conditions and rapid transit (the trains).” All this is still true of Woodacre, except transit now is by car or bike. It’s only ten minutes to Fairfax and thirty minutes to Point Reyes Station through the towering redwoods of Samuel P. Taylor Park. Sometimes I’ll go through Nicasio to pick up some Foggy Morning cheese at Lafranchi’s cheese company. Just ten minutes away, Rancho Nicasio has been a great half-way spot to get together with friends from the coast.

Once home, I have reveled in the private enclave and multiple spots to relax: reading/writing on the deck, lunch out on the terrace, and swaying in my hammock behind the studio in the evening while following the raptors as they sweep big circles across the sky. The empty lot on the north side provides another layer of seclusion.

Along with privacy comes the soundscape. I barely hear the cars on Sir Francis Drake. In summer, the shouts and laughs of kids playing in the pool at the Woodacre Improvement Club remind me of my childhood summers. Musicians gather to play at pop-up events near the post office, live music free for all. Occasionally I have heard the clip clop of hooves on pavement as riders from the Dixon Ranch lead their horses to trail heads. Rains bring the seasonal creek alive with the soothing rush of water over rock. Each evening at dusk the crows begin their symphony, calling out to each other from the treetops.

The cottage that once housed my son is now home to Michelle, a woman who loves the place as much as I do. She has made the cottage her serene retreat, basking in the sun on the deck while working from home. The cottage location, far from the house, allows for privacy. Michelle and I have gone for days without seeing each other, but it's been a comfort for me to know that she is on the property, especially when I have been traveling.

While living here, I have been enriched by the San Geronimo Valley community – its activities at the Community Center aim at inclusion: family events, senior lunches, and NextGen, a group of young adults who are serving the community. The Center's motto: You Belong Here. I have loved both watching and riding in the exuberant Fourth of July Parade. The Fire Fighters Pancake Breakfast and the parade, followed by a flea market, food and music at the Dixon Ranch, are authentic home-grown celebrations, as is the Halloween parade of ghosts and goblins up and down Railroad Avenue. I have enjoyed living in a strong, vibrant community that honors its unique surroundings with pride and gratitude.

The Valley is home to artists who thrive on the beauty of their surroundings. The Community Center supports artists in several annual events in which I have shown my work. The many community talent shows and especially the St. Patrick's Day Talent Show, a tradition for over thirty years, gives voice to musicians, singers and other talented performers.

I have loved the small-town vibe, seeing the neighborhood kids riding their bikes and walking arm in arm down the roads without sidewalks. The Woodacre postal clerk knows residents by name and box number. The Woodacre Deli, along with its popular sandwiches, has necessities in a pinch, along with retro items—tie-dyed headbands and packages of incense harkening back to the Valley's hippie history.

Many Valley residents leave their doors unlocked. After nearly twenty years without any incident, I should have been able to follow suit, but as a former city dweller, I could not break the habit of locking my doors. I have appreciated the Marin County Fire Department close by.

A hiking trailhead sits right up the street—just one of many. Roy's Redwoods has been another favorite. But many days I've walked the routes right outside my door—from oak woodlands to redwood forest and back. I haven't had to take many steps to become bathed in nature.

Living here also means living with wildlife that visit or decide to stay for a while—deer, foxes, lizards, butterflies. I found the southern terraces a perfect spot to raise bees. I had two hives until traveling made beekeeping impractical.

Here the seasons become more marked, with salmon spawning a winter ritual. No matter where I land, I will come back to the view the salmon swimming up Lagunitas Creek to spawn. Their return signifies hope and renewal, inseparable from the Valley's unique sense of place.