

Adorning the Garden Path

Where the Natural and Artistic Worlds Coalesce WRITTEN BY LIZ GOLDNER, PHOTOS BY TOM LAMB



Bluebird Park

The harmony of nature and art, the mirroring of the natural and artistic worlds, has been celebrated for centuries in a variety of cultures, and recently in Laguna Art Museum’s annual “Art & Nature” festival. Yet in our city by the sea, the synchronization of nature with art is a year-round occurrence, with pocket-sized gardens and parks displaying finely crafted art pieces alongside lavish plantings and our larger parks mingling sculptures and murals with native cacti, aloe, geraniums, daffodils, bougainvilleas, roses and nasturtiums. Then we have the breathtaking, Treasure Island Park at the Montage Resort, Crescent Bay with its terraced gardens opening to crashing waves, and Alta Laguna with its view of mountains, canyons, and ocean. Here are seven favorite spots that mix native and introduced species and seasonal flowers with original public art.

You enter **Bluebird Park** through Jon Seeman’s brightly colored Bluebird Park Gate, featuring whimsical designs and shapes inspired by fairy tales. As much an artistic installation

as a children’s playground, this site includes a tall rocket ship with slides, Michele Taylor’s six-foot ceramic-and-glass mosaic *Laguna Tortoise*, and blue, gold and chartreuse play equipment. Its colorful walls and ledges are integrated with such species as Mexican marigold, orange clock

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vine, plumbago, lemonade berry, California holly, blue hibiscus, Carmel creeper, jade plants, aloe, saponaria and jacaranda trees. Cress Street and Bluebird Canyon Drive.



Treasure Island Park



Village Green Park



A short drive down South Coast Highway to **Treasure Island Park** reveals magnificent lawns and rugged coastlines along with aloes, cacti, daylilies and California poppies. These plants and flowers are enhanced by sculptures that echo the mystical mood of the nearby ocean. Linda Bruncker’s *Voyager*, a tall bronze sculptured woman, appears to be fashioned from seaweed and stands atop a pedestal bedecked with fish, starfish and seashells. Cheryl Ekstrom’s two bronze *Parallel Dance* pieces, created

with the lost-wax method, are mythical creatures—part sea animal, part horse and part dragon. Wesley Drive and South Coast Highway.

Travel a few miles south to Catalina Street and you’ll find **Village Green Park**, modeled after an old town square. Designed by Laguna’s Fred Lang, Ken Wood and Ann Christoph, this park is entered through two sculpted bronze gates and includes a tree house, native plants and tall mature trees. Mirroring these weathered trees is Julia Klemek’s bronze sculpture *Green Man with Red Birds*, inspired by a long artistic and religious tradition. Examples of the iconic “Green Man” date back to classical Rome and were incorporated into the facades of many European churches during the Middle Ages. True to its art-historical origins, Klemek’s part-tree, part-man statue reaches up to the heavens while its heart is a nest of ten red ceramic birds. Catalina Street, one block east of South Coast Highway.

Located near the center of downtown, **Main Beach Park** is famous for its broad sandy beaches and vast lawns bordered by geraniums, aloes, Torrey pines, Lagunaria trees and Washingtonia palms, not to mention



“Autumn Colors at Big Bend, Laguna Beach” 11 x 14

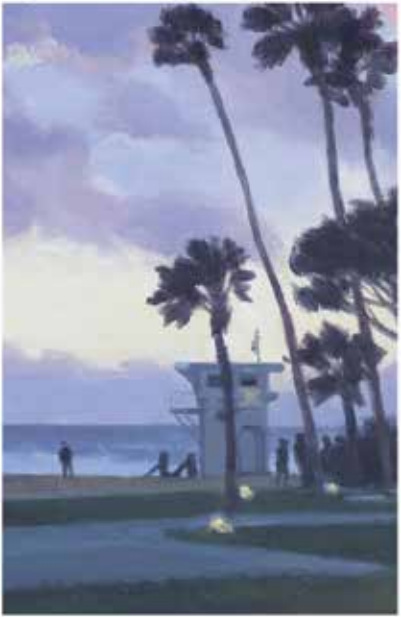
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the local garden club's "Garden by the Sea." Attractions include the 1920s-era hexagonal Lifeguard Tower, which was moved to this location in 1937 and has been a Laguna landmark ever since. Nearby you'll find *Canyon Chess and Checkers*, hand-formed and glazed ceramic table and chairs created by Marlo Bartels. The newest art piece in the park, Terry Thornsley's bronze, copper and stainless steel mural *Grace*, includes two figures rowing a dory through churning seas.

South Coast Highway, from Broadway to Laguna Avenue.

Adjoining Main Beach is **Heisler Park**, a three-quarter-mile stretch of land with a long walkway running atop ocean cliffs and bordered by some of Laguna's oldest trees, including Torrey pines, Monterey cypress and Washingtonia palms. Among the park's attractions are a

rose garden and a nearby gazebo with views of rocky beaches, tide pools and the sea beyond. Several large public artworks, including Jorg Dubin's *Semper Memento*, turn the area into an informal sculpture garden. Installed on 9/11/11 and incorporating two steel beams salvaged from the World Trade Center after its demolition, Dubin's piece also features a base representing the Pentagon. Made of concrete and stainless steel, George Stone's *Rock Pile Carve* represents a long wave with a surfboard riding through it. *A Rocky Ledge* by Julia Klemek and Leslie Robbins is a curved sculptural bench that mirrors in color and texture the surrounding flora and tide pools. And Jon Seeman's *Breaching Whale*, a realistic 19-foot artwork of stainless and COR-TEN steel, dominates the park. North Coast Highway between Cliff Drive and Myrtle Street.



Heisler Park



Main Beach Park



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The most dramatic Laguna Beach park, **Crescent Bay**, has the appearance of a movie set—perhaps one out of South Pacific; its peninsula-like periphery overlooks the rock formations below and the ocean with its crashing waves. Within the park, granite walkways and benches punctuate the well-manicured lawns, while plants and flowers, including aloe, cacti, geraniums, roses, daffodils and bougainvilleas, proliferate. Looking out to the ocean is Terry Thornsley’s magnificent bronze

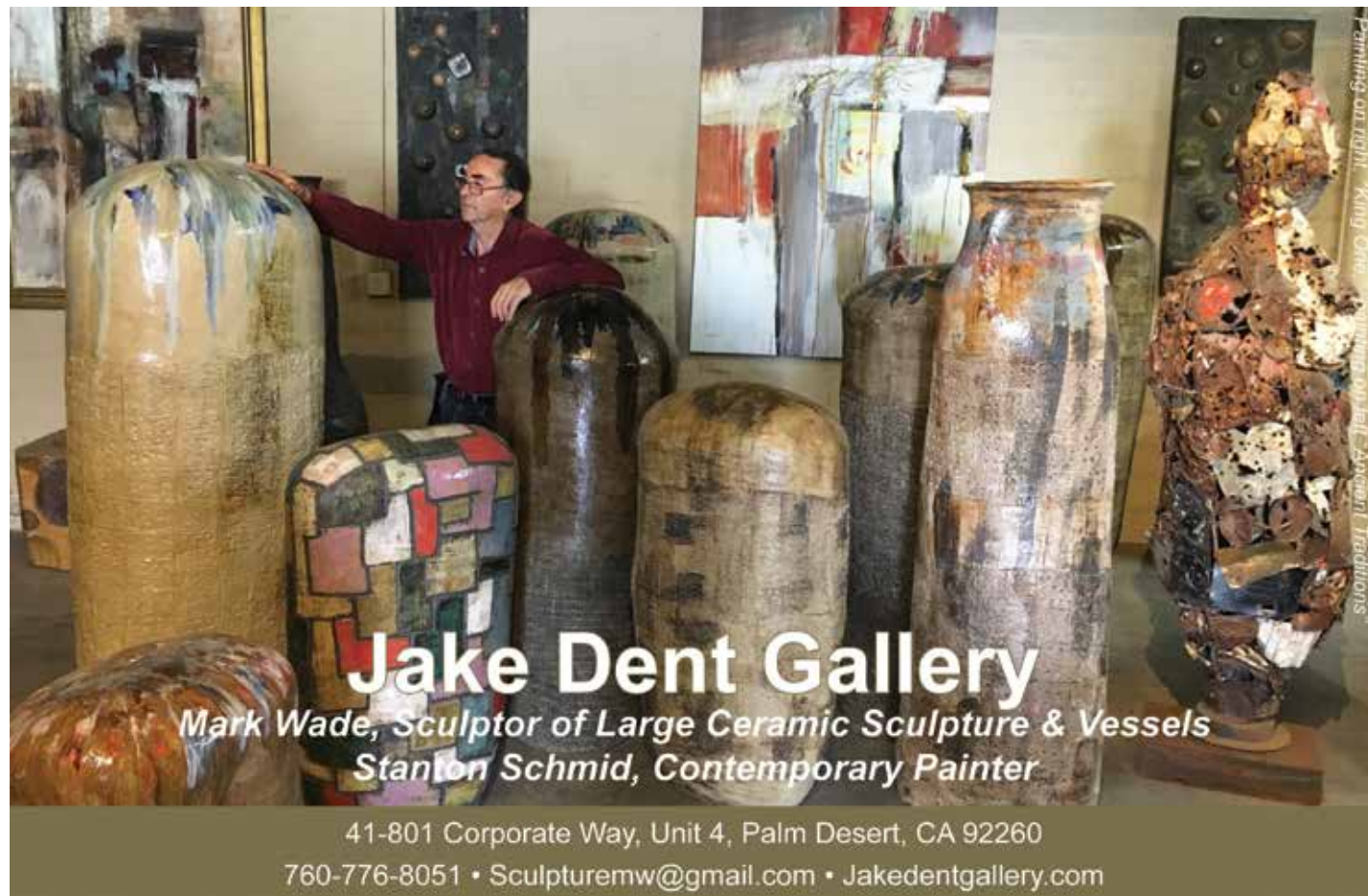


sculptures *Laguna Locals*, depicting an elegant sea lion and a large cormorant taking flight.
223 Crescent Bay Drive.

Seven-acre **Alta Laguna Park** at the top of Park Avenue includes playgrounds, sports fields, a bridge and gazebo, as well as lawns and gardens featuring coastal sage and wild flowers. The public artwork here is Peter Busby’s, *Interlude*, six graceful wire sculptures of whales’ tails. At 1,100 feet in elevation and with 360-degree views, this windswept hiker’s dream looks out at Saddleback Mountain, Laguna and Aliso Canyons and the seemingly endless Pacific Ocean.

3300 Alta Laguna Blvd. 

Many thanks to Laguna Beach landscape designer Ruben Flores for providing detailed information about the plants

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