



Design Scout  
Outdoors

# Touch-and-Go Garden

FOR A MAN WITHOUT SIGHT, A ROSE IS A ROSE IS A ROAD MAP.  
BY JOANNE FURIO

IN JERRY KUNS'S NOE VALLEY backyard, a gravel pathway leads the way to the outdoor grill. The hot tub is bordered by fragrant star jasmine bushes. And, farther back, his favorite bench is sandwiched between a babbling stream and rustling bamboo stalks. These cues of sound and scent are important because Kuns is blind. →

**Between Two Ferns:** Jerry Kuns navigates his backyard by sound, touch, and scent.



But his multisensory garden is so well designed that he can confidently maneuver through it without a cane.

A few years ago, Kuns enlisted **John Steuernagel** of **Sculpt Gardens** to transform his bi-level backyard, which was a thicket of weeds at the time. He gave the landscape designer three requests: a stream, some “play” areas, and winding pathways. “I get enough straight lines on the street,” says Kuns, who commutes via mass transit to the California School for the Blind in Fremont, where he instructs students in how to use technology. (His wife, Theresa Postello, who is sighted, also teaches the blind at schools throughout San Mateo.)

After poring over drawings for weeks, Steuernagel fed them through a three-dimensional printer that turns lines into ridges, like a topographical map. Then he led Kuns through the plans by touch.

The garden contains seven zones, each with its own distinct character. Sections are distinguished by scent (creeping mint, rhododendron), texture (stone, gravel, bark), and sound (rustling plants, trickling water). A stream winds diagonally through the garden, crossed by a stone bridge that rocks slightly when stepped upon. At the entrance, a puzzle-like rock formation provides a sense of play. Kuns calls the garden “one of the most wonderful, tranquil spots of my existence.” □

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1. Bark and gravel pathways crunch underfoot.
2. The stream cascades into three variously sized pools, creating different sound effects. Stone pieces within the current can be moved to vary the water tones.
3. Jerry Kuns sits in the so-called “coveted corner” among flowering rhododendron—his wife’s favorite spot in the garden.
4. Leafy plants and succulents provide textural cues.