

Room with a view

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Moonrise above The Palisades, 30 Nov 09.

I've been very fortunate in my life to have lived in a number of exceptionally scenic spots. During college in Ithaca NY I shared an apartment in a rather funky building perched above Ithaca Falls with views out over the valley - though not of the lake. Ithaca Falls is one of the Finger Lakes regions' many scenic waterfalls but is within the city limits and was exceptionally lovely when frozen in winter, or swollen with spring rains.



View across the San Francisco Bay from the Maybeck Cottage garden, 11 Jan 2000.

While in Berkeley CA, during part of my career at the UC Botanical Garden, I lived for 14 years in the Maybeck Cottage in North Berkeley. This was another rather funky structure - though with great charm and the historical association with architect Bernard Maybeck and his family - but it also was sited directly across the bay, with an unobstructed view of the Golden Gate Bridge connecting San Francisco with the Marin headlands. I could watch the sunset move N to S (and vice-versa) as the seasons changed, and I believe it was around Nov 5th when it set in the middle of the bridge from my perspective (the spring counterpart was in early Feb.) First as a renter and later as an owner with David McCrory, the Maybeck Cottage was the place I was able to really explore the horticultural possibilities of living in the Bay Area of California, as well as explore my concept of gardening itself. (check out our website for more pictures of the Maybeck Cottage garden, www.planethorticulture.com.) While at the UC Bot Garden, another great viewpoint, I was able to explore the full spectrum of California native plants - or at least those I could successfully grow. Though of "lesser" importance, I also took care of the Bot Garden's Eastern North American collection of plants. In Berkeley my "horticultural plate" always looked like Thanksgiving Dinner, seemingly way too much, but all delicious stuff.



Daytime view of The Palisades above Calistoga, from our deck, 3 Dec 09.

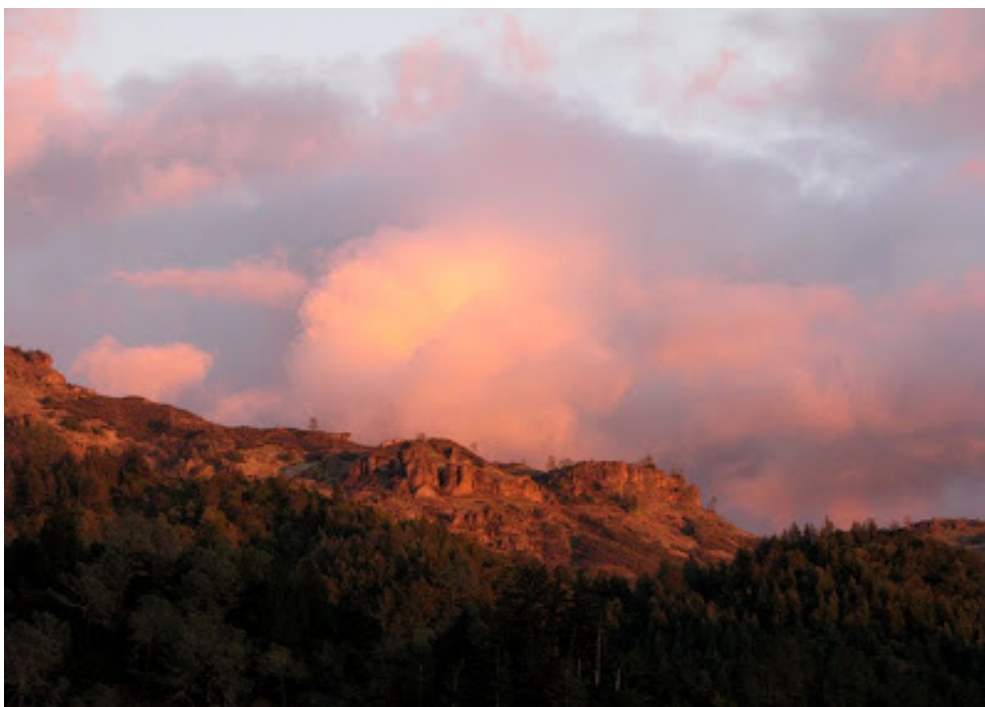
Now we live in Calistoga CA at the N end of the famous Napa Valley. Our house looks directly E and NE toward The Palisades, a long escarpment of volcanic rock S of Mt. St. Helena (the highest point in the county at 4300'). Although the term, The Palisades, specifically applies to the stretch of cliffs, most folks, myself included, use the name to refer to the entire plateau stretching S of Mt. St. Helena to just S of the gap where the old Oat Hill Mine Rd. (now a trail) passes E through the cliffs toward Aetna Springs. Most of this plateau is in the 2400' - 3,000' range. Palisade is a term originally applied to fences, barriers or fortifications made out of pales or stakes, usually sharpened at the top and set into the ground. We have all seen movies with re-created forts employing this technique. Later the term was put on long stretches of cliffs, often along riverbanks, that resembled this type of fortification. I am not

sure when the name was applied to the cliffs above Calistoga, but it was probably early on in European settlement of the valley. Every sunny day, from our house, we can watch the last sunlight move up the cliff-face, usually accompanied by a color change as it approaches true sunset; first golden, then orange, then reddish. Once the sun has set in the W, the rock turns back to a cold gray color with amethyst tints. Thus, although we can't watch the true sunset, we get a reflected sunset on the cliffs.



The Palisades in the orange phase with rising moon above, 29 Nov 09.

Because I look out at The Palisades every day, I tend to take a lot of pictures of it. Rather than bore you with endless sets of similar pictures, I chose some of my favorites from the last 4 months. This is my favorite time of year as the latest sun hits the cliffs directly and the moon moves to the N to rise above the cliffs (whereas in the peak of summer the cliffs are in shadow from Mt. St. Helena at sunset and the moon rises over the ridge to the S).



Late light on storm clouds, 22 Nov 09, just before sunset.



(same as above)



Same date as above but more to the S where the Oat Hill Mine Rd. pierces the facade of The Palisades to continue eastward (now a popular hiking/biking trail).



Moon above at very last light, 31 Oct 09.



Date as in previous, but moon appearing to be ready to roll off cliffs.



A slice of late light as sun gets below ceiling of clouds, illuminating the central cliff portion, 18 Oct 09.



As above but near the N end of cliffs.



Last light and rising moon, 2 Sept 09. Here the moon is still S of the main cliff section.



Nearly the full escarpment, 26 Aug 09.



Post sunset cloud glow, 31 Aug 09.



Slipping into darkness, post sunset glow and moon over Oat Hill Mine Rd. ridge.