

## Summer/Fall Pruning

Once again, it's that time of year when the landscape grows lush, beautiful - and out of control. At Brende & Lamb, our work involves balancing the practical with the aesthetic. On the one hand, our clients ask us to restore their views, make more light available, and reduce fire hazards, while retaining their screening and privacy. At the same time, we're committed to bringing out the natural beauty of their trees. We'd like to share some of what we've learned over the years of striving to create this delicate balance.

## Aesthetic Pruning

Each plant has a natural growth pattern. Aesthetic pruning accentuates the shape given the plant by nature, while creating a light and open feeling. It enhances the observer's experience through an interplay of open spaces and denser spaces, periphery and interior.

The first step in aesthetic pruning is to see the flow of the tree. We begin by looking at the base of the trunk, then let our eyes follow the trunk upward into the branches and out to the branch tips. We notice how the flow of the branches determines the tree's form. The form may be weeping, as with Willows and Chinese Elms. Perhaps the branches ascend at acute angles to the trunk, giving the tree an upswept look, as with Monterey Cypress. Or the branches may bend and twist, forming complex arcs, as does the Coast Live Oak. Within these patterns, each tree has its own unique form and flow.

## Pruning and Size Reduction

Whatever the form of the tree - and whatever your practical needs - careful, attentive pruning can enhance its beauty. We would, for example, open up a pine not by stripping out its insides (a practice called "lion-tailing," which undermines the tree's health) but by thinning to highlight the spaces or "layers" in its natural patterns. For example, by removing or shortening shoots that grow up and down, we let in more light and air, encourage interior growth and overall health, and leave enough green so that the tree can offer screening, if desired.

When reducing the size of a tree or shrub, we cut back long branches to the crotches formed by shorter branches growing in the same direction. If the branch doesn't fork, we cut back to the lowest growth point that will neither create a thick stub nor undermine the arching quality of the branch. When a tree or shrub has been reduced in this way, it's difficult to detect the cuts or tell that the branches have been shortened.

Both layering and cutting back can be combined with removing deadwood to reduce biomass, thereby enhancing fire safety as well. Poor pruning, on the other hand, encourages watersprouting, which increases biomass.

## Aesthetic View Work

In view work, the beauty of the view and the beauty of the tree often seem to be in conflict. Many pruners focus solely on the view and simply hack back the tree. However, more than the tree's beauty is at stake. "Topping" creates dense, sprouty regrowth, as well as disease and rot, that can make the tree more, not less dangerous. This unnatural density also threatens the tree's health by blocking needed light and air flow. Professional arborists no longer top trees. Removing a tree and replacing it with a smaller variety that can be kept out of the view may be preferable to beheading it.

However, view problems can often be solved by looking at tree-and-view as an aesthetic unity, as two elements that frame each other. Sometimes, lightly bringing the tree back without cutting into major branches can prevent further encroachment on the view.

To recover even more of the view, we create "windows" by selectively removing branches not essential for the tree's natural form. We can enlarge these by removing branchlets that rise or drop into the view. Thinning above and below the window creates an overall feeling of openness, rather than an abrupt gaping hole. The image formed by the Golden Gate Bridge, when framed by the trembling needles of a well-windowed Redwood, proves that nature and civilization can complement each other - as can aesthetics and practicality.