

THIS SITE-SPECIFIC ARTWORK NESTLES COMFORTABLY ON THE EDGE OF THE OAK GROVE as if it has been here forever. In its use of local rock and brick, it reflects the textures of the mountain. It also reflects the indigenous culture of the Kumeyaay—Native Americans who lived in this San Diego/Northern Baja California region and walked as much as 100 miles to meet together at the base of Mt. Kuchumaa as a tribe. Here they enacted sacred ceremonies, worked out peace pacts, and shared ways to live harmoniously on the land.

All of us involved with the creation of Kuchumaa Passage at Rancho La Puerta trust that those who pause at the threshold will choose to stay a while; to reflect and connect with this special place and be touched by that ancient sacredness.



SARAH LIVIA BRIGHTWOOD'S love of the earth has shaped her life's work as a designer of healing gardens. She is a humble witness to the earth's powers of regeneration and healing. She is currently the President of Rancho La Puerta. She stewards a 2,000-acre conservation area, manages a diverse organic farm, and has developed an environmental education center in Tecate, Baja California, Mexico. She is the daughter of philosopher and visionary Edmond Bordeaux Szekely and community organizer and philanthropist Deborah Szekely.

MILENKO MATANOVIC is a community builder and a visual artist with a professional career and international reputation spanning 35 years. As founding director of the non-profit Pomegranate Center, he has created an arena in which art, public participation, and community betterment converge. Milenko has facilitated the conception and construction of 30 community projects—open-air gathering places and public art in the U.S. and abroad. He has extensive experience helping people of divergent views come together to solve common problems, and has facilitated design processes for dozens of communities regionally, nationally and internationally. He is the author of three books, most recent being *Multiple Victories—Pomegranate Center's art of Creating Community-crafted Gathering Places* (excerpts of this article were pulled from that book). Milenko was honored with a national *2005 Home Magazine Shelter Award* for his caring and imaginative works to bolster the social well-being of neighborhoods nationwide. His diverse work can be viewed at www.pomegranate.org.



JAMES HUBBELL sculpts unique living environments from nearby materials, providing beautiful shelters for humans to dwell in harmony with nature. Over the past 50 years he has shared an inspiring vision of the spirit of nature made tangible in glass, wood, metal, concrete, and stone...in homes, schools, gardens, pavilions, nature centers, and peace parks around the globe. He is also the founder and guiding light of the Ilan Lael Foundation. His art, architecture, and community activism can be viewed at www.hubbellandhubbell.com.

THE STORY BEHIND

KUCHUMAA PASSAGE

A SCULPTURAL
MONUMENT
TO HONOR
A SACRED MOUNTAIN



RANCHO LA PUERTA

Tecate, Baja California, Mexico

Project inspiration: Sarah Livia Brightwood
Project leaders: James Hubbell and Milenko Matanovic

KUCHUMAA PASSAGE WAS BUILT IN AUGUST, 1990, TO BRING TOGETHER THREE DREAMS:



- Sarah Livia Brightwood's desire to have something built on the Ranch to honor Mt. Kuchumaa, our sacred mountain overlooking the Ranch, and...
- Artist James Hubbell's long-standing dream to design and craft a sculptural building or monument organically with a group of students and...
- Artist Milenko Matanovic's dream to test how "community building" and art can be joined.

James Hubbell began by reviewing letters from 300 applicants from around the world who described why they wanted to participate, Twelve apprentices were selected. Sarah Livia chose an acre-large site with a mix of oak forest and a meadow with a beautiful view of Mt. Kuchuma. She also provided a supply of local rock and brick and offered two experienced local stone masons to assist with construction. It was agreed that the entire project would be designed and built in only ten days.



James and Milenko called it the *Soil and Soul Workshop* to allude to the two central

goals for the workshop: The first to create environmentally sensitive shapes and forms that organically rest in, and celebrate, the spirit of a particular natural location; and the second to celebrate the human spirit with all of its diversity and creativity.

THEY ORGANIZED THE PROJECT IN FOUR PHASES: LISTENING AND TEAM BUILDING—DAYS 1 AND 2

The group started its work by studying the site's textures, light, air, and water. All participants created drawings and paintings, studied local plants, and observed wildlife. Sarah Livia taught the group about the history of the area and the Ranch:

- learning about the geology (granite batholiths here were formed over 150 million years ago, then exposed through subsequent erosion)

- meeting local Kumeyaay and learning about their customs,
- visiting local industries such as the brick factory and *maquiladoras*
- hiking the sacred mountain and learning that several Kumeyaay shamans are supposedly buried in the valley on the top of the ridge to the west of the peak
- meditating in the woods deep in the mountains
- interviewing individuals from Tecate and the Ranch
- learning about the origin and philosophy of the Ranch from Sarah Livia and interviews with Deborah Szekely (Sarah Livia's mother).

VISIONING AND DESIGNING—DAYS 3 AND 4

On the third day participants started to create a group vision for the project through a series of exercises. First every participant stood on the spot where the project's focal point should be. This led to the eventual decision to place the project on the edge between the oak grove and a meadow.

Then they looked for archetypal forms—circle, square, line, spiral, etc.—to begin to capture possibilities. They studied available materials. In the course of sharing individual insights certain ideas kept reappearing. For example, "cupped ears listening to the mountain" was an idea that increasingly gained support. They worked in small groups to develop drawings and three-dimensional models made of clay. Each person spoke about their individual solution. At the end, James took all proposals and synthesized them into the final clay model, with the group's additional input and blessing.



The design includes two circular walls with benches facing the mountain. These two walls are on the edge of a stone circle that also leans toward the mountain. Four cardinal directions laid in the circle honor the Native American cosmology of The Four Directions. To better connect the woods, the Passage circle and the meadow, a seating element and two low walls were placed along the axis of the entire project, and a rising wall was constructed in the meadow to further energize the alignment with the mountain.



The group gave an evening presentation to the Ranch leaders and several selected guests on the evening of the fourth day to explain the project and receive approval to proceed with construction from Sarah Livia and Deborah.

SHAPING—DAYS 5 THROUGH 10

Working under the guidance of team leaders, the group started building—laying the foundations, building walls, working with mixers, etc. This was intense but highly energizing work, made more meaningful because the hard labor celebrated important ideas uncovered during the previous stages.

The model of a horse's head on top of the wall memorializes an experience the group had during a meditation in an oak grove deep in the mountains. A solitary white horse galloped in, reared its front legs up in front of James Hubble, bowed down to him and turned around and galloped off. Everyone

was very moved by this experience and Macario Olea, a local potter and artist who participated in the project, made the horse's head that was eventually placed on one of the walls. Throughout the ten days, the group experienced many other magical moments such as an encounter with a rattlesnake that rose from the hole as we were preparing the site, and a visit from a coyote.

GIFTING—CLOSING CEREMONY ON DAY 10

At the end of the marathon construction phase (which was completed 5 minutes before the opening celebration!), the artwork was celebrated with leaders from the Ranch and selected guests. The following day the group departed, exhausted but uplifted by the project.