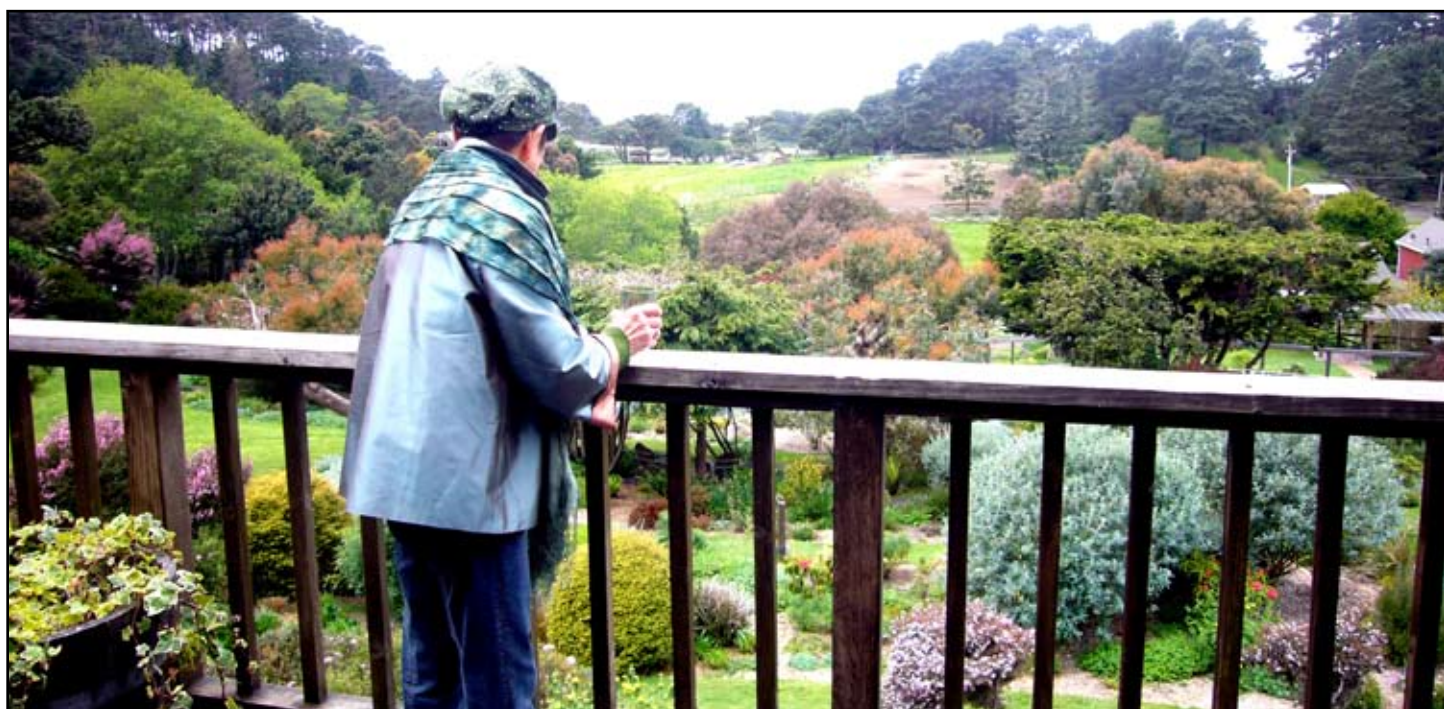




# *Tall Cotton in Mendocino*

Bill and Sandra McIver live in a secluded mansion atop steep cliffs rising from the Pacific coast. That's their home at upper right in the above photo. Only the hardy and the fearless can approach by sea. As I discovered, it's not easy to get there by land either. Bill, a meticulous gentleman, had provided detailed instructions for getting through his security gate off California Highway One. *Just punch in my code, Jackson, and I'll answer at the house and open the gate for you. If that doesn't work for some reason, here is a secret code that will open the gate. If you are still locked out, get help from our housekeeper at the white house nearby.* Well, nothing worked, not

even the housekeeper, who, I suppose, had gone out on an errand, leaving behind only barking dogs. Later it was determined the electronic device was indeed broken, or at least corroded into inertness. The gate would open only for those who were already inside. In amused frustration, I joked to Yoshi: "Bill and Sandra live on a multimillion-dollar estate protected by a \$59 thingamajig." Anyway, Yoshi and I were tired after driving up from San Francisco for hours, so we left the stubborn McIver gate and checked into the nearby Stanford Inn by the Sea. The suite that Bill had reserved for us was lovely and offered a soothing balcony view of spring gardens. The inn was nonsmoking





and vegetarian – not exactly my kind of place – but there were eggs on the breakfast menu, if not bacon and sausage. Of course I called Bill right away, to let him know we had arrived, a little later than expected, and to complain about the deaf and dumb gate device. Bill and Sandra picked us up at the inn and took us to dinner in downtown Mendocino. The restaurant was the charming Moose Café – landlords, Bill and Sandra McIver. Sandra and I chose the sea bream, while Bill and Yoshi ate something else. The next day, with Bill's help, we finally got into the ten-acre McIver estate. They showed us around, inside and out. It was an impressive home. Bill's wine cellar is twice as large as what can be seen in the photo at right. Most of the wine comes from the Matanzas Creek Winery, near Santa Rosa, which Yoshi and I had toured the day before. The McIvers sold the winery in the year 2000, cashing out after decades of hard work. It took 14 months to build their Mendocino home, plus three years for the landscaping. The exterior and interior walls amazed me. They are "rammed earth" walls, a technique as old as China but not seen extensively in America. Look at the wall thickness in the photo below, in which Sandra makes a hand gesture so vigorous that my camera could only capture a blur. Mine is a good camera, a gift







**Photo by Bill McIver**



last year from a Japanese nephew, but I've got to learn more about it, instead of just pointing and shooting and hoping for the best. The weather was fickle. Once it rained hard for a minute or two, then brightened up as the sun poked through hazy clouds. Wet grass did not deter us from walking down the hill to the edge of the sea cliffs. Yoshi and Sandra hugged themselves in the cool marine winds. Blubber protects me. I'm always warm, even in lightweight clothing. In the top photo here, as Yoshi and I approach Sandra, we are focused on a large sea stack teeming with harbor seals. In the middle photo, Sandra explains that it was "calfing" season, and that the seals always gather on this sea stack to give birth to new crops of babies. If we looked closely, we could see little ones among the big ones. I snapped the photo at left as we were trudging back to the house. Bill and Sandra's black cat, named Tux, enjoyed the excursion with us, bouncing happily here and there. To Bill, the house is a 5,000-square-foot, one-bedroom bungalow, but it struck me as a magnificent spaceship that had landed on a coastal hilltop and grown roots. If this was the backyard, with the Pacific Ocean providing panoramic dazzle, we should now tour the expansive landscaping that wraps around the home's front and sides. As I have made clear in my eclectic writings over the years, Yoshi possesses the





Photo by Bill McIver



green thumb in our household. She loves vegetation about as much as she loves animals. Me? I appreciate gardens but I'm more interested in structures and systems and why they work. Good gardens have both. Walkways crisscrossed the McIver gardens. I wondered how far you could walk without retracing your steps. I didn't ask. I figured Bill wouldn't know. And take a look at the high hedge just beyond the bench in the top photo here. A delineating border hedge, fine, but why is there a second one running parallel to it a couple of feet back? Aha, it's because deer can jump one hedge but not two at the same time. In the photo at bottom left, our rented Mazda is parked on the grass. Bill had a hard time convincing me to park there. One doesn't usually park on somebody's lawn. One looks for concrete, gravel, brick or paving stones, not real live grass. But this nicely manicured grass grows up through a heavy-duty steel grid. A car won't leave ruts. No oil spots either.



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