

Kaspar Burgi, Inc. successful with

Massive Tree Transplant

By Lou Speer

LANDSCAPING history was made recently when a 60-ton oak tree, a specimen *Quercus Lobata* (Valley Oak), estimated to be over 300 years old, was systematically transplanted.

Declared a "first" by landscape professionals, the massive transplant typifies the latest in land planning and architectural designing.

The transplant took place in early March, 1968, in Westlake Village, California, site of a 12,000-acre master-planned community.

The village, formerly one of California's oldest ranchos where colorfully garbed vaqueros once tended the great cattle herds of Spanish dons, straddles the Ventura-Los Angeles county line, north of Los Angeles in the Malibu Mountains.

The move, part of an overall plan to retain the rural atmosphere of Westlake's "city in the country" by saving as many of the Lobata, Agrifolia, sycamores, and other trees dotting the development, is the project of American-Hawaiian Land Co., a subsidiary of American-Hawaiian Steamship Lines.

The moving of the 60-ton oak fell under the direction of Bill Peterson, Westlake's landscape director, and Kaspar Burgi Co., Inc., big tree movers, Los Angeles.

Because of increasing sizes of modern buildings, the growing

trend in the landscaping industry is to get as many trees, and as large ones as possible into the landscape. Parallel with this trend, architects obtain ideas for building textures, and general forms from the trees that are to surround it. This way, the building is pleasantly compatible with its environment.

This being the case, it became the major objective of Westlake's consulting architect, George McLean, to save as many of the development's own trees as possible. To do so would be to preserve the rustic charm, while creating an ultra urban neighborhood.

Land Planning

Land planning played a highly important role here—fitting the buildings into the existing topography, keeping the grading in as near the same condition as the dons had once known, where possible, providing tree wells and making transplants.

The first Lobata selected for the massive transplant was picked by McLean chiefly because of its particular form. The chosen oak stood ½-mile distant from Westlake Village Inn, where at that time, it was intended to go into the restaurant's planter. Then, too, it was chosen because of the challenge: Could such a large tree as this be moved successfully?

Into the pre-planning went all the knowledge American-Ha-



Six shielded steel cables are used to guy this California massive transplant in place. Tree appears highly successful and limbs have now leafed out. Entire moving preparation and operation required 28 months. Cost was less than \$10,000.

waiian could obtain from tree movers, from putting the hole into the ground, to use of hormones to stimulate bud production. Intermediate steps along the way would call for the usual pruning, boxing, moving of the tree, and backfilling. In addition, there would be the unusual steps necessary because of the size of everything—the tree, box, equipment to move the tree.

The transplanting contract, totaling less than \$10,000 was carefully coordinated between Peterson, and Kaspar Burgi Co. The major equipment supplier for the transportation was Owl

Crane Co., of Compton, California.

The moving procedure began in February 1966. Jim Cowan, Kaspar Burgi Co., was put in charge of boxing. Cowan constructed a 12 ft. x 12 ft. box to house the tree's root system during the transplanting process. He used 2 x 12's, banded on the sides with rods and tighteners.

The tree, which is 50-foot tall, and 50 feet wide, with a trunk exceeding 4-feet in diameter, was thoroughly pruned before the root boxing process began, thus preventing loss of moisture when the roots were cut back.

Dormant Stage

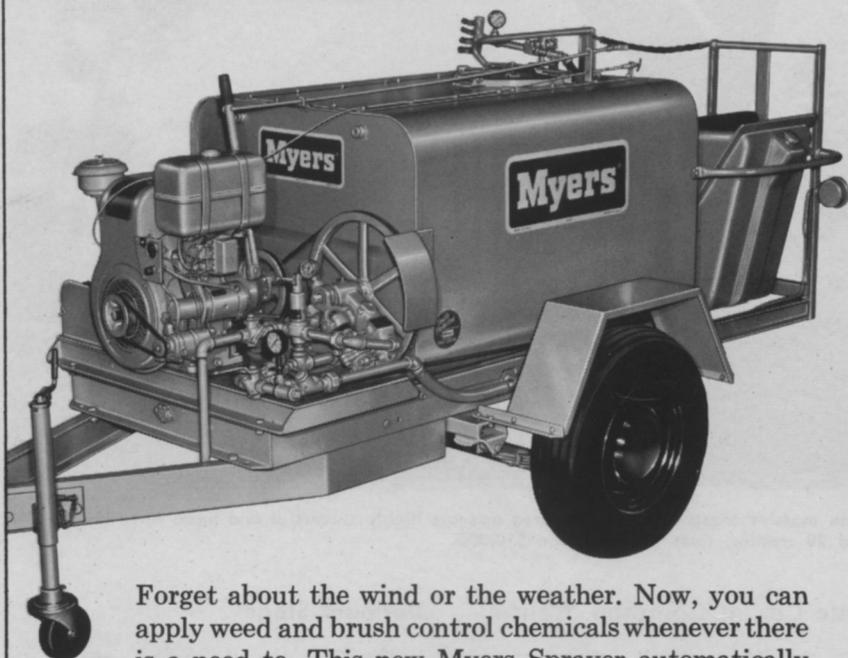
During its dormant stage in early 1966, the roots of the giant oak were partially cut, and two sides of the 12-foot square box put around it. To avoid as much shock as possible, a year's wait ensued before the other sides were added.

Of constant concern to Peterson and Cowan were the tree's transpiration rate, shock effects, and prevention of any disease resulting from the root cutting operation. They discussed the tree much the same as doctors around the bedside of a patient.

The gravest moment came just

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after the tree was side boxed completely, and began to leaf out. A few of the limbs were late in budding. Some did not leaf at all. Concern grew. When the bottom boxing took place, further shocking the tree, even more limbs might be lost.

During the waiting period before bottom boxing, the tree was watered on a monthly interval and with approximately 200 gallons of water. In addition, it was still getting plenty from the tap root. To insure the health of the tree, Norton's Soil Drench and vitamin B₁ also were supplied bi-monthly.

Characteristically, the Lobata is susceptible to twig gertler. In combating this, all Westlake trees are helicopter sprayed once a year with DDT over a 2-year program.

"We feel," Peterson said, "this gives us 90 percent control over the disease."

Water Problem

Bottom boxing of the massive oak began in January 1968. Immediately, another unusual problem popped up. Grading had filled in around the Lobata 6 feet. By the time the diggers cut thru the filling and natural grading, they had a 20-foot deep hole dug, and found themselves down to the lateral water level.

Water seeped into the hole and container. Operations halted. Cowan sent for a pump, and set it up in the hole.

With the pump chugging, the diggers began work again. Carefully, they hacked, with pick and shovel, cutting away piece by piece, ever mindful of hitting the tap root.

"But there was no tap root!" Peterson said. "The largest root cut from the bottom of that 50-foot giant was only 3 inches in diameter. This is one of the valuable things we found out, that the Lobata oak—at least those here—do not have large tap roots."

Peterson says this condition

may be peculiar to just one oak—the Lobata, but feels it is a pretty general condition of all the trees in the Westlake area. Other trees, Agrifolia, sycamores—80 to 90 feet tall—that he has transplanted here also have shown the same rooting tendency, ideal for transplanting.

“I would advise anyone attempting a massive transplant,” Peterson said, “to give consideration to the soil condition where the tree is found. Look for wildings high in creek banks. When you see a tree where it doesn’t have to go very far to water, and in loaming soil, you will find a more fibrous root system rather than a tap root.”

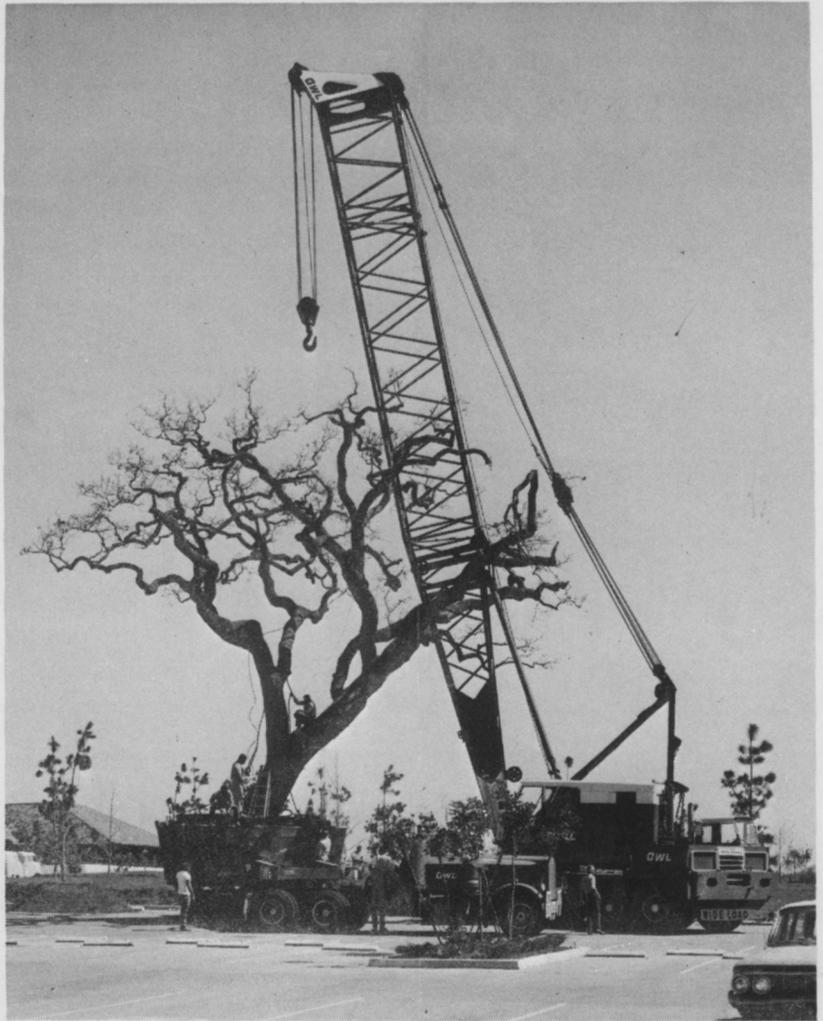
Move Planned for March

The big move was slated for March 1968. The Lobata hadn’t started leafing out yet, but the buds were starting to swell indicating all was fine.

Kaspar Burgi wheeled in a 115-ton Owl Crane and special low-boy next to the tree, jockeyed into position. Workmen built special skids under the big box so the lifting could be done on these rather than upon the box; other workmen wrapped 15 strands of No. 8 gauge wire around the box for additional strength.

Then the crucial period began, lifting the tree from the hole, putting it on the truck, transporting it to its new home in front of the Westlake Inn, and setting it in place. It had been decided, because of the size of the tree to set it away from the building rather than in the planter as previously intended. The base had carefully been prepared, a 20 x 20-foot hole, 15-feet deep, filled with approximately 5 feet of base rock. Now it waited for the tree.

Could they do it? No one to their knowledge had tried a transplant of this size before. There were so many things to consider. And should one crack develop in the soil area, chances were they had lost their tree.



Once transported to new location in front of Westlake Inn Restaurant, workers prepare the giant 300-year old, oak tree to be lifted by a 115-ton crane into new setting. Moving of the 50-foot high tree made landscaping history.

Huge chains were hooked around the skids, the giant hook dropped in place. The front end of the crane rose four feet off the ground as the tree came up.

Critical Moment

Slowly, carefully, the boom turned. Even the most minute movement of the crane was enough to send the tree swaying violently because of the tremendous weight in the tree’s top. The lowboy sank 4 inches into the earth as the tree settled upon it. Quickly, big chains were fastened to the box to tighten it down.

Then came the slow crawl, up over the unimproved road, towards the highway. Anxious faces moved alongside the big tree. Though the road had been

prepared as smoothly as possible, each tiny dip sent the huge tree swaying dangerously. Would it fall? Would it remain upright?

It remained. And the box and soil area remained intact. Peterson and Cowan grinned with joy. It took two days to complete the job of moving, setting the tree in place, and backfilling.

The backfilling material was loam, 40 percent clay. Previously, Peterson had been using native material for his transplants, but in this instance chose a mixture.

“Just a little more insurance,” he said.

Of course, the tree was watered during backfilling to eliminate air pockets. Soil Drench and approximately 5 gallons of vita-
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SMA Elects New Officers

Emilio L. Fontana, city forester of Lincoln, Neb., was recently elected president of the Society of Municipal Arborists. The 4-year-old organization's new vice president is Peter B. Childs, supervisor of street trees, East Orange, N. J.

Massive Tree

(from page 21)

min B₁ were added also. The huge oak was guyed in place with 6 steel cables, shielded at the top, and the deadmen were planted 6 feet deep.

Today, California's first massive transplant — perhaps the world's — appears to be highly successful. It is a living tribute to the landscaping and tree mov-

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