

DESIGN

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NEW ENGLAND

*new
traditions*

FRESH IDEAS FOR MAKING MEMORIES

THE
MAGAZINE
OF SPLENDID
HOMES
AND GARDENS

ALLIUM, NEPETA, SHASTA daisies, lavender, and other sun-loving summer bloomers grow along the edges of the retaining walls around the pool and kitchen terraces of this suburban Boston home. The site's steep slope (FACING PAGE) enabled the designers to build walls around the pool, as required by law, that are invisible from above.

PUBLIC VIEW PRIVATE SETTING

A garden in a historic district incorporates deep neighborhood memory into a new landscape design



RECLAIMED GRANITE FOUND in New Hampshire is used as paving (ABOVE) as well as for walls (TOP) and for the sturdy posts that flank this and other wooden gates designed with a simple Arts and Crafts motif.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT DAN Gordon designed granite walls with dramatic curves (FACING PAGE) to counteract the dominant rectilinear shapes of the house, garage, and swimming pool. Small metal fixtures installed around the pool and the outdoor kitchen hold citronella oil to ward off mosquitoes.

The house

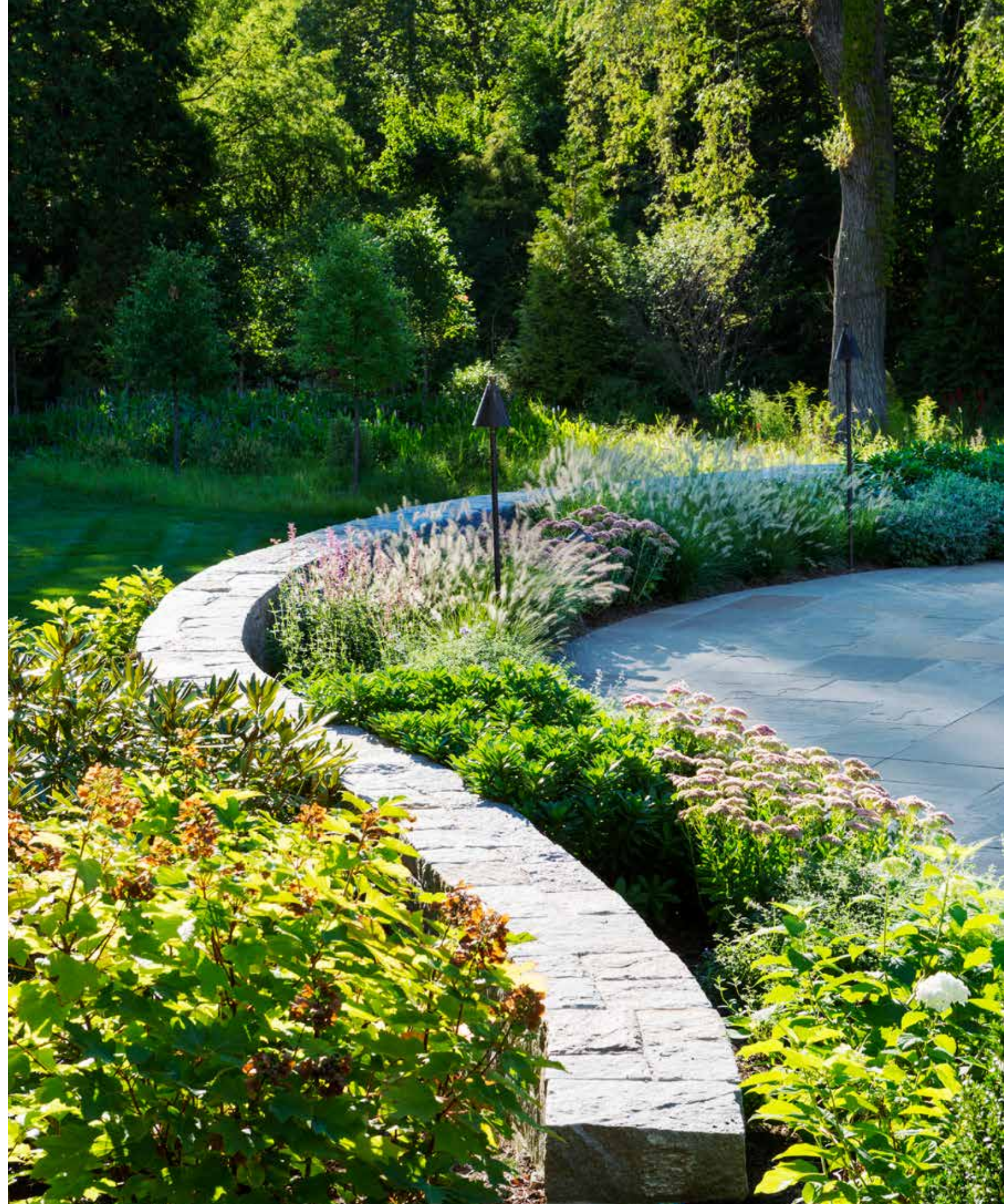
was once owned by a passionate gardener, whose large backyard became a neighborhood highlight. On Sunday mornings, when parishioners attended the two nearby churches, the owner opened the gates fronting her property so that passers-by could take in the view of a broad lawn sloping down to a pond. Perennial beds backed by manicured shrubs and stately trees presented a riot of bloom. With time, the view of the garden became as much a part of the neighborhood as a public park or a local sledding hill.

The current owners, a husband and wife, hadn't planned on being stewards of such a legacy when they were looking for a home. All they wanted was a place with a two-car garage and a yard. What they found was this house, designed by Chapman and Frazer, the notable architecture firm credited with a number of late medieval– and early Renaissance–inspired buildings in Boston's Back Bay. Built in 1911 and surrounded by 2½ acres of gardens, the property was not only bigger than anything the couple had dreamed of, it also had a monumental impact on the memory and imagination of its neighbors. Located in a historic district in a Boston suburb, the property was reviewed by the local historical society, which weighed in on the proposed landscaping plans, saying that any new garden design should retain a view corridor from the street to the pond, where the previous owner had built a gazebo and where, rumor has it, three marriage proposals took place.

“But of course,” says the wife, “we had our own ideas. In the garden, we wanted privacy, color, and wildness. We did not want it to be too groomed.”

“A primary consideration when buying this property was that it not be another suburban backyard,” her husband adds. “That meant not just private, but private and wild. At the same time, I love play spaces for football or Frisbee, and we wanted modern outdoor living with a kitchen, a swimming pool, and a spa.”

To reconcile their desire for privacy with local determination to preserve views for the neighbors, they turned to Dan Gordon, principal of Dan Gordon Landscape Architects in Wellesley and Edgartown, Massachusetts. In collaboration with project manager Patrick Taylor, the new owners developed a landscape that still brings pleasure to passers-by while meeting their own unique requirements.





“It was a balancing act that had three major components,” Gordon says. “They were to execute the homeowners’ program, to do so while aware of the historic nature of the property, which weighed privacy with the views from the street, and to create a sustainable ecosystem.”

The last goal was more than a vague desire to be green: In the many decades since a low-lying wetland had been excavated to form the pond, it had silted up and was eutrophying. Overgrown with algae, it was unable to retain oxygen and could no longer support a healthy ecosystem. “Evergreen trees shaded the pond and an old shade garden,” says Gordon. “We decided to remove some of them, take out the old garden, and make the pond bigger. We worked with the local conservation commission to dredge the pond. Then we created a series of shelves for shallow and deep aquatic plants that improve the water quality.”

MOUNDING BOXWOOD covers the slope (ABOVE LEFT) between the back of the garage and the pool terrace. The lumpy shapes make for a playful transition from building to landscape, while providing an evergreen backdrop for perennials. Bluestone pavers (ABOVE RIGHT) line the pool surround and the outdoor kitchen terraces; walls are granite. Sedum ‘Autumn Joy,’ catmint, and fountain grass prettily spill over the edges and provide color all summer long.



Aquatic plants include Canada rush, fox sedge, sweet flag, blue flag iris, arum, and pickerelweed. A swale directs water away from the lawn as it flows downhill toward the pond. Bordering the lawn is a meadow planted with goldenrod and verbena. In the marshy areas surrounding the pond, wet meadow plants, including fescue, cardinal flower, joe-pye weed, hay-scented fern, and ostrich fern, were installed. Three granite bridges span rivulets and add architectural interest.

Gordon and Taylor terraced the slope to accommodate a swimming pool and, beside the house, an outdoor kitchen and dining room. Graceful oval granite retaining walls act as traditional ha-has, which function as barriers while invisible from ground level.

“We carefully designed curved walls as they step down,” Taylor says. “The house is rectangular, the pool also, so the curves are important to keep it from becoming too formal, too static.”

Some landscape trees found new homes. A magnificent Stewartia once in front of the house now stands beside the kitchen-dining patio, where its form and flowers show to best advantage. A pair of red Japanese maples were moved to frame the view of the house from the street, and a number of lesser trees were removed because they inter-



WHEREAS STRATEGIC PLANTINGS and terracing render the areas around the swimming pool (ABOVE) and the outdoor kitchen invisible from the street, shrubbery at the property edge allows for a view of the pond. While the front of the house faces the street, the new side porch is hidden from sight and offers ready access to the outdoor play, lounging, and gardening areas.



THE SWIMMING POOL terrace (RIGHT) is located between the house and the pond at the bottom of the property. The homeowners say that taking in the view of the setting sun as it’s reflected in the pool (SEE PHOTO, PAGE 77) is one of the great pleasures of living here.



INFORMAL GRANITE PAVING STONES (ABOVE AND LEFT) lead around the edges of the pond, where the designers planted ferns, pickerelweed, arrow arum, fox sedge, and blue flag iris. They aid in keeping the pond water oxygenated and healthy. Several small granite bridges (BELOW) bring architectural interest while aiding explorers. When it was heavily shaded, the pond (FACING PAGE) eutrophied and lost its ability to retain oxygen. Removing some trees was part of the effort to bring it back to health. It is now ringed with tupelo, dwarf fothergilla, blueberry, red twig dogwood, and azalea.



- 1 PARKING COURT
- 2 FRONT ENTRY GATE
- 3 VIEW TO POND
- 4 FIRE PIT + SEATING
- 5 SPA
- 6 POOL
- 7 PLAY LAWN
- 8 VEGETABLE GARDEN
- 9 WET MEADOW
- 10 POND
- 11 GRANITE BRIDGES
- 12 MARSH

fered with the view of the pond. Two stately dawn redwoods, however, remain where they were planted.

When the previous owner lived and gardened here, a board fence bordered the street. Today, a row of evergreen shrubs makes for a softer, but no less effective privacy screen. Taylor’s design utilizes an optical trick in which an opening in the greenery provides the requisite view of the pond from the street. The break is not seen from below because it is visible only when viewed straight on. The aperture leads the eye to the pond while the pool, spa, and dining and lounging areas are hidden by shrubbery and terracing. “It provides sightlines to the pond but does not in any way affect the homeowners’ privacy,” Taylor says.

By the road, the garden gate has a simple diamond Craftsman motif that is repeated in paving and on granite posts, a nod to the house’s Arts and Crafts origins.

“It’s a work in progress,” says the husband, “and we are now enjoying the easiest part, the plantings. Maybe we’ll put a cutting garden in the vegetable garden, or maybe plant a row of arborvitae. We love to think about it while sitting on the stone wall by the pool, dangling [our] feet over the edge and enjoying a glass of wine while we watch the sun set over the pond.”