

Our Home at 91 Lombardy

We have so enjoyed our magical home & we hope you will as well...

91 Lombardy has southern exposure, and the house was designed with the seasons in mind. In the winter the low morning sun pours into the dining room and you can have coffee with the sun on your back. In the summer the sun is higher and it does not come as far into the dining room. In the winter the sun also pours into the living room and it's wonderful to sit by the sunny living room window, or in the fireplace bedroom in a pool of sunshine on a cold day. Late afternoons as the sun sets, the front porch becomes the perfect sun bathing spot....yet during the day when the sun is high we can enjoy the shade on the porch.

Our home does not have AC. If you want to install air-conditioning, we built a duct work chase that runs from the garage rafter area to the living room with vents installed in the master bedroom, master bath, adjacent bedroom, dining room and living room so that these rooms can be cooled. The chase does not reach the west bedrooms, but that side of the house is cooler.

An adobe home with walls approx 16" thick feels very snug. It is quiet and has excellent thermal qualities. The master bedroom is not original construction, it was built of reinforced masonry. The radiant system extends thru the added master and its closet and bath

Sleeping with the bedside windows open a crack you will often hear owls at night, and in the distance the frogs and sometimes coyotes.

There is an abundance of nature around us. On the hill above the yard we often see deer, and in the spring will see young fawns bounding across the hillside. We also sometimes see a tall grey heron standing still on the hill, waiting for a gopher to pop up. Hawks will sun themselves in the trees up the hill. We have often had quail pass thru the yard, Mom and Dad Quail with ten puff ball babies in tow, the size of ping pong balls. Many bird species live and/or browse in the garden. We have had hummingbirds nest here. The thatch under the Mexican Fan palm is a nesting site for a pair of yellow hooded orioles who migrate here in the spring. Beautiful to see. They weave a basket for their young. Best to wait to remove the thatch after they've moved on. JP Palms Trimming (209-278-4602) does it well, and also the queen palms, but keep an eye or they will over prune and take too many green fronds! Speaking of the queen palms, the internet says the dates are edible, but we have never tried it.

When the pandemic started we got additional chickens in case there was a food shortage. We have had as many as 12 in the coop, and there is plenty of space so long as they can roam in the fenced area during the day which we call Chicken Land. Chicken Land is home to a number of fruit trees; Asian Pear, dwarf pear, apple, pomegranate (we got at least 20 last year) and a huge very prolific fig tree with another smaller one growing rapidly. There is also a giant lady banks rose growing up the front of the coop that blooms in April, and a delightful mock orange that blooms intertwined with a red rose on the fence between Chicken Land and the neighbors sport court. Chicken Land is also home to six different types of lavender.

Frogs are threatened by drought and shrinking habitat. Last year the vernal pools in Briones dried up before the tadpoles could become frogs. Out of concern for our native Pacific Tree Frog and the Red Legged Frog (endangered) we built a large pond last spring in Chicken Land. Our chickens ignored it and just walked around the pond. A single frog showed up one day last April, but we never heard him. This spring several frogs arrived on their own and have been sounding a chorus at night, and laying eggs in the pond. We now have tadpoles! If you sit on the upper garden steps at dusk you will hear the frogs begin to ribbit and they will make sounds back and forth with the frogs that live on the other side of Lombardy. The pond has native plants culled with permission from Wagner Ranch (a wonderful nature preserve) , including cattails and tulle reeds. During the summer there are many colorful dragonflies darting about and hovering on the reeds. With the windows closed you can barely hear the frogs from inside the house. The frogs will go into hibernation, burying themselves in the dirt sometime in July or August, and won't emerge again until after frost has passed.

Like the water feature in the front yard, the pond is easy to maintain. I spray off the filter screen about once a quarter, and it takes less than 10 minutes to do. The moving water, carnivorous insects, and frogs keep mosquitos at bay. If you see larvae there are 'mosquito dunks' in the shed, one or two donut shaped floating on the water will prevent the larvae from growing, it's a biological remedy. Supposedly amphibian safe, but best not used until the tadpoles have grown. We do not have fish of any kind because they will eat tadpoles, as well as all the water bugs (boatmen, skeeters, etc)

We can get frost on our front lawn in the winter. When the temperature is going to dip we wrap the banana palm tree in a fabric sleeve and leave it that way thru February, we have some extras. Christmas lights also keep it from freezing, but if you don't want to bother, you can just cut it back in the winter and it will regrow in the summer.

We also cover the foxtail agave and anemone succulents. Everything else is fairly cold hardy unless temperatures become extreme.

There are well over 50 roses in the garden. The roses are prolific and provide buckets of flowers to give to friends. Along the rose walk near the east fence there is a quince tree. Quince are very yummy baked or poached- and expensive, so your gourmet friends will appreciate them. They fall to the ground when ripe and don't bruise. The east fence is covered with passion vine.

In front of the greenhouse is an area we call Butterfly Land. This large oval bed is full of California native perennials that attract butterflies. At the very top of the yard, just beyond the iris bed, we have started a fairly good sized patch of native milkweed plants, they come every spring, and are situated about ten feet to the left of the Matilija Poppy (also called fried egg poppy). Many nurseries are now selling milkweed to support monarchs.

Dozens of Calla Lilly bloom in March and April along the retaining wall near the east property's driveway. They are easy to divide and propagate and would also do well on the other side of the house.

From late spring to fall we have extremely fragrant gardenia and daphne blooms. These are best enjoyed on your nightstand and there are enough of them so that you can have fragrance at your bedside for weeks.

There are two large beds of gardenias, one grows in front of the living room windows, the other grows under the dining room windows.

In February the daphne bushes bloom. In front of the curved wall along the driveway there are approximately 7 variegated daphne plants, and at dusk you can smell their perfume when you walk by. There are more in the back yard growing under the Mirabelle (wild) plum tree, just downslope from the compost bins. The Mirabelle plum tree bears a tart fruit, it makes a wonderful preserve.

Next to the greenhouse there are three different types of lemon, and also two kumquat trees.

The vegetable beds all have drip irrigation. The chard seems to be a perennial, and it just keeps coming back, same with the rhubarb.

We have never used pesticide on anything. We also don't poison gophers because that kills animals that eat them. We have had success using mechanical traps. We haven't had a gopher in the yard this year.

We have a lot of native plants that bring seasonal interest; California fuchsia blooms scarlet in the fall near the pool steps, drawing hummingbirds. Another favorite of the hummingbirds is the native California Currant (*Ribes*) which flower pink near the BBQ, and near the dogwoods.

We also get tiny tiny salamanders that show up when it is rainy. They sometimes find their way into the pool after a storm and we will scoop them up and relocate them farther away.

The rain makes a wonderful sound on the roof of this house. We installed French drains at multiple locations on the property. Lines are located: above the greenhouse, behind the bbq wall, under the bocce court edge, behind the swimming pool and patio walls, and along side the east fence. When it rains the French drains carry water to a pipe that drains at the curb, moving water from the hillside to the street. We also added additional drains under the patio when we redid the pool and added the firepit in 2009.

The swimming pool also automatically drains the street. The pool is a salt water pool, and it feels delightful. The jacuzzi, pool and spill over fountains can be turned on via an app installed on your phones.

During the summer the greenhouse will get very hot unless you open the windows and the door. We usually keep the door open so critters can come and go. There is a roof vent that works with a thermostat to automatically open the roof vent.

The sink in the greenhouse, and the sink at the bbq do not drain to the sewer but connect to yard plumbing drains so you should not wash paint brushes in these sinks.

Last year we brought electricity to the far reaches of the backyard. There are electrical plugs along the bocce court, and then again inside the greenhouse, and at the chicken coop.

The front yard has numerous electrical outlets alongside the inside perimeter of the courtyard wall, and the low adobe wall, all placed to power your Christmas lights, stereo speakers or party blenders ☺

When we poured the front driveway in 2021, electrical wires were put into a 4" pipe to reach the street side of the driveway so that front slope lighting could be added if desired. We also have our sprinkler pipe inside a similar pipe, so that this sleeve provides additional protection if heavy equipment is on the driveway. A second pipe sleeve was also added and left empty so that if additional lines are needed on the front slope they can be pulled thru the pipe.

There is additional tandem parking alongside the garage. In the middle of this area, and underneath the ground, there is a rectangular pit built of reinforced masonry that was designed to hold two 50 gallon water barrels. This water storage area was built to accommodate a future grey water system. When we built the master addition in 2009 we added a lever outside the laundry room so that water from the master shower and laundry could be diverted to water tanks and ultimately be used for the garden.

Lighting: there are dimmer switches in abundance in the house. Along the side yard there is a motion sensing light that will turn on if a person, or cat walks by. The front wall entry gate lights are controlled at the switch near the laundry room.

During the 2009 remodel we abandoned the original fireplace, and instead, added a gas insert. This is why the wall between the living room and front west bedroom is thick, which also allows for the TV to be hidden in a cabinet.

During this remodel we learned a lot about the construction of the house. We had previously X-rayed the house and learned there is rebar in the walls, but of course we could not see it. During demolition we removed a corner of the house near the pool steps, to add the master. When we opened up this wall we discovered that there is rebar running between the two courses of brick, from the foundation to the bond beam. The bond beam is a continuous concrete beam that runs around the perimeter at a height of approx 7 feet.

During the 2008-2009 remodel, we completely gutted the house doing the following:

- Rebuilt the two existing bathrooms, and expanded a third to become a master bath
- Redid the kitchen with custom walnut cabinets, pitched the roof and added skylights, drawer pulls are 100% bronze by Ashly Nortan.
- Replaced all windows. The windows are steel Bloomberg windows made in California.
- Replaced all doors. We have two NanaWall doors that open the house to the patio. Our front entry door and dutch door at the kitchen are by Craftsman in Wood.
- Added a hall closet and pantry where previously there had been a redundant hallway
- Added 9 skylights
- Enclosed the breezeway to create wife's closet and passage to laundry room
- Enlarged the back patio, added a fire pit
- Resurfaced the pool, new pool equipment (switched to salt water approx 5 yrs ago)

More recently:

- From 2018-2019 we terraced the backyard and added bocce court and greenhouse
- In 2019 we opened up the wall between kitchen and living room, adding a steel beam header (with structural engineer and permit)
- In 2020 a front yard redo adding a courtyard wall, gates, fountain, lighting and another fire pit
- In 2020 we added the garage side parking area and new driveway
- In 2021 the frog pond was added and electrical to the back yard
- In 2022 we repainted and recarpeted, and updated fixtures

The back yard is terraced with woven rebar created much like a wattle willow fence. Approximately every six to eight feet the rebar is anchored with a 'dead man' that is tied to the wall. To understand this, imagine a 6-8' long rebar bobby pin threaded thru the wall, that goes into the hill and is embedded in a fat log of cement buried under the earth. Behind each woven rebar wall there is filter cloth and gravel. The lizards LOVE these walls and scamper in and out. The highest veggie beds sit atop a retaining wall that is slightly pitched forward. It has been this way for many years and should last for a long time because this wall is also anchored with a couple dead men that run between the veggie beds under the hill.

Just above the roses are two grass mounds. Each of these mounds was designed as a 'sofa' and has a seat that provides a wonderful spot for watching clouds or stars.

In the spring the magnolia blooms pink, a ton of poppies pop up on the front slope, adding color to the daffodils. The seasonal color continues all year.

Fruit Trees: Quince, Pomegranate, Figs (2), Asian Pear, Miniature Pear, Apple, Mirabelle Plum

Flowering Trees & Shrubs: Dogwood, Magnolia, Mock Orange, Daphne, Gardenia, peony, hydrangea

Vines: 20+ climbing roses, Honeysuckle, Wisteria, jasmine, ceanothus

7 Raised Garden Beds for Vegetables

91 Lombardy is a wonderful home for entertaining and gathering, whether for young families or adults. The pool and jacuzzi have always been a focal point, our kids loved to jump in from the pool ledge. Later when teenagers they gathered night after night with friends around the fire pit which easily accommodates 12 in a semi circle using the jacuzzi bench. Meanwhile, adults could have their own fun in the front courtyard, where the DG patio has its own firepit, and separate soft seating area, and was built large enough to handle a dining table or ping pong table.

When our children were small we installed two different pool safety devices. We had a mesh fence that ran from the back of the house around the jacuzzi, to the pool retaining wall which effectively fenced off the pool deck, allowing our toddlers to use half the back patio for their tricycles. The fence holes remain in the concrete and it would be easy to add back the mesh panels. When the kids were a bit older, we switched to a net that covered the pool, the brass grommets remain around the

perimeter so a net can be re-installed. The net had the advantage of allowing full patio circulation but would not be good for small children who would want to climb it. Both these methods worked well, were easy to remove when company came over, and both methods could be used together for extra security.

Our kids loved the backyard, the shed makes a wonderful playhouse, and there is a lookout deck above the chicken coop that they enjoyed climbing. The Sleepy Hollow Swim & Tennis Club is a 16 minute walk, convenient for walking to/from tennis or swim practice, or the popular Legends Summer Camp.

The School District is one of the best in the country, with Miramonte High School ranked #311 out of 18,000 schools ranked by U.S. News. Miramonte is the top rated high school of 5 in the Acalanes High School District and #39 in California out of 3,892. Sleepy Hollow Elementary is a short 4 minute drive or a 17 minute walk. Our kids rode the bus to both Orinda intermediate and Miramonte high school, enjoying the time with their friends, and student organized pancake breakfasts aboard.

Sleepy Hollow is wonderfully fun during Halloween. The Sleepy Hollow school carnival and haunted house are very memorable, and around the corner, Lower Van Ripper is the most fun street for trick or treating with every house decked out in Halloween decor.

Wishing you all the best,

Owners of 91 Lombardy Lane, Orinda

May 1, 2022