

Artist Goldsworthy's 'Spire' graces Presidio

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SAN FRANCISCO – The Presidio in San Francisco has a garden sculpture that stands head and shoulders above the rest.

"Spire," a 90-foot tower composed of trunks of felled cypress trees, rises like the Transamerica Pyramid on a hill above the park's Inspiration Point. It was designed and built on the spot by famed British artist Andy Goldsworthy, who has created place-based art at the North Pole, in Yorkshire and in Australia.



Work of art: Andy Goldsworthy's "Spire" is a 90-foot tower made of cypress trunks. Bret Putnam/special to The Examiner

Rooted in concrete 15 feet below the ground, the wood trunks overlap each other until they culminate in a peak. They're affixed to a base with steel pins. The whole installation process took two weeks.

Below "Spire" is a two-acre field garden of 9-inch baby cypress trees. They were planted to replace dying cypress trees removed for reforestation. The juxtaposition of height, of new and old, of living growth and stolid firmament is dramatic. When the small cypress trees grow to full height, "Spire" will be integrated into the green forest.

"That's all part of the experience," says Dana Polk, a senior advisor for government and media relations at the Presidio Trust, which oversees the Presidio.

The entire upper hill is a study in life cycles. Beyond the baby cypress there are rows of older cypress trees rising 6 to 8 feet.

To the side are old "lollipop" cypress trees, placed in the ground by the soldiers at the Presidio, when it was a military base. They're called lollipop because they were sited too close to each other, with no space for expanding foliage. Some cypress trees, their tops barely covered in dark green, sway unsteadily in the wind.

At the other end of the Presidio, near the Main Post off Funston Avenue, is another replanted area where officers' houses from the late 1800s have been refurbished and re-landscaped according to the period.

One of the most interesting gardens features a row of rounded, sculpted French lavender plants that edge the front and side of a residence. Behind the lavender are various variegated plants mixed with untrimmed, 3-foot high rose bushes and a lemon tree. The front yard is grass, and has geometric borders and Victorian formality.

Beyond the houses there is a renovated path called Lover's Lane that features a fine example of brick walls from the late 1800s.

In the background are ubiquitous Presidio eucalyptus trees, with pines, cypress trees and myriad palm trees, including a parade of Royal Palms near the main avenues.

The Presidio, which is open 24 hours a day, comprises 1,500 acres — it's larger than Golden Gate Park — of land and structures, many of them historic.