



PHOTOGRAPH BY SIRI BERTING

NATURAL INSTINCTS

For the plein air warriors of the Portuguese Bend Artist Colony, the land, sea and sky that frames Terranea Resort comprise more than a beautiful vista. They inspire a lasting artistic bond between friends.

Written by Fabienne Marsh

OPPOSITE: SEA CAVE AT PORTUGUESE POINT BY RICHARD HUMPHREY; THIS PAGE: VICKI & DANIEL PINKHAM PAINT A SOUTH BAY SUNSET WITH TERRANEA IN THE FOREGROUND.



TO MAKE THE BRUSH MIGHTY AS THE SWORD.

—STEPHEN MIRICH

A group of seven *plein air* (painting outdoors) artists, affable and familial as they are, hold a common target in the crosshairs of their brushes: the open spaces they have explored and loved since childhood are painted with the express purpose of recording and preserving them.

It's early Wednesday evening, and Victoria and Daniel Pinkham have called a meeting of the Portuguese Bend Artist Colony (PBAC) at their home across from Inspiration Point. The couple each has a painting on display in Terranea's reception area, the framed works hanging on opposite sides of an archway. Keeping with the tradition of their intimate group, the two paintings depict natural treasures along the Palos Verdes coast.

Joining them this night are fellow *plein air* artists Richard Humphrey, Stephen Mirich, Kevin Prince, Thomas Redfield and Amy Sidrane. Seated in a vast room with wood-beamed ceiling and canvasses leaning against the 19-foot wall, the guests listen to Dan recount how he and Victoria rescued their home from demolition 13 years ago. "We discovered that this 'Gate House' was actually a replica of the roadside chapel loaned to Michelangelo by the church in Italy during his commission to paint the Sistine ceiling," he explains. The chapel now serves as the Pinkhams' studio and headquarters for the PBAC.

The light coming through the enormous Palladian window is slipping away. By the time the candles are lit, the artists are beginning to resemble a Renaissance portrait, with wine, cheese and grapes laid before them.

In 1997, the artist colony teamed up with the Palos Verdes Land Conservancy, stewards of preserved land neighboring Terranea, to launch the first in a series of art exhibitions dedicated to raising funds for the organization's stated mission: protecting land and restoring habitats for the education and enjoyment of all. Since that first show, and 12 years later, the artists have donated up to 40% of their sales to the cause, which since



ABOVE: PEACOCK BY AMY SIDRANE; BELOW: CHAPEL COURTYARD FOUNTAIN BY VICTORIA PINKHAM; OPPOSITE, TOP: MOONRISE OVER PORTUGUESE BEND BY STEPHEN MIRICH; BOTTOM: ABOVE THE COVE ON A SPRING DAY BY RICHARD HUMPHREY



1988 has saved 1,600 acres of open land, the largest open space in Los Angeles County. Louise Olfarnes of the Land Conservancy considers the artists a marvel: "They grew up together, went to school together, paint together. They're like-minded in their appreciation for the open space which inspires them."

Mirich, who lived up the road from the Pinkhams for 24 years and now lives in San Pedro, knows all too well what happens when a landscape is neglected outside a land conservancy. Of *Moonrise Over Bixby Slough*, Mirich says that the slough, one of his favorite places to paint the moon rising from the eastern horizon, is "overlooked and in bad shape." He wants to exhibit paintings in order to bring attention to what he calls "this badly treated step-child of the Los Angeles parks."

Many of our paintings try to reflect the sheer poetry of the Palos Verdes Peninsula. This open space feeds our soul and ignites our sense of gratitude.

—Daniel Pinkham

Frank Vanderlip, president of New York City's National Bank, bought 16,000 acres on this peninsula, sight unseen, in 1913. It is easy to see how, after visiting Palos Verdes, Vanderlip fell in love with a seascape he likened to the Amalfi coast. He hired the Olmsted Brothers to help ▶





AS KIDS IN LUNADA BAY, WE SPENT
COUNTLESS, CAREFREE HOURS
CLIMBING UP AND DOWN THE
CLIFFS, EXPLORING THE SHORELINES
AND SWIMMING IN THE BAY.

—RICHARD HUMPHREY



Vanderlip family.

The coastal road that runs from Malaga Cove in Palos Verdes Estates to the Pinkham's gatehouse in Portuguese Bend is impossibly beautiful. Uplifted by the ocean and gauged by the surf around the time of the Ice Age, the ancient terraces appear upholstered in green and step broadly down to the sea. The peninsula's gullies, canyons, cliffs and coves are teeming with wildlife.

In Malaga Cove, where Amy Sidrane painted *Peacock*, two birds are stopping traffic with their haughty, unrushed strut. Off "Right After Torrance" Beach, pelicans glide overhead and dive-bomb into the sea—another near-miss for the dolphins, whose lacquered arches proceed rhythmically past The Neighborhood Church.

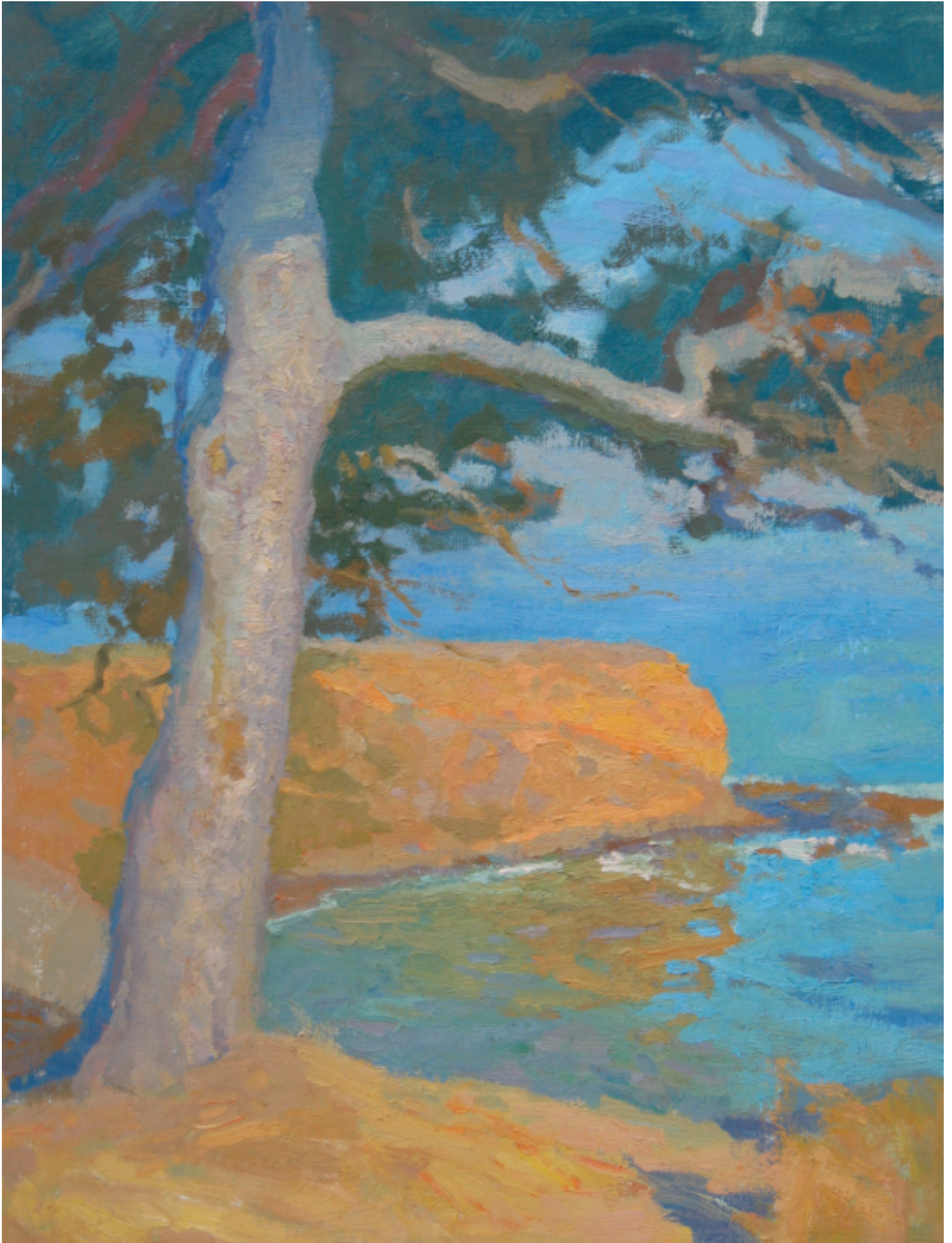
In Lunada Bay, where Richard Humphrey and Dan Pinkham, co-founders of the artist colony, went to school, the land opens up. Tart green lawns, fuchsia bougainvillea and massive Australian fig trees make way for hills carpeted in nasturtium, purple ice plants or, depending on the season, fields of mustard that fizz in Humphrey's *Above the Cove on a Spring Day* or blaze in Mirich's *Almost Spring*.

Along the western shore of this road, cliffs of every shape and color jut into the sea like geological exclamation points. In *The Cliffs and Sea at Point Vincente*, Humphrey has captured this perpendicular majesty with his portrait of the lighthouse. "I've painted this spot six different times. It's full of energy and can change on a moment's notice. I painted this in late morning, when a fog bank was forming out at sea. The waves threw off a lot of

OPPOSITE: *INSIGNIFICANCE* BY KEVIN PRINCE; ABOVE: *PORTUGUESE BEND NOCTURNE* BY THOMAS REDFIELD; BELOW: AMY SIDRANE AND THOMAS REDFIELD AT THEIR EASELS.

him execute a vision for what became known as "The Palos Verdes Project" (now the city of Palos Verdes Estates.) In the 1920s, Vanderlip built a country house on Portuguese Bend; the Pinkhams' home/studio was once Vanderlip's gatehouse. Victoria Pinkham has painted both *Chapel Courtyard Fountain*, the tranquil center of their home, and *Tribute to Elin Vanderlip*, in which she invites us to climb the 250-step path lined by cypresses, pines and olive trees leading to the private garden Olmsted designed for the





mist which mixed with the morning sunlight, diffusing the light and color on the cliffs.”

Kevin Prince paints the light on the sea above the Point Vincente lighthouse with unblinking ferocity in *Insignificance*. “I stood on the hill and watched a sailboat sail into the light, and it nearly disappeared. In the midst of the light, there’s the vaguest representation of a sailboat. And the light itself was changing and refracting and could quite possibly disappear.”

I paint because it’s going away.

—Thomas Redfield

The 150-year-old tradition dating back to Claude Monet and other French landscape artists is about painting on-site to capture a vivid impression of the scene. What Monet did for his backyard in Giverny, or for haystacks, or for Rouen cathedral is precisely what the PBAC is doing the hundreds of times they paint open spaces on the Palos Verdes Peninsula.

Monet was not painting haystacks. He was painting a time and a place.

—Thomas Redfield

“I’m always checking my watch,” Redfield says. For *Henry*, a small landscape of his dog in the cove beneath his home, Redfield once raced from his job at the port in San Pedro, followed the light along the coast, and then set up his easel and captured a wink of orange before it slipped away. The great grandson of American impressionist Edward Willis Redfield, Tom explained how plein air artists have 15 minutes to capture the mood conveyed by the light in their landscapes. After that, Daniel Pinkham chimes in, “they’re dead.” In the studio, Pinkham holds up one of the many 6x8-inch panels they all paint on location and revisit for their larger canvasses.

Long Point has given way to Terranea, a eco-friendly resort with two miles of walking trails developed under advisement from top marine, land and habitat specialists. In 2009, Terranea hosted the Palos Verdes Land Conservancy’s exhibit of paintings by the Portuguese Bend Artist Colony. Many of the PBAC’s canvasses



OPPOSITE: *A POINT TO REFLECT* BY DAVID PINKHAM; ABOVE (L TO R): KEVIN PRINCE, THOMAS REDFIELD, RICHARD HUMPHREY, STEPHEN MIRICH, AMY SIDRANE, VICTORIA AND DAVID PINKHAM.

are currently on view in the lobby and in The Lunada Bay room.

Portuguese Point and Inspiration Point are much as they were when Cabrillo sailed here in 1542. On any given day, whales are spouting where once they were hunted. From 1874 to 1877, more than 2,100 barrels of whale oil were tried by Portuguese whalers, giving the Bend its name.

Daniel Pinkham’s *A Point to Reflect* was painted across the road from his home at Inspiration Point. “Since my youth, I have walked the natural paths and sought inspiration from the cliff’s edge. Today there is much the same feeling in Portuguese Bend. Some of the last elements of beauty and wildness still exist.”

This week Dan and Amy are teaching a plein air class on the very hill they have painted so many times (Sidrane’s *Looking towards Bara’s Hill*). Vicki’s *Sunset at Kumquat Lane*, painted a stone’s throw away, recalls a time they all painted at Mirich’s house. “Sunsets were magical. Steve’s dinner was often delayed because the artists wanted to capture the day’s end.”

As our meeting draws to a close and the landscape begins to resemble Redfield’s *Portuguese Bend Nocturne*, the artists are asked what they hope visitors will experience in the open spaces they have fought so hard to preserve. Vicki Pinkham wishes them to be present for “the poetry of every day.” Redfield says, “We’re trying to get them to SLOW DOWN.” Mirich hopes visitors will be “enchanted by the art and lifted for a moment to look at the surrounding land and sea with a wider eye.”

I’ve become obsessed with Portuguese Bend and the locations we paint. The places become sign points—where you’ve come from, where you’ve been and where you’re going. We’re beyond the subject.

—Richard Humphrey

“To see the landscape more intimately,” Humphrey says, “we want to convey a spiritual relationship with the land we grew up with.” Put another way, Prince says, “I cannot paint God’s face, but I want to paint something that will make people see God’s face.” ■

Terranea Resort enjoys an ongoing relationship with the Portuguese Bend Artist Colony. In addition to displaying the artists’ work throughout the resort, Terranea makes certain pieces available for purchase to guests. Please inquire with the Concierge desk for information. For more on the Portuguese Bend Artist Colony, visit them at pbartistcolony.com.