



THE REAL ESTATE REPORT

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Gardening for Dinner and Delight (II)

Continued from the September column, a conversation with horticulturalist and nurseryman Randy Hinz of The Sycamore Garden Center and Nursery, Columbiaville, Columbia County, NY. (518 697-3738, randy@sycamoregarden.com)

Gardening as a work in progress

Owners approach their garden potential in different ways, partly depending on their home, whether traditional or contemporary, and partly on their personal disposition. And, yes, sometimes on the inspiration that others, including gardeners, bring to them. Those who have an entire garden done at once may enjoy the relatively immediate result, but they are probably not true gardeners. One sometimes meets people who are not true gardeners but love gardens nonetheless. I had a client on Long Island tell me "Don't you dare make me into a gardener, I don't want my golf game to suffer." I was enthusiastic about what we were doing for her garden and she was beginning to feel the same way. If you are a true gardener, you look at gardens and plants differently from the way others do. With each plant you notice the color of the leaf, and, of course, the shape and form of the plant. Once you start opening up another's eyes to the wonders of the plant world, providing they have some latent feeling for it, they also can begin to become very enthused. My customer on Long Island loved her garden. In fact she had a beautiful garden; she liked to be in it and entertain there. I created for her a nice outside environment. Although she didn't really want to be a gardener, she did love her garden.

With your wife DeGuerre and her gardens, I share the same aesthetic and feel for gardening, whether the house is traditional or modern. We immediately connected and garden the same way. We don't like to do everything all at once. A garden needs to develop over time; it feels better that way. And when it is



The formal parterre garden

Formal gardens are best seen from above, their intricate patterns manifest in morning or evening light. With the right selection of scented plants, organized design, and babbling water (here two fountains) parterre gardens are a delight to all the senses - the most comprehensive art form. The Nathan Wild House at Valatie, inspired by Kevin Jacobs and Will Swift, designed by Rod Blackburn.

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finished it has a look completely different from that of a garden which is totally "designed out." It is nice to take a certain area of the property and develop a garden, then later go on to develop others elsewhere, creating wonderful rooms to wander into and out of, which is exactly what you did with your garden. That is how a property would naturally develop.

Gardens as art

Most artwork, with the exception of some modern sculpture, is not kinetic while a garden is very kinetic. Even modern kinetic art is planned and predictable; a garden is not so predictable. Gardens are more dynamic. Things happen which you do not expect. Gardens can also be dynamic by sending you in a differ-



Parterre in winter

We are used to burying our gardens in winter snow (and in our mind) when the most colorful plants of summer turn brown. Not so with a boxwood and yew hedge garden which retains form and color year around. Even under snow, light and shadow expresses their complex pattern for all-season delight. Here the very first flakes of winter snow lend extra contrast to a knot garden, as much at home in the rigors of our climate as the Europe of its forebears. Kinderhook, Blackburn design.

ent direction from that in which you may initially have been headed. For instance, when a large tree all of a sudden comes down in a storm and creates a massive void, there is sun where there used to be shade - an unexpected, exciting opportunity.

Today gardens are much different from the way they were earlier in our history. They change in time and direction. That was not the case long ago when gardening was predicated strictly on practicality, with the planting of a vegetable garden and some fruit trees. Plymouth Plantation, for example, has such practical gardens. They are beautiful in their austerity, but were developed of necessity. Providing that necessity was satisfied, gardens could be made attractive. In fact they can be absolutely gorgeous even though their reason for being is not in the first instance an aesthetic one. Any time order is introduced in a garden it can prove exciting. Although it is different in the city as there is so much order already, in a rural setting if order is intro-

duced, such as raised box beds or parterre boxwood hedges, it becomes very exciting. It is not something that exists there naturally. (There is, of course, a natural order but that is different from structured order.) When you and DeGuerre first did your garden in boxwood, all of a sudden there was a striking contrast



The cottage garden

For Tom Noonan's Gothic cottage in Hudson, Randy Hinz took cognizance of how blessed it is with open space on three sides, helping Tom create a meandering cottage garden of perennials in perfect scale to the house, the lot size, and for the intimate enjoyment by a few friends. The foliage-like strap work and painted leaves of the porch, combined with potted plants on the porch, integrate house

and garden seamlessly. We share with the English much of our taste and delight in all garden forms - cottage, formal and picturesque landscape, all of which do well in our region in large part because it shares much with English climate, topography and plants.

between the property in general and its gardens.

One of my favorite garden styles is the cottage garden because it is ordered chaos, which is terrific. I also love a formal style like the parterre type garden where you have an ordered layout of beds with close clipped hedges. I like to see that inside the hedges the planting is very loose, the plants are taller, giving contrast to what is formally laid out between well ordered walk ways. That looseness inside is like chaos contained. That is exciting. A garden where everything is clipped is beautiful but in a different way. If that is all you have, which was a tradition for a long while, it may be beautiful but there remains a longing for more because it is so contained, so tight and ordered. There is no relief in that garden. I love to mix the two styles, one ordered, one not so.

The Hudson Valley as landscape

What is so fantastic about this area is that it is so green. In so many other parts of the country places may be beautiful in other ways, like Santa Fe, which is lovely with its arid landscape and ochre colors -- but I miss the green. It is such a soothing and for me very comfortable color, probably because I was raised in upstate New York. Meadows are beautiful, particularly when they are mowed occasionally. But then again when un-mowed you get different wild flowers blooming at different times, providing an entirely different texture and contrast.

The Hudson Valley region is naturally beautiful, a beautiful corner of the world because of its topography and trees. The soils are good enough that we have large trees with canopies that cast beautiful shadows. Of course any raw property you go to look at for purchase is often not as gorgeous up close as it was from a distance because in nature things die and fall over, and vines overtake trees. It may look gorgeous as one drives along the road, but when a property owner actually begins living on it, he or she may understandably want to impose a little more order



Columbia County landscape

Crow Hill, the Greek Revival estate near Kinderhook, overlooks the oldest cleared landscape in Columbia County, the "Groote Stuck", Dutch for Great Piece, an extended Indian-clear flatlands on both sides of the Kinderhook Creek. Its fertility encouraged Dutch settlement at what is now Kinderhook Village. The landscape is still "farmer-natural," its beauty a happenstance of the agricultural function it has always had.

and control over the natural environment.

Plants in our climate

We are in an area of the world with four distinct seasons. In much warmer climates a homeowner/gardener doesn't have to give so much consideration to the basic structure of plants and trees as they retain their foliage through the seasons, masking much of their structures. But in colder climates deciduous plants will be "naked" all winter. Accordingly, it becomes important to select for the actual skeleton of the plant in order to add interest to the winter landscape. Fortunately we have a wide variety of plants and garden styles that work for all seasons. The built environment becomes a bigger issue. In the Hudson Valley putting up a stucco hacienda style house with a red tile roof would be very jarring to me. I think it should not be here. But as far as plants are concerned, there are not many that I feel shouldn't be here. In fact I have banana trees which won't survive the cold in this climate and need to come into the house or conservatory. Nevertheless they are not terribly out of place. Victorians loved these kinds of plants. The world of botany really started to open up in this country during the Victorian era. People were traveling the world and bringing back interesting and exotic plants. Victorians loved oddities and for them a plant like a banana was an oddity they had never seen before. So there is a tradition for having beautiful potted tropicalls, or orange trees, or camellias. Aesthetically I think that they work fine in our area. It depends on how they are used and in what context. There is such a wide pallet when talking about plants.

Critters in the garden

Deer are unpredictable. It seems that they like nothing better than to make liars out of anyone who pontificates on what they like or do not like to eat. It depends on where you are. Evidently deer do not stray far from where they were born; they

don't go roving a lot. I am not in an area which is a natural pathway for them. I have plants that deer would consider delicacies, but they don't come here. They are in the meadow and woods but seem not to wander the extra 200 yards to the nursery. Of course that could change at any time. When under the duress of a harsh winter or facing heavy competition for food, deer will eat vegetation that they would not normally eat. They retain their memory of food sources and will come back to eat at previously visited locations. In different parts of the country deer eat different things. Informed books about deer will tell you by region what they like or don't like, but these are only loose guides. For example, lilacs are considered deer resistant here but I have



A Copake landscape garden

Taking advantage of a thousand yards of rolling topography the owners created a grand landscape garden with island beds of dug-up boulders juxtaposed to the lightly moving softness of native grasses and flowering perennials. Wandering over the property you come to these interesting islands beckoning one on and on to explore the full landscape. When creating a new garden, the place itself is as much the inspiration as the ideas the owner and garden designer (in this case Randy Hinz) bring to it.

clients who have told me that deer are constantly at their lilacs.

Woodchucks are a big problem. Evidently their favorite food is clover, which is surprising to me because in my experience woodchucks seem to prefer anything that has a central stem, like sunflowers and lilies. For whatever reason they have not been bothering me a lot. But they were eating my quince and barberies, both of which are covered with thorns. Amazingly these were eaten right down to the nubs. Well let's say they pruned them for me as they came back beautifully the following spring. During the growing season the only thing they were eating out of the center of the entire garden was the quince. I have plenty of rabbits and they decimated my black-eyed susans. These plants have fuzzy leaves which you would think would be the last thing appealing to a rabbit. Now they are eating my "Lady in Black" asters. Hopefully they are finished and that is it. My little friends are welcome to the asters. I don't mind sharing. Both flowers and rabbits will be back next year.

Postscript (Rod Blackburn)

How they keep track of such statistics I cannot imagine but gardening has been the most popular pastime/hobby of all. I am not surprised, it has so many appealing features. What other pastime produces delicious and beautiful products with relatively little effort (although nature is the senior partner)? Regardless of age and gender there is a real kick to envisioning a creative idea and then see it develop in profusion unmatched by any other form of activity - a handful of seeds can become an acre of food or flowers. Try to match that with a box of oil colors. Creating beauty is an impossible challenge for most people, they don't have sufficient talent. But if you team up with nature you will receive the personal pleasure and public approbation of an accomplished artist.

Gardening is probably the most creative act which appeals to all our senses: vision, hearing (fountains are the song of gardens), touch, and smell. Unlike love making, gardens are a pleasure to any age or condition. The joy of gardens is transportable (pictures and cut flowers), easily shared with others (don't forget our four-legged brethren who appreciate our labors). They cost a little—or a lot, but they can produce a little—or a lot more. No plot of land is too small to be enlivened by a garden's smile; no estate so broad that it cannot be improved by judicious thinning and planting. With shapely evergreens, gardens can be appealing in all seasons, even winter. While everyone lives in a structure, it is nice to see that nearly everyone has the desire to embellish their plot with plantings; especially those refugees from the Big Apple who do miss this chance so much that they are almost driven to have a country place. The ancient English expression "Everyone busy at his country place," is neigh on universal for those who have the pleasure of a garden.