

Sunol Residence, California



This newly constructed home is comprised of a modern style main house with separate office and garage buildings. Greenroofs (depth 5.5") were designed by the architect for all the buildings, and sit atop sloping and curved barrel roofs. The main house roof slopes down from its peak, and ends at a retaining wall in front, which meets a native soil slope. Despite the very different soil depths and composition, one of the first objectives was to blur the distinction of greenroof and native soil so that from the front, house and front landscape appear as one continuous uphill slope with no demarcation line evident at the retaining wall.

This scenic 4-acre hillside property is surrounded by a cow pasture, open space, and hills (of grasses and oaks) overlooking the valley in Sunol. The client requested a planting design which would blend and not compete with the beauty of the natural landscape. Sunol enjoys hot dry summers with frequent wind, but traditional greenroof succulents would not blend with the native landscape, so a planting palette of ornamental grasses was selected, with trees and boulders added on the front native soil sections to add to a natural setting. The grass colors were carefully selected in the grey-green tones (avoiding bright greens) to blend with the native landscape.

Plantings are of mostly evergreen ornamental grasses for all roofs. The native landscape is comprised of summer dormant grasses, but to minimize fire hazard and for best aesthetic appeal, non-native grasses that looked good year-round were chosen and that could take the summer heat, drying winds, and importantly, summer irrigation. Since the client enjoyed succulents, we chose to flank the entry doors with more colorful succulents and have trailing rosemary ("Irene") cascade down the side concrete walls. The planting palette is simple with three main grasses:

Festuca mairei (Moroccan Fescue), *Pennisetum spathiolatum* (Slender Veldt Grass), and a spreading *Bromus retusus* (French Brome). The first two grow up to about 3' high and could be kept lower by twice a year pruning. The front native soil afforded the opportunity to add trees to give shade and blend with the blue oak trees towering above behind the house. Large boulders/rock outcroppings and taller accent grass (*Spartina bakerii*) were added. First time visitors usually cannot figure out where the roof is until told.

size: 5950 square feet

client: Residence

landscape designer: Cynthia Tanyan, Mozaic Landscape Design Group

completion: 2006