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Bold color, fanciful art and plenty of pots define Tina Dixon's pleasing place

By Valerie Easton

FULL AND LUXURIOUSLY planted, Tina Dixon's quarter-acre Bothell garden is nevertheless accented with more than two dozen pots. And no wonder. Dixon is the Northwest queen of pots. She's turned her container expertise into a successful career, and her award-winning work is frequently published in magazines.

From early April through late autumn, Dixon and crew are kept busy designing, planting and refreshing containers for residential and commercial customers.

Why pots? Dixon's wildly romping golden retriever lends a clue. At least Dixon's plants have a chance to survive when they're raised in a pot safe from the dog's joyful frolic. The pots also serve as art, color spots and effective punctuation in her spacious garden.

"We do everything slowly," says Dixon of the garden she and husband Paul Stredwick have been developing for more than a decade. **Early on, they worked with contractor Mike Jeppesen of Sammamish Landscape to design and install the stone stairs, pathways, arbors, and gates.** Now bamboo creates a thick privacy shield at the back of the property, and a gunnera Dixon describes as "so large it needs its own ZIP code" sets the leafy, exotic tone of the place.

The garden has evolved to incorporate artwork and structures along with Dixon's trademark cobalt-blue pots. An arbor-topped gate serves as a dramatic entry to the garden. Brawny pillars support a lengthy pergola. Every structure and all but one of the 27 pots in the garden are blue, echoing the trim color on the house and carrying Dixon and Stredwick's favorite shade through the seasons.

Dixon fills her pots with nonhardy succulents, exotics like banana trees and experimental plants she's trying out for clients. But she's also trying to dial down on maintenance. "I just can't replant them all seasonally, so I've moved toward solo plants . . . and five of the 27 pots are treated as art, so aren't planted at all," she says.

Even a garden shed in the back corner has been turned into a focal point. "I wanted it to look like an old house along a Santa Fe street," says Dixon of the shed's impressive blue-stucco facade inset with an aged-looking wooden door. And what's behind the wall? "Oh, just storage," says the practical Dixon. A graveled area underfoot and a pair of green Adirondack chairs add to the Southwestern aura that warms up the area.

Chartreuse and golden plants set against blue art and structures define the garden. This large-scale color play is a macrocosm to the microcosm of Dixon's container plantings in blue pots. Dixon admits it took her husband awhile to appreciate the contrasts. "Until recently, Paul was chromophobic, but he's getting used to color," she says.

So is Dixon one of those rare professional gardeners who fully shares her home garden with her partner? Not really, although Dixon dishes out plenty of credit to her husband. "I do ask Paul's opinion all the time because he's so visual," she says. "But when it comes to actual work, he mows the lawn."

Valerie Easton is a Seattle freelance writer and author of "The New Low-Maintenance Garden." Check out her blog at www.valeaston.com. Mike Siegel is a Seattle Times staff photographer.



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The atmospheric are amped up by an arbor-topped blue gate opening into the back garden. The stone path leading to the gate is trimmed with hostas and ornamental grasses



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The stained-concrete columns supporting the pergola look like stucco but are less expensive.