

ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL LANDSCAPE DESIGNERS

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2025 Awards Issue



BEST OF SHOW

David Thorne Landscape Architect, Inc.
Valley Brook, Lafayette, California

2025 APLD International Landscape
Design Awards

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the judges

2025 APLD International Landscape Design Awards Distinguished Judges



Bruce Crawford



Eric Gilbey, PLA



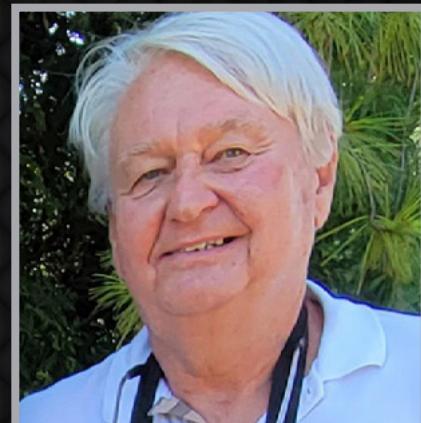
Margie Grace, CPLD



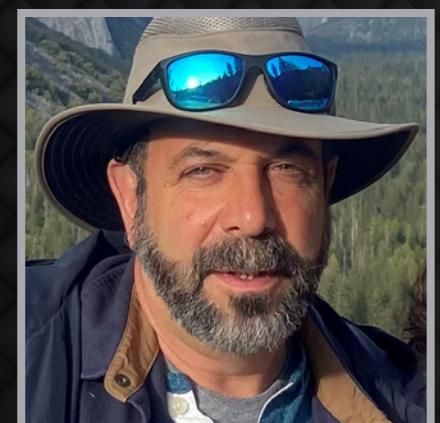
Charles Hess



Lisa Nunamaker, PLA



Greg Pierceall



Richard Rosiello



Susie Thompson, CPLD, FAPLD

The 2025 International Landscape Design Award winners presented design ideas exceeding fundamental conceptual boundaries while encompassing space, serenity, and sustainability. All the designs are works of aspiration and excellence. Enjoy these highlights of the winning projects.



2025 apid international landscape design awards
best of show

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL DYER PHOTOGRAPHY

best of show

VALLEY BROOK

Residential Category Over \$100,000

Project Location: Lafayette, California

Zone: 9b

Best of Show David Thorne Landscape Architect, Inc.

**Design Team: David Thorne, Kristina Kessel,
and Ryan Minahan**

Website: www.thornela.com

Firm Location: Oakland, California

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAUL DYER PHOTOGRAPHY



Tucked away off a beautiful, bustling street in Lafayette, California, David Thorne, Principal/Owner and Founder of David Thorne Landscape Architect, Inc. (DTLA), and his team crafted a serene brookside retreat nestled among mature oaks and coastal redwoods.

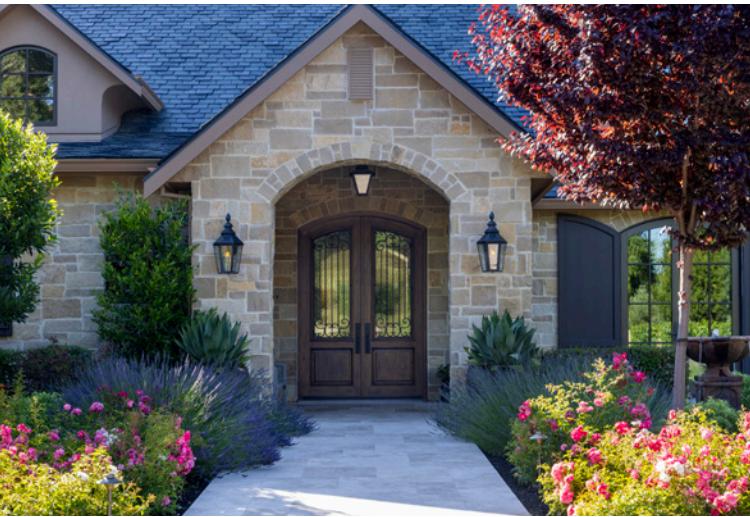
Former water-loving lawns and birch trees were thoughtfully revitalized into low-water gardens and peek-a-boo walks, once again delighting judges and earning DTLA the distinction of APLD's 2025 Best of Show for the second year in a row.

Inspiring a Welcoming and Serene Forever Home

Thorne's clients purchased the lot and existing structures with plans to start afresh and build a forever home to age in gracefully. They dreamed of a space that would exude an understated and serene vibe with opportunities for both sun-drenched and shady spaces.

The property was reimagined to include a Mediterranean-style home and guest house, which fueled the DTLA team's creativity.

"We took inspiration from the materiality of the house and the architecture," said Thorne. "It's the rare client that clads pretty much the entire house in stone, so we wanted to extend that stone and warmth out into the landscape and tie everything together."



Following the home build, the landscape was a blank slate. The large lot enabled Thorne to provide global site planning that met client requests and embrace the property's existing natural features, including a brook, mature oaks, and coastal redwoods. Thorne's team strategically placed major elements of the design on the brook side of the house, drawing focus toward natural features and away from the busy road, while ensuring the street-side of the property also had special moments.



Overcoming a Firetruck Turnaround, Busy Street, and Lots of Paving

One major challenge came with the entry to the property. The front driveway was required to serve as a turnaround for fire trucks. While the paving was significant, Thorne's team masterfully minimized it by planting in key areas and utilizing impervious materials that were within code.

The hustle and bustle of the street posed another challenge. Thorne's team initially proposed a stone wall with a series of concave and convex arcs, trailing vines, and gaps to allow light to pass through. Sadly, the Design Review Board denied the request. Thorne's team shifted to a linear, sound-dampening fence that met requirements and fulfilled the clients' needs and desires.

Thorne's clients also wanted to take full advantage of California's ideal climate for outdoor living.

"They wanted a fairly large swimming pool and all the requisites, some pool terraces and an outdoor fireplace," Thorne stated. "It was kind of complex to weave in all that, in the sun and shade, protect the trees, and create focal points."

Thorne's team took a naturalistic approach to masterfully blend the hardscapes into the trees and banks of the brook.

Softening Hardscapes With Planting Design

One of the judges praised the "... masterful connection between the materials and style of the home with the lush and perfect balance of rustic softscapes and pristine hardscapes."

This resonated with Thorne. He praised the planting design by DTLA's Kristina Kessel.

"A lot of the focus of the backyard, other than the pool area, is really planting design... embracing that concept of, how do you balance materials to be more soft and [create] softer, pristine landscapes," said Thorne.

"Kristina and I were very deliberate about [our plant palette, composition, contrast, and form]," he continued. "On a large project like this, with the circulation path or journey, we try to create different garden spaces... through repeating material elements and foliage colors in various forms and applications."

best of show



For example, the team used Purple Loropetalum in one spot or grouping, then a bit further, they chose Purple Berberis to repeat like colors, but change the texture.

One of the best examples of this is the putting green area, Thorne said. The team created an organic-shaped putting green and integrated it in a naturalistic way with a variety of plantings, camouflaging its true nature from a distance.

The team used many long-lived shrubs and ornamental grasses to create foundations – including Loropetalum, Abelia, Pittosporum, Lomandra, and Miscanthus – interspersed with pops of color from ground cover roses, perennial sages, and catmints.

“The putting green seamlessly blends into the surrounding plantings,” a judge noted.

The existing native oak trees, with their low water requirements, called for other California natives, like California Lilac, Toyon, and Coffeeberry, along the perimeters and the brook.

Moving closer to the home, Thorne’s team blended native plants with layered, more lush plantings offering year-round color without having high water requirements. Selections included Mediterranean-climate species like Olives, Lavender, Bay Laurels, Variegated Italian Buckthorn, and Australian Coast Rosemary. Thorne used careful drip irrigation to keep the plants growing and vibrant instead of moving into summer dormancy.

Another judge praised Thorne’s team, saying, “There are moments of brilliance in the planting design. The plant palette, planting composition, and contrast of form and texture are exquisite. The simple, dry-laid, peek-a-boo walk draws the eye through this beautiful landscape.”

The repeating colors and varying textures of the plantings softened the hardscapes, brought unity to the project, and made the experience dynamic.

Caring for the Environment and Natural Life Through Thoughtful Sustainability

Sustainability has long been considered in DTLA’s designs. With periodic and sustained drought, higher temperatures,



and water-conservation efforts, the DTLA team incorporated Mediterranean and California native plantings to conserve water and provide habitat for native fauna.

One thoughtful way Thorne and his team considered the impact of their plans on the native fauna was by creating a wildlife corridor.

“We were going to fence the entire street, so how do [the deer and wildlife] get to the creek? They couldn’t do it,” said Thorne. He recommended building a 10-foot wildlife corridor with a fence on the property line separating the space from neighbors, offering the wildlife a safe way to reach water without jumping over any fences.

They also used locally sourced willow branches to make up the twin trellises, creating shade in the sunny pool area and off of the primary suite.

The Tuscan-inspired fountains were acquired from a San Francisco company with Italian roots, instead of importing them.

Crafting Custom Moments

Thorne’s clients wanted to push some points of the design to craft custom moments. The DTLA team stretched their design ability to make these moments come to life in a variety of ways.

As part of the global planning, Thorne realized that the building orientation based on cardinal directions offered lovely opportunities for naturally lighting their design.

“[The layout] gave us the opportunity to take advantage of the low Western light coming through the garden and backlight masses of grasses across the pool area,” said Thorne.

Other unique opportunities were created through repetition. From the main house, the pool anchors the views with its complementary sculptural spa counterpart. Kessel created deliberate and tasteful parallel lines through the design to resonate with the repeating pops of plum-colored foliage. The repeating sets of lines can be seen in the custom willow trellising, paving joints, and gate pickets, unifying the project.

An attractive, custom entry gate welcomed the clients with a custom sign and different widths of pickets, overseen by DTLA’s Ryan Minahan.

As a nod to the clients’ love of California wine country and their own small vineyard, Thorne’s team installed a mini-vineyard on the property.

The sound-dampening fence with special, soft plantings also offered a custom-designed solution to subdue road noise.

“Having a client say, ‘Oh, wow! That’s cool. Nobody’s got an entry gate like that. Nobody’s got a sound-dampening fence or a wildlife corridor.’ I’m proud of those. They’re not off-the-shelf stuff,” said Thorne.

Recognizing Meaningful Partners

Thorne gratefully accepted the Best of Show award, recognizing the value of the award from his peers.

“We’re blessed by working with really complex teams,” said Thorne. He extends his thanks to the following individuals and businesses who made Valley Brook a success.

- The entire DTLA team, and in particular Kristina Kessel, on the planting design, and Quintana Kardel for art direction and staging photography
- Ryan Minahan, a DTLA designer who moved on to open his own firm
- Paul Dyer Photography
- Left Coast Architecture
- Branagh Development, general contractor and construction
- Leisure Escapes, landscape contractor
- Nature’s Reflections, pool contractor
- Sandra Brown, interior designer

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2025 award winners

Residential
\$25,000 - \$100,000



gold award

MID-CENTURY GARDEN REVIVAL

Residential Category \$25,000 – \$100,000

Project Location: Silver Spring, Maryland

Zone: 7b

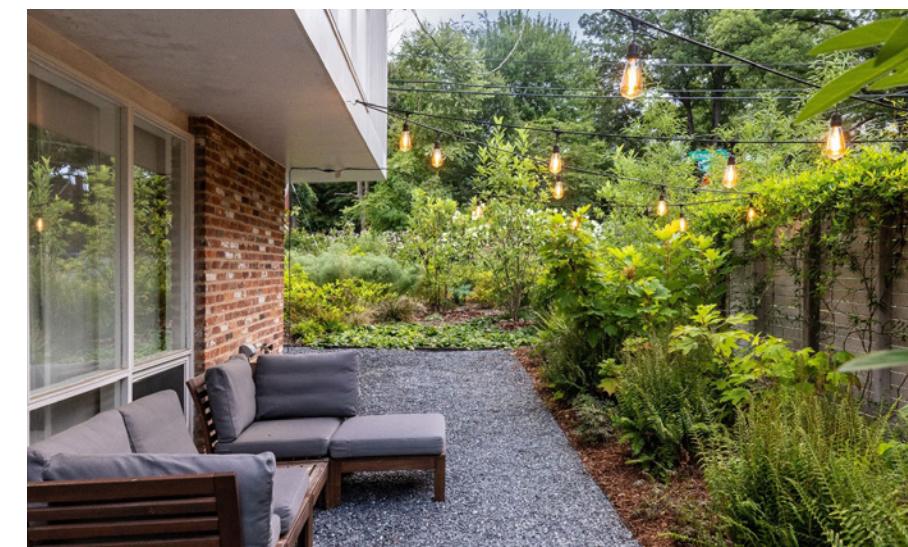
Backyard Bounty

Website: www.backyardbounty.net

Firm Location: Middletown, Maryland

PHOTOGRAPHS BY REGIS LEFEBURE

Tucked away in a suburban corner lot of a closed-in community near Washington, D.C., sits a property that was in need of an upgrade. The garden began as a compacted, sloped landscape with invasive groundcovers, exposed tree roots, and heavy pedestrian traffic cutting through the front yard. The clients sought a private, biodiverse refuge that would manage stormwater, deter foot traffic, and harmonize with both the home's architecture and the neighborhood. The design transformed the entire site—removing lawn and invasives, adding custom boulder steps, patios, walkways, and screening elements—into a native, wildlife supporting landscape. Today, neighbors stop to thank the homeowners for the beauty and biodiversity the garden brings to the community.



DESIGNER TIP:

"Focus on each project and making it the best it can be. Don't be afraid to push your clients past their comfort zone. Listening to clients is one of the most important skills a designer should develop, but listening doesn't mean the client should tell you how to design."

—Edamarie Mattei

JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

This is a wonderful transformation that honors the mid-century architecture while bringing the gardens to a current aesthetic. A very nice blending of grasses and perennials can be seen throughout. The placement of the wooden partition was a clever way to conceal the seating area and also work with the lines of the house.

gold award

MORE WITH LESS

Residential Category \$25,000 – \$100,000

Project Location: Long Beach, California

Zone: 10b

Outer Spaces Exterior Design

Website: www.outer-spaces.com

Firm Location: Long Beach, California

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAUREN AVILA PHOTOGRAPHY

This Long Beach backyard, once a spacious 60' by 50' lot, was reshaped after a new "Granny flat" reduced its size by a third, prompting a full redesign. The remaining space, shaded by the towering main house and flanked by unused slopes with failing retaining walls, needed to accommodate a pool, entertaining areas, and a vegetable garden while integrating the new ADU as a seamless part of the landscape. The designer transformed the sunniest corner into a private retreat with a custom pool, cabana deck, and bamboo screening, while a dry creek bed and salvaged stone staircase introduced a California coastal feel. Concrete paths connect key spaces, and thoughtful touches like a fire pit with stump seating add both flexibility and charm. A dry well beneath the creek bed captures runoff, supporting Long Beach's sustainability goals and helping this modern, plant-rich backyard function beautifully year-round.



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

The design has brought new life into a previously lackluster garden, accomplished with great use of materials and placement. The wooden platform by the pool, the steps, and the wood slats on the arbor are a warm change of materials. The planting is nice yet simple, as it should be in such a small place.



gold award

ROCKSTAR FORMAL

Residential Category \$25,000 – \$100,000

Project Location: South Minneapolis, Minnesota

Zone: 5a

**Jason Rathe/
Karina Greenwood,
Field Outdoor Spaces**

Website: www.fieldoutdoorspaces.com

Firm Location: Minneapolis, Minnesota



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

Great innovation and execution with wonderful materials. The movement created by the curved lines is inviting and exciting for the eye. The minimal streetside palette reinforces the sense of movement.



DESIGNER TIP:

"If a client has a crazy or outlandish idea, lean into it and think outside the box. That's the time to really let the creativity flow, try new things, look for inspiration in things you may never have looked at before."

— Karina Greenwood



After moving from a grittier urban area into a more formal neighborhood, the homeowners wanted their new front landscape to reflect the elegance of their colonial-style home—while adding a rebellious, unexpected twist. Inspired by the idea of “an aging rockstar buying an English estate,” the design features sweeping, undulating walkways and curving gravel borders that bring drama and movement to what was once a plain, lawn-dominated yard. The front slope is now a striking display of *Sesleria autumnalis* Autumn Moor Grass, with crisp-edged No-Mow sedge lawns and a blue boulder wall offering both formality and a casual place to sit. White roses and prickly native plants like Prickly Ash add texture and edge, while low-maintenance, drought-tolerant plantings suit the clients’ hands-on approach. At night, lighting highlights the garden’s layered views from both the street and the home’s dramatic front windows, creating a landscape that surprises, welcomes, and performs beautifully day and night.

gold award

YOUNG FAMILY RESPITE

Residential Category \$25,000 – \$100,000

Project Location: Piedmont, California

Zone: 9b

Alexis Davis Millar Landscape Architecture

Firm Location: El Cerrito, California

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CAITLIN ATKINSON

This rear yard renovation transformed a once-stressful pool area into a tranquil, contemporary garden space tailored for family enjoyment. The redesign began with reshaping the pool to accommodate an automatic safety cover that improved child safety and created an opportunity to simplify hardscape materials and textures. New smooth stucco walls, linear wood fencing, and a restrained palette of native grasses and foliage-rich plantings bring a sense of calm, while preserved mature Acer palmatum offers shade. A hardwood boardwalk bridges the house and garden, discreetly concealing drainage improvements, while lighting and architectural elements ensure the space feels inviting both day and night. Every detail, from locally sourced materials to low-water plants and efficient irrigation, reflects a thoughtful blend of environmental responsibility, contemporary design, and livable beauty.

“Each choice we made in the design, geometry, materials and finishes, served the overarching design vision of clean lines and simplicity.”

—Alexis Davis Millar

JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

A picture of modern tranquility. The design is functional, and the plants add a sense of fun and whimsy while seeming like formal elements at the same time. Unifying the color of the paving and wall, combined with the simple, straight planting lines, nicely helps the overall design.



silver award



VEDADO

Residential Category \$25,000 – \$100,000
Project Location: Atlanta, Georgia
Zone: 8a

Patrick Bell/ City Garden Co

Website: www.citygardenco.com
Firm Location: Athens, Georgia

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CITY GARDEN CO/KAYLINN GILSTRAP

After 30 years in a Manhattan apartment, the clients arrived in Atlanta ready for a fresh start—and their backyard needed one too. Outdated hardscape, overgrown plants, and a deteriorating shed made way for a clean, modern retreat focused on privacy, simplicity, and low maintenance, with space for their dog to roam. The design team preserved only a remnant of an old wall for historical continuity, replacing the rest with crisp stucco planters and seat walls, a contemporary fence, and a Pennsylvania bluestone patio. Plantings were kept minimal, with a perennial strip for personal touches, and a beloved existing water feature was seamlessly integrated into the design. Despite major challenges, including drainage issues, a massive city stormwater lid, and difficult site access, the final design quietly resolves them all, delivering a calm, functional, and beautifully modern outdoor space.



DESIGNER TIP: “Negative space is just as important as stone or plants. At Vedado, bluestone and stucco gave quiet structure so the plantings could shine.” – Patrick Bell

JUDGES’ FEEDBACK:

The backyard is now brighter and more cheerful. The bluestone patio connects nicely with the existing deck, and the fence is very attractive.



bronze award

PROVENCE BY THE SEA

Residential Category \$25,000 – \$100,000
Project Location: Rye, New Hampshire
Zone: 6a

McDermott Landscape Design

Website: www.mcdermottlandscapedesign.com
Firm Location: Portsmouth, New Hampshire

The existing landscape of this French-inspired home had grown unruly after two decades of minimal maintenance, with oversized shrubs obscuring the architecture. The clients wanted to refresh the space without expanding the gardens or altering the hardscape, seeking a more open, inviting look with areas of negative space and a renovated pool patio. Custom steel trellises with climbing David Austin roses now soften the once-blank front walls, while carefully selected deer-resistant perennials and evergreens provide structure and color. In the back, a heat-reflective paver was chosen to mimic bluestone around the regraded pool patio, and outdated plantings were replaced with compact shrubs and perennials for seasonal interest. The result is a clean, elegant landscape that enhances the home’s charm while blending seamlessly into the wilder edges of the property.



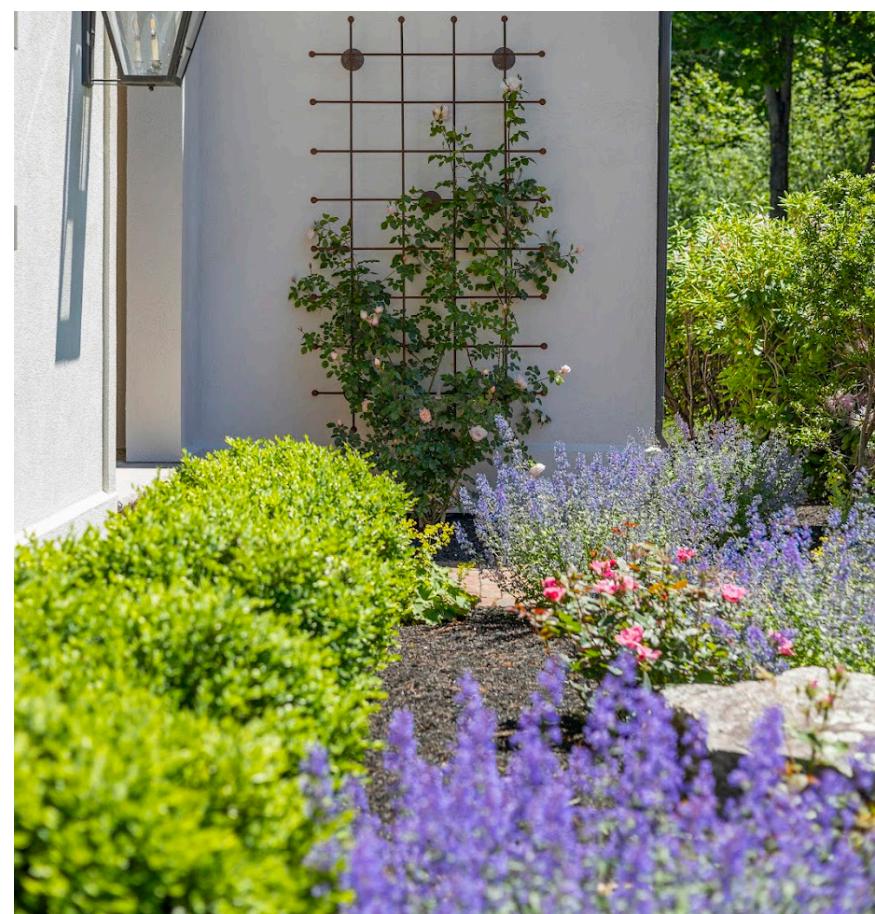
PHOTOGRAPH BY RIDGELIGHT STUDIO

JUDGES’ FEEDBACK:

Replacing the old pavers with the bluestone-like pavers was a successful solution. I also like the sweep of Hay Scented Fern – a truly underutilized plant!



PHOTOGRAPH BY RIDGELIGHT STUDIO



PHOTOGRAPH BY SCOTT MCDERMOTT

DESIGNER TIP: “Landscape design is not just about plants and stonework. This project involved custom steel trellises, wrought iron railings, a new fence design, containers, and boulder placement. There’s so much you can do to enhance a property.” – Scott McDermott and Jessica Engle

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2025 award winners

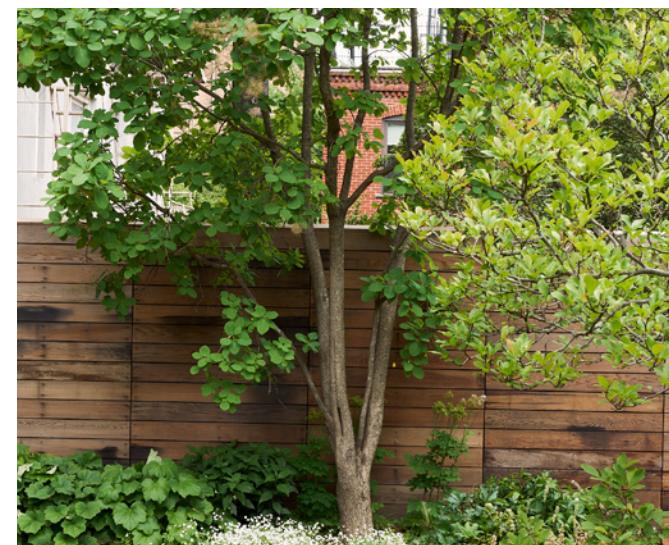
**Residential
Over \$100,000**





JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

This is an inspiring makeover of a property. Honoring the architecture and surrounds while bringing it into the 21st century has been skillfully achieved. The use of repurposed materials, drainage mitigation, and planting for ecology shows a commitment to the client's wishes. Spatial awareness and balance are evident in the just-right size/shape spaces for each property, while still creating an overall unified space. The plantings are nicely distributed with a balance of trees, shrubs and perennials that create private dining spaces. Favorite elements: reuse of bricks and redwood, use of curved lines on the ground plane in an otherwise linear space. Nicely done!



gold award

CLINTON HILL GARDEN

Residential Category Over \$100,000

Project Location: Brooklyn, New York

Zone: 7b

BluePlant LLC

Website: www.blueplantnyc.com

Firm Location: Brooklyn, New York

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DOUGLAS LYLE THOMPSON PHOTOGRAPHY

Nestled in the heart of Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, two Greek Revival homes from the 1840s stand as the oldest houses in the neighborhood. These homes, a joint purchase by a brother and sister with young children, were chosen not only for their historical significance but also for the expansive backyard—a perfect canvas for their dream of creating a shared family space. The goal was clear: a sustainable, energy-efficient garden that would provide a safe and engaging environment for the children to play and the families to gather, all while maintaining the heritage of the property.

During the renovation, fireproof bricks from the original timber-frame structures were reclaimed and repurposed throughout the garden, while sustainability guided every detail from passive drainage systems and reclaimed materials to a green roof and native plantings. Anchored by mature trees, custom patios, and a series of stepped planting beds tailored to each family's vision, the garden now thrives as an ecologically rich, resilient space where both children and adults connect, play, and grow together.

gold award

DARIEN OCEANFRONT OASIS

Residential Category Over \$100,000

Project Location: Darien, Connecticut

Zone: 7

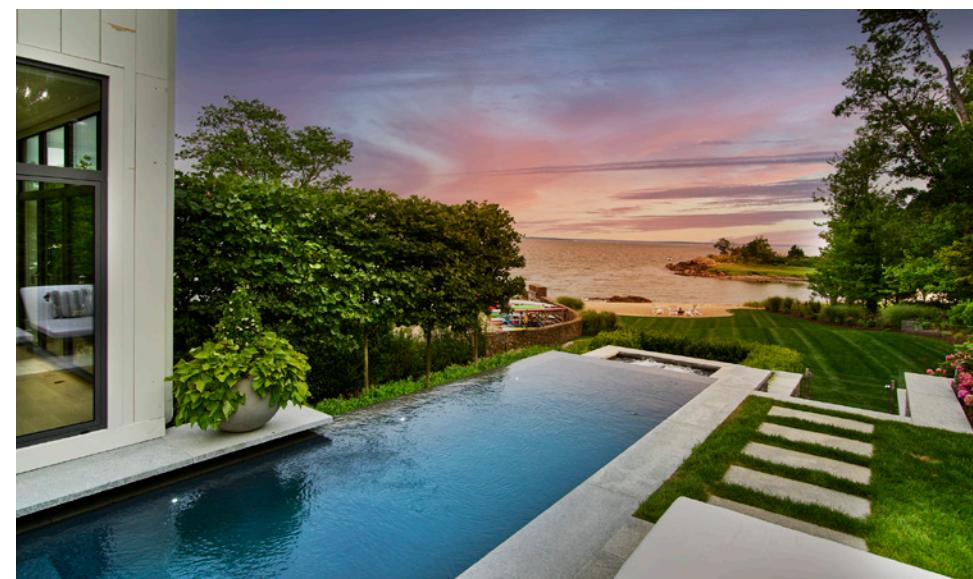
Nick Ackerman – Glengate

Website: www.glengatecompany.com

Firm Location: Wilton, Connecticut

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BILL MILNE

From rubble to refuge, this beachfront property was given a second chance. What was once a raw construction site with scattered debris and overgrown invasives was transformed into a refined coastal retreat overlooking Long Island Sound. The clients envisioned more than just a backyard; they dreamed of a space that blended family-friendly function with natural elegance. Layered terraces now tame the steep terrain, creating zones for play, relaxation, and entertainment—including a pool, outdoor kitchen, and firepit—all while preserving views and ensuring privacy from a neighboring beach club. Native plants were protected, invasive species removed, and runoff carefully managed, allowing the landscape to thrive in harmony with its surroundings. Every detail, from custom glass railings to restored beachfront pathways, was crafted to turn a disrupted site into a seamless, sustainable sanctuary.



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

The layout and sizing of activity spaces are nicely balanced, showing spatial awareness. The slope is now a beautiful feature, rather than a problem, with grading and attractive walls to create an upper terrace. All in all, a stunning transformation that satisfies the client's requests.

DESIGNER TIP:

"I put my heart and soul into all my projects. For me, it's client interaction that sparks a worthy project submission. If my clients and I are on the same page throughout the project, I know in my heart we have a winner." – Mark G. Brotton



Set in a historic district, the landscape had suffered years of neglect: chaotic plantings, nutrient-poor soil, and privacy concerns overshadowed the home's recent interior revival. The new design embraced the home's historic charm, replacing disjointed elements with graceful garden rooms, repurposed brick patios, and soft mass plantings that invite color, texture, and calm. Views from the kitchen, library, and master bedroom now open onto lush vignettes of climbing roses, 'Golden Wings' blooms, and a shaded mountain meadow retreat. With smart irrigation, local materials, and low-voltage lighting, the renewed landscape offers both sustainability and year-round enchantment.



gold award

HISTORIC GARDEN REVIVAL

Residential Category Over \$100,000

Project Location: Santa Fe, New Mexico

Zone: 6b

**Mark G. Brotton -
Principal Designer -
Living Water Irrigation
and Landscape LLC**

Website: www.livingwaterSF.com

Firm Location: Santa Fe, New Mexico

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANIEL QUAT

JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

This is a beautiful and harmonious restoration and transformation. The elements throughout the garden are seamlessly connected, providing a comfortable flow. The lush planting plan provides multiple seasons of interest and invites wildlife garden visitors, offering just the right balance to the hard surfaces. The attention to the environment with water management, recycling of materials, and tree preservation is commendable.

gold award

KENT COTTAGE GARDEN

Residential Category Over \$100,000

Project Location: Kent, United Kingdom

Zone: 9

Jo Thompson Landscape and Garden Design

Website: www.jothompson-garden-design.co.uk

Firm Location: East Sussex, United Kingdom

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JASON INGRAM



Located beside a centuries-old castle wall, this garden feels lifted from the pages of a storybook. This fairytale cottage and its east-facing garden called for a design that balanced heritage with enchantment. Inspired by old maps and the well's original use as a communal water source, the layout became a journey of discovery with brick paths winging past topiary, sunken seating, and a rill that flows gently from the restored well. A formal knot garden gives way to a loose wildflower meadow, filled with roses, shrubs, and seasonal blooms that invite both pollinators and pause. Reclaimed stone, native species, and thoughtful planting ensure the garden remains as timeless and rooted as the land it shares with the castle.



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

This is a lovely transformation of a dated and neglected garden. The cottage, gardens and surrounds are seamlessly connected by appropriate hardscape materials and layered plantings that immerse you in the space. The inviting winding path creates nicely shaped and balanced spaces, providing an interesting journey. The rill enhances the spatial division and guides visitors on their walk from start to finish, as well as draws wildlife into the garden.



DESIGNER TIP:

"Look to the history of the site, it is often the richest source of inspiration. By studying old maps and understanding the significance of the well, we created a garden that felt as though it had always belonged." – Jo Thompson

gold award

LOWELL

Residential Category Over \$100,000

Project Location: Lafayette, California

Zone: 9b

Envision Landscape Studio

Website: www.envisionlandscapestudio.com

Firm Location: Walnut Creek, California

Set on a private road, this hillside property was transformed into a vibrant, nature-conscious retreat that balances recreation, relaxation, and timeless design. Centered around a large pool and natural play lawn, the landscape was carefully integrated with the new build home and designed to reflect the family's active, social lifestyle. A covered "California Room" serves as the heart of the space, complete with a heated lounge and central bar area, while heat-resistant porcelain tile hardscapes offer durability and style without overwhelming the natural setting. Mature heritage oaks and redwoods were preserved and celebrated, with native, low-water plantings thoughtfully layered throughout to soften built elements and reinforce a connection to the land. Sustainable choices, from solar energy and low-voltage lighting to real turf and minimized concrete use, support a design that's both environmentally responsible and effortlessly inviting.



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

This design beautifully integrates the built landscape with the existing surrounds, while extensive plants and layering connect the spaces. Tree protection and the use of low-water plants and natives are commendable and demonstrate respect for the environment. The spaces are appropriately sized and well defined.



gold award

NORTHSHORE MEADOW HOUSE

Residential Category Over \$100,000

Project Location: Wenham, Massachusetts

Zone: 6b

Matthew Cunningham Landscape Design LLC

Website: www.matthew-cunningham.com

Firm Location: Stoneham, Massachusetts

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANTON GRASSL

After years abroad in London, a local family returned to Massachusetts' North Shore to create a home deeply rooted in the pastoral New England landscape. Set on 9.6 acres of meadow and preserved woodland, the site was reimagined to include a pool, spa, pickleball court, vegetable garden, and spaces for entertaining, all while honoring its natural character. The new house was set further back, nestled among mature trees and overlooking a rear meadow, while winding gravel drives and mown lawn paths connected the property's outdoor rooms. Reclaimed granite, native plantings, green roofs, and preserved fieldstone walls all reflect the project's environmental ethos. The designer led the process from master planning to plant selection, ensuring the garden continues to evolve in harmony with its surroundings.



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

Sustainability and simplicity are the strong champions in this project. Material choices in the constructed features and plantings maintain a close connection to the house and exude the spirit of the place. The landscaping sits well on the site and harmonizes well with the structures.

gold award

ORCHARD BAY

Residential Category Over \$100,000

Project Location: Bristol, Rhode Island

Zone: 7a

Katherine Field and Associates, Inc.

Website: www.katherinefield.com

Firm Location: Newport, Rhode Island

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROMEO D'ANDREA, KFA



Once part of a historic coastal farm, Orchard Bay still carries the legacy of its beech, oak, and elm trees, open lawns, and sweeping water views. The new homeowners, golf and boating enthusiasts, wanted to preserve this character while creating a low-maintenance landscape with space for a private golf green and a few vibrant, contained gardens. The design responded to the site's steep slope with careful grading and eight rain gardens, dividing the property into three distinct zones while managing runoff and enhancing natural beauty. A previously constructed pool terrace was transformed with custom stonework, an outdoor kitchen, and lush plantings that connect it back to a multi-season entry garden wrapped around a central fountain. Every element was crafted to blend function, sustainability, and the enduring charm of the original coastal farm.



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

This project handles the dynamics of water management well and provides a refined and elevated experience with a coastal view. The large variety of hardscape materials work well together to add richness, texture, and a sense of history while playing well with the architectural materials. The client's program is beautifully fulfilled.



gold award

OVERHILL

Residential Category Over \$100,000

Project Location: Orinda, California

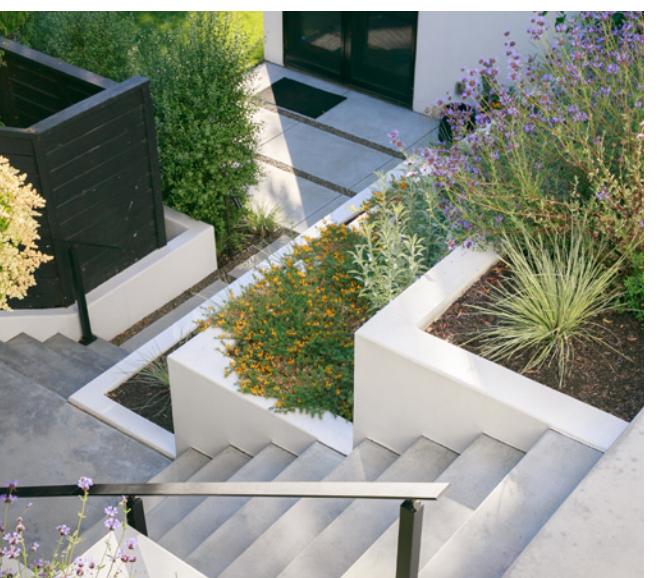
Zone: 9b

Envision Landscape Studio

Website: www.envisionlandscapestudio.com

Firm Location: Walnut Creek, California

Cradled in the contours of the Orinda hillside, this steep terraced property is reimagined as a cohesive and multi-functional outdoor retreat. Designed for a young family who loves to entertain, the three-level landscape plan maximizes every inch of space from the upper backyard to the lower side yard, creating distinct zones for gathering, play, and quiet relaxation. Safety and privacy were key, with structural terraces, layered plantings, and low-voltage lighting ensuring a secure and secluded environment. Drought-tolerant, California-native plant selections and timeless materials ground the design in sustainability and style. The result is a landscape that's both beautiful and practical—perfect for everyday living and memorable moments.



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:
This is a simple, elegant solution to fulfill the client's rather large program, all in a small space on a challenging site. The light footprint and low maintenance add to its beauty.

gold award

"The AHA! moment came during the final walkthrough when every texture, light, and layer aligned perfectly. The Mediterranean-inspired materials, grape stake fencing, oyster shell bocce court, and olive-toned foliage with subtle color accents felt timeless and effortless. The design achieved what we value most: harmony between architecture, lifestyle, and landscape." – Colin Miller



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

Exquisite, simple, elegant and inviting. I enjoyed the emphasis on varied textures and embracing Mediterranean culture, all while succeeding with water efficiency and sustainable water management.



UPPER HAPPY VALLEY

Residential Category Over \$100,000

Project Location: Lafayette, California

Zone: 9b

Envision Landscape Studio

Website: www.envisionlandscapestudio.com

Firm Location: Walnut Creek, California



Located along a protected creek on a private road, this full residential new build reimagines outdoor living with spaces that flow seamlessly from interior to exterior. Influenced by the clients' former Napa home, the design incorporates Mediterranean and California native plantings to create a sustainable, regionally grounded retreat. The front courtyard features a lush vegetable garden, seasonal pollinator habitat, and boulder water feature, while the backyard centers around a pool flanked by mature olive trees, a bocce court, pizza oven, and meditation garden with a labyrinth. Drought-tolerant landscaping, a greywater system, and permeable surfaces minimize environmental impact while enhancing daily life with elegance and intention.

gold award

WARREN AND HEATH

Residential Category Over \$100,000

Project Location: Brookline, Massachusetts

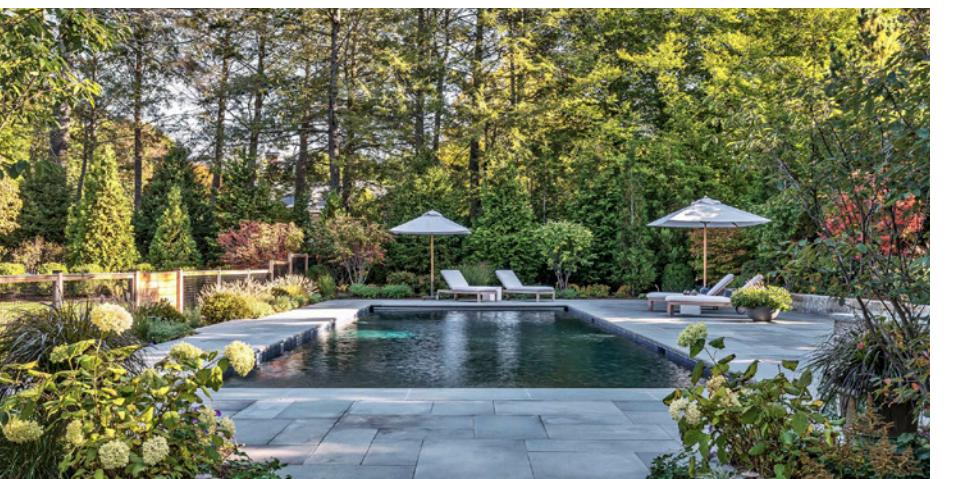
Zone: 6b

Matthew Cunningham Landscape Design LLC

Website: www.matthew-cunningham.com

Firm Location: Stoneham, Massachusetts

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICHARD MANDELKORN



Framed by public roads and shaped by resilience, this Boston estate reclaims a long-forgotten lot. Surrounded on three sides by busy streets in a Boston suburb, this double lot had sat vacant and overgrown for nearly a decade before the client's vision brought it back to life. Nestled among declining trees and aggressive invasives, the site was carefully cleared, preserving healthy native oaks, pines, and maples while making way for a grand shingle-style home at its center. With 360-degree views from the interior, the landscape design balances openness with privacy, using layered native plantings instead of traditional hedges to screen roads and neighboring properties. Modern amenities, including a pool, spa, and outdoor kitchen, are connected by crisp bluestone walkways, while a thoughtful mix of native species supports pollinators, reduces maintenance, and fosters a sense of countryside serenity in an urban setting. The landscape architect led all phases of design, permitting, and construction, ensuring every detail served both the clients' lifestyle and long-term environmental stewardship.

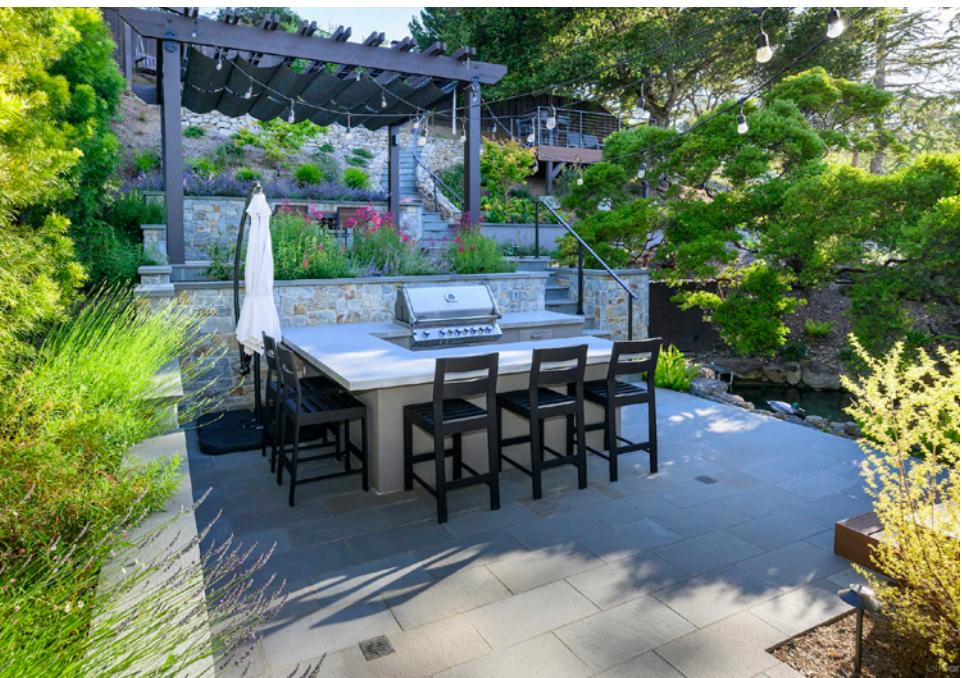


JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

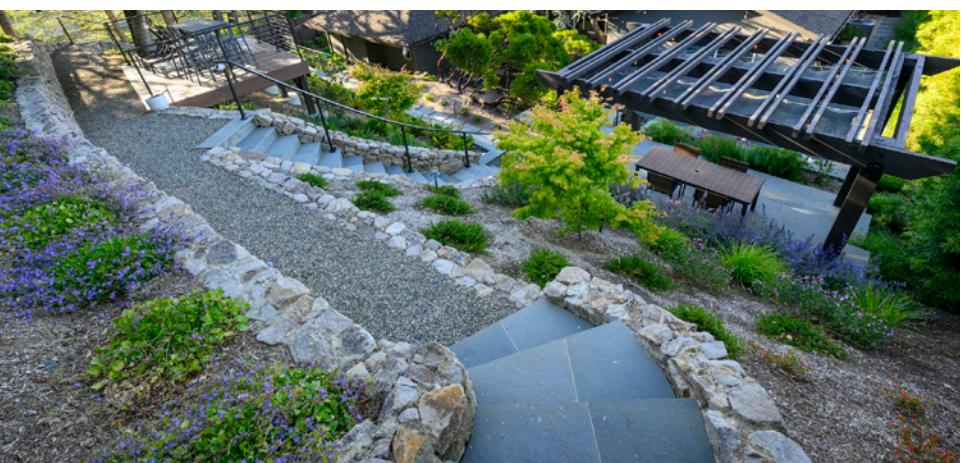
This project expertly re-envisioned a difficult site with declined conditions into a harmonious combination of existing landscape and home with a well-stewarded and ecologically supportive site. The flow, balance, scale, and sense of place are all spot on. Excellent job screening busy streets and neighbors while creating a serene, natural composition.



silver award



In a suburban Bay Area neighborhood, a corner home sits perched on a flat plateau, eight feet above the busy street below. The house is surrounded by a narrow ring of flat terrain, which is less than 15 feet deep, before the land slopes: rising steeply 20 feet at a 2:1 pitch behind the home, offering a breathtaking Bay view from the top, descending more gently in front and on the side. The rocky, clay-loam soil challenged the transformation requested by the active family, who dreamed of outdoor spaces that blend function with beauty: a kitchen, covered patio, fire pit, view deck, small lawn, and colorful, privacy-enhancing gardens. The design carefully preserved the property's natural assets, including heritage trees and a stunning Manzanita, while shaping terraces, patios, and pathways that flowed naturally through each zone. Outdoor "rooms" now connect via graceful steps and curves, each with its own character, making the landscape not only livable, but magical.



A HILLSIDE TRANSFORMED

Residential Category Over \$100,000
Project Location: Belmont, California
Zone: 10a

Kristen Rudger Landscape Design

Website: www.rudgerlandscapes.com
Firm Location: Belmont, California

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEFF BARTEE PHOTOGRAPHY



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

This was a difficult site to work with. Nice job capturing more usable space and connecting the elements. Overall, a beautiful transformation that checked all of the boxes for the client.

silver award



ALDERLEY EDGE CHESHIRE

EAST NORTH WEST UK
Residential Category Over \$100,000
Project Location: Alderley Edge, Cheshire East, England, UK
Zone: 8

DK Garden Design/ Bespoke Garden Elements Ltd

Website: www.dkgardendesign.co.uk
Firm Location: Manchester, England, UK

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID KEEGAN



DESIGNER TIP: "Don't be afraid to be you. By that I mean try not to second-guess yourself. Have confidence in your vision, and your clients most likely will too." – David Keegan



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

This is an exquisite transformation of a dated space with a wonderful mix of contemporary design and ecological plantings. The new materials blend seamlessly with reused materials, and the garden rooms have individual character but are connected to create a unified space that honors the rural setting. The diversity, quantity, and design of plantings create surrounds that bring a satisfying connection to nature. Excellent consideration was given to providing a wildlife habitat.

silver award

ARDROSSAN FARM

Residential Category Over \$100,000

Project Location: Villanova, Pennsylvania

Zone: 7a

Donald Pell Gardens

Website: www.donaldpell.com

Firm Location: Phoenixville, Pennsylvania

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROB CARDILLO



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

The amazing planting design, coupled with the warm hardscape materials, just makes this project stunning. The spaces are cozy, and I love how this entire project sits gently within the plantings. The plant list is also diverse and creates a beautifully designed plant community.



Sitting atop one acre of land, this site posed a unique challenge for the designers, as the large footprint of the residence, combined with an extensive underground rainwater system, divided the space and limited tree placement opportunities. Guided by the clients' vision of patio space, fountains, and a dynamic, naturalistic garden, the design team focused on creating immersive spaces that invite the homeowners to journey through and discover a constantly evolving garden.

Carefully remediated soils and intentionally selected plantings now support a range of garden areas, from woodland-inspired paths to vibrant sunlit slopes, each offering seasonal color, texture, and ecological value. Sinuous garden lines define pathways designed to encourage exploration and create a rich, plant-centric experience. The final design reflects the homeowners' desire to live joyfully and fully immersed in nature.

silver award

BAYVIEW SANCTUARY

Residential Category Over \$100,000

Project Location: Duxbury, Massachusetts

Zone: 7a

Colin Hand/ a Blade of Grass

Website: www.abladeofgrass.com

Firm Location: Sudbury, Massachusetts

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETE CADIEUX



Nestled along the shores of Duxbury Bay, this project revitalized the landscape of a charming coastal home by improving the functionality and flow of the outdoor space while framing views of the bay. The project has been a ten-year process to create a welcoming hub where extended family can gather, relax, and make lasting memories. At the heart of the design is a reimaged pool area, which is complemented by lush plantings and a bluestone patio that offers ample space for relaxation and entertainment.

A cedar picket fence atop a fieldstone wall provides both a sense of enclosure and a framed view of the pool house and surrounding landscape. The outdoor kitchen, complete with a built-in grill and generous seating, creates the perfect hub for hosting gatherings, while the firepit extends the seasonality of the space into the cooler months. The plantings surrounding the pool area provide texture and softness, balancing the clean lines of the hardscape with vibrant greenery. Over the years, each element has been carefully considered to support the evolving needs of the family while providing them with a welcoming outdoor sanctuary.



DESIGNER TIP: "Revisit your projects and clients, don't view them as one-time events." – Colin Hand

JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

Beautiful use of hardscaping materials and plantings to create a soft, muted, coastal palette. Excellent execution of the program while not overcrowding the space. I love the preservation of antique granite posts and walls. The pool and pool house transformation is stunning; framing the bay views shows spatial awareness and attention to detail.

silver award

CAVENDISH ROAD MONTON

NORTH WEST UK

Residential Category Over \$100,000

Project Location: Monton/Greater Manchester,

England, UK

Zone: 8

DK Garden Design/ Bespoke Garden Elements Ltd

Website: www.dkgardendesign.co.uk

Firm Location: Manchester, England, UK

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID KEEGAN

JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

This is an exquisite transformation of a very tired and dated property. Spatial awareness is evident in the design; awkward spaces have been made into a harmonious and unified landscape. The focal points and details are abundant and make the journey through the garden special. The banded pavers, with irregular edging, provide a gentle motion and rhythm for garden visitors.



This project focused on redesigning the gardens surrounding a detached Art Deco-style home undergoing significant renovation. The clients sought a contemporary garden that would align with their modern vision while reflecting the architectural heritage of the house. The brief included a variety of distinct and functional spaces, such as a shaded outdoor dining area, a campfire-inspired seating zone, a Mediterranean herb garden, a woodland retreat, and formal front lawns with parking. New boundary walls, gates, and railings were also designed to enhance the property's overall character. From planting schemes and material choices to lighting layouts and planning permissions, the intentional craftsmanship created a cohesive and visually striking garden that respects both the home's history and its renewed identity.



silver award

COYOTE

Residential Category Over \$100,000

Project Location: Montecito, California

Zone: 10b/11a

Trace Robinson

Website: www.tracerobinsonlandscape.com

Firm Location: Santa Barbara, California

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LEPERE STUDIO, HOLLY LEPERE



In the heart of Santa Barbara's mild coastal climate, a high-maintenance site was reimagined as a sustainable retreat rooted in beauty, biodiversity, and function. The client's vision of a low-water, low-impact sanctuary guided the transformation, centered around a shaded dining pergola wrapped in fragrant wisteria and anchored by salvaged olive trees. Natural boulders now double as playful seats for grandchildren, while pollinator-friendly plantings bring color and life to every corner. With permeable surfaces, solarized soil, and Wi-Fi-controlled irrigation, the landscape now thrives as an ecological haven and an everyday escape.

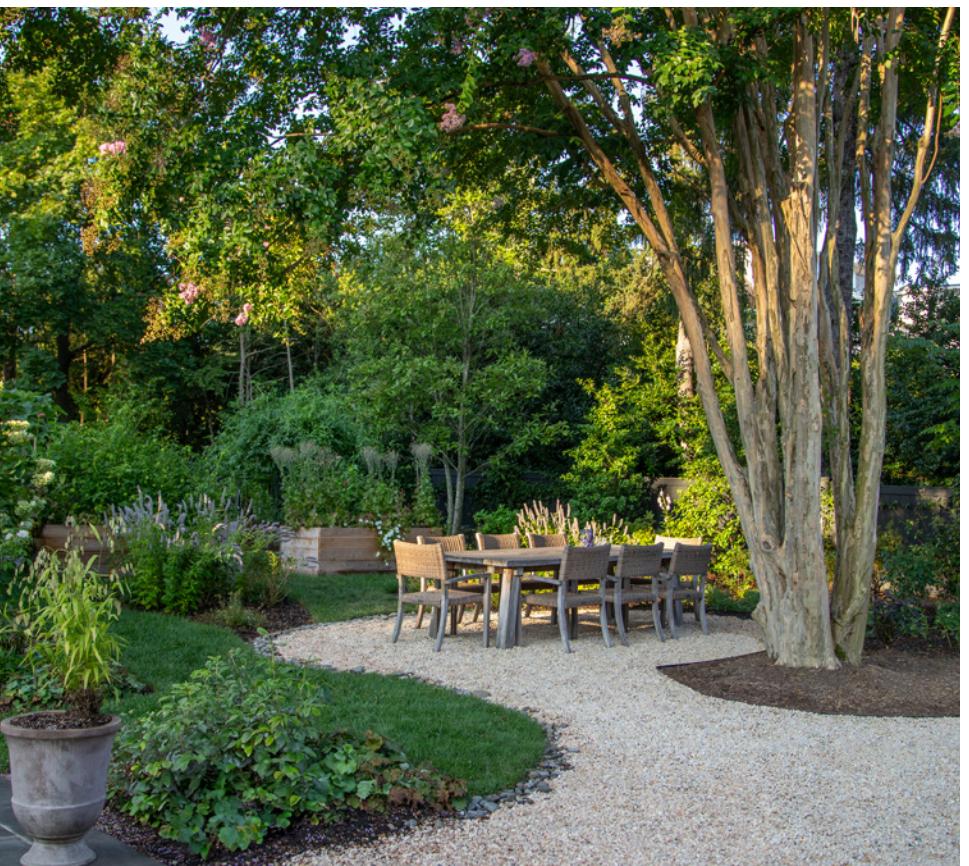


DESIGNER TIP: *"This project is defined by two main elements: a lush yet water-wise planting palette and a commitment to sustainability, which guided every decision from the choice of materials to the overall design approach." – Trace Robinson*

JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

A beautiful design with impeccable material selection, both in hardscaping and plants, that nicely meets the client's request for improved sustainability practices, reduced water usage, and improved ecological function.

silver award



The Gherardi House project in Chevy Chase, Maryland, began as a vision for a lush, family-friendly landscape that honored the home's landmark status while inviting everyday use and discovery. In place of overgrown wisteria and flat, flood-prone ground now lies a carefully balanced composition of outdoor rooms, from a potager garden bursting with native and heirloom edibles to a pool and bocce court framed by fragrant herbs and flowering perennials. Historic trees were preserved, drainage expertly managed, and every element, from the cedar shed to the gravel dining terrace, was placed with intention and respect for the home's architectural heritage. The result is a timeless landscape that feels both elegant and lived-in, where food, play, and beauty flourish side by side.



GHERARDI HOUSE

Residential Category Over \$100,000
Project Location: Chevy Chase, Maryland
Zone: 7b

Horn & Co.

Website: www.hornandco.com
Firm Location: Arlington, Virginia

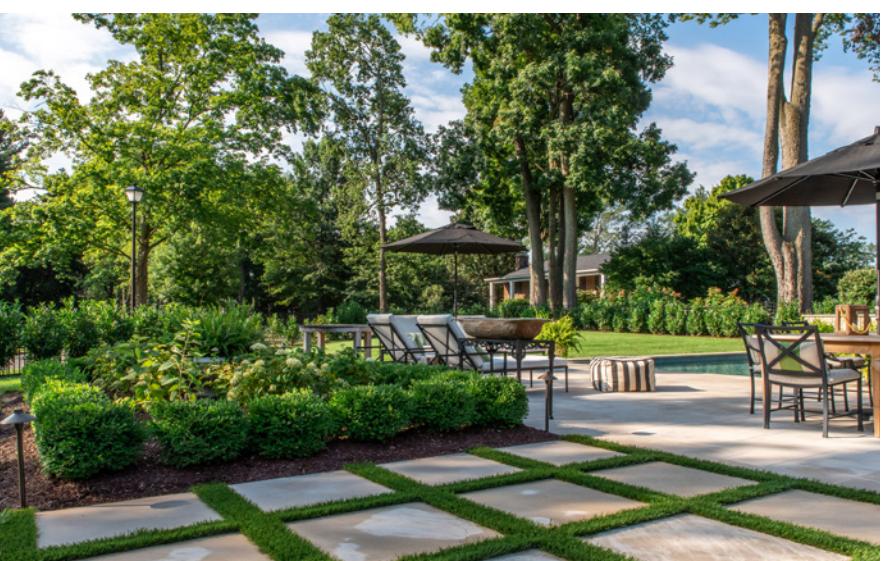
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALLEN RUSS PHOTOGRAPHY



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

This is a beautiful restoration of a property. It preserves the historic sense of place with appropriate materials and plantings, the reuse of the garage as a pool shed, protection of legacy trees, and restoration of the horseshoe drive to its original footprint. The space functionality has been updated to a 21st-century lifestyle that seamlessly blends with the surrounds and satisfies the client's wishes. Great technical achievement in the handling of water on site, too. Ecology and the environment have been respectfully considered.

silver award



LEXINGTON RD. RESIDENCE

Residential Category Over \$100,000
Project Location: Louisville, Kentucky
Zone: 7a

Myers + Co. Landscape Architecture

Website: www.myersandcompanyla.com
Firm Location: Louisville, Kentucky

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEREMY BLUM PHOTO + VIDEO



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

This is a beautiful restoration/ transformation of a historical property. Appropriate materials and iconic hedges provide a strong sense of place. Spatial awareness and balance are evident in the just-right-size spaces and elements. The wall and paving materials are high-quality and have wonderful craftsmanship.



silver award



PHOTOGRAPH BY BEN COLE

This oceanfront retreat on Cape Cod's Great Island balances timeless coastal elegance with careful environmental stewardship. Set on 3.47 acres with sweeping views of Nantucket Sound and its own private beach, the landscape was thoughtfully shaped to reflect the architecture while meeting strict conservation regulations. The design team worked hand-in-hand with the architect and engineers from concept through construction, repositioning the home to reduce its footprint within sensitive coastal zones and crafting a seamless outdoor experience centered around a plunge pool, fire pit, and native plantings. A strong visual corridor from house to beach anchors the rear yard, while custom hardscapes, a tailored outdoor kitchen, and dark-sky lighting provide comfort and beauty in equal measure.



PHOTOGRAPH BY JANA CEVELO

NANTUCKET SOUND OVERLOOK

Residential Category Over \$100,000
Project Location: Great Island, Yarmouth, Massachusetts
Zone: 7a

Mulcahy Design Group

Website: www.mulcahydesigngroup.com
Firm Location: Norwood, Massachusetts



PHOTOGRAPH BY JANA CEVELO

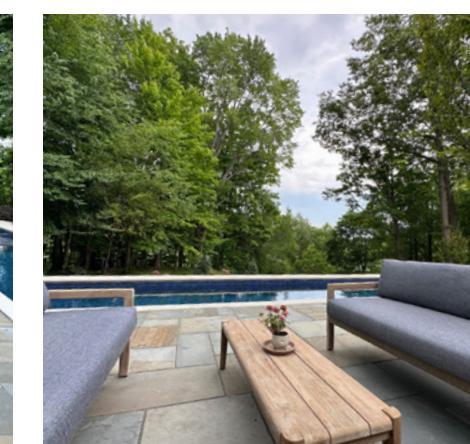
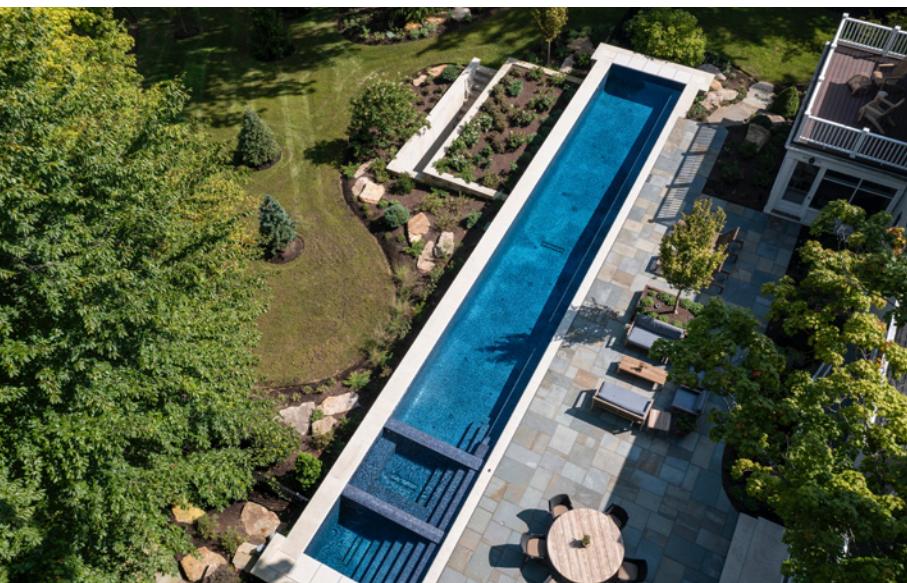


PHOTOGRAPH BY JANA CEVELO

JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

Overall, a cohesive design balancing the client program and site constraints. The ecologically sensitive approach to the coastal buffer and the material connections to the house and region make this a true inspiration to the surrounding community.

silver award



OHIO RESIDENCE

Residential Category Over \$100,000
Project Location: Pepper Pike, Ohio
Zone: 5

Angelotta Landscape Associates

Firm Location: Chesterland, Ohio

Tucked into a compact backyard, this project transforms limited space into a high-performance, year-round retreat centered around aquatic therapy. The homeowners, dedicated swimmers, sought a modern lap pool with an integrated cold plunge and hot tub, all wrapped in a luxurious yet natural outdoor living environment. Layered plantings and preserved perimeter trees create a sense of privacy and lushness, while a heated bluestone patio, Corten steel planter, and custom outdoor kitchen elevate the space's functionality and style. Hidden automated pool covers, a sunken green-roofed equipment room, and generator upgrades speak to the thoughtful integration of aesthetics and technology. The designer led the entire vision, from concept and material selection to sustainable planting and technical coordination, bringing luxury, therapy, and sustainability into perfect balance.

JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

The project is an elegant solution to fulfill the client's program on a challenging site. Balance, scale, materials selection, execution, and attention to detail are all spot on. The space is very inviting and functional, and blends seamlessly with the site and larger landscape.

silver award



Born from devastation, the Santo Tomas landscape was transformed into a sanctuary of resilience and renewal. Following a catastrophic mudslide, the site demanded extensive restoration, including stabilizing eroded slopes, improving drainage, and reviving soil health. The design blends ecological recovery with serene beauty, integrating native and drought-tolerant plantings, wildlife-supporting garden zones, and a reimagined Asian-influenced retreat beneath mature oaks. Functional elements like a retention basin, dry creek bed, and permeable pathways ensure long-term sustainability while enhancing the site's natural flow. The result is a landscape that not only heals the land but offers a peaceful, biodiverse haven rooted in the spirit of place.

SANTO TOMAS

Residential Category Over \$100,000
Project Location: Montecito, California
Zone: 10b/11a

Trace Robinson

Website: www.tracerobinsonlandscape.com
Firm Location: Santa Barbara, California

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LEPERE STUDIO, HOLLY LEPERE



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

Color extravaganza! I love the use of foliar and floral texture and color throughout the project, enticing the viewer to appreciate every vantage. The grand entrance is nicely done, and the hardscape (fieldstone, flagstone) marries beautifully to the house and is well-designed and executed.

DESIGNER TIP: *"I like to design gardens that engage all the senses through fragrance, color, and texture. I often incorporate fruiting trees for their seasonal interest—from their fragrant blossoms to the fruit they bear and the changing color of their leaves. Including edible plants also supports pollinators, especially when paired with water features that provide both a source of water and a sense of serenity. I view the garden from every angle, striving to create a cohesive story that unfolds from different points of view." – Trace Robinson*

silver award

SEASIDE VILLA

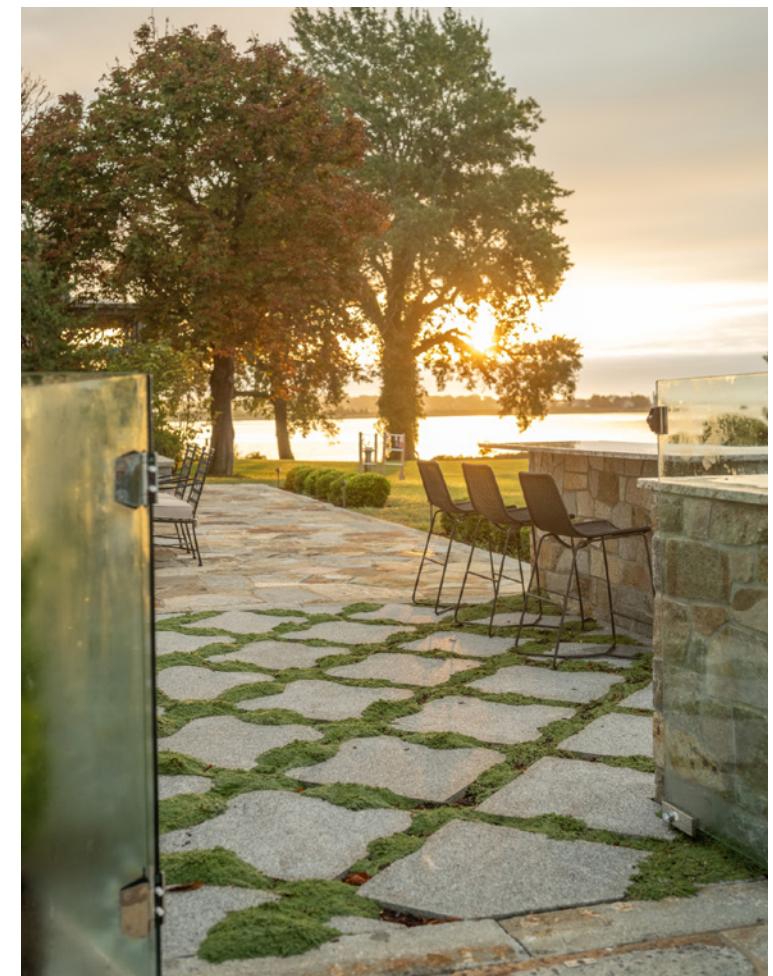
Residential Category Over \$100,000
Project Location: Guilford, Connecticut
Zone: 7a

Donna Christensen, Designer, Christensen Landscape Services

Website: www.christensenlandscape.com
Firm Location: Northford, Connecticut

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NEIL LANDINO

This coastal estate was reimagined as a refined European-inspired retreat shaped by constraint and creativity. With ocean winds, salt spray, and strict setback limitations, the design team faced a complex challenge: deliver a luxurious pool, spa, and expanded entertaining spaces without compromising the home's panoramic views. The solution, a side-yard pool anchored by hand-selected European tile and surrounded by stonework echoing the original masonry, transformed limited space into a flowing, old-world sanctuary. Elegant hardscapes, a vibrant cutting garden, and low-profile plantings maintain the home's coastal sightlines while adding texture, color, and warmth. Every element, from reclaimed granite curbing to the mosaic fire pit terrace, supports a timeless design vision rooted in beauty, function, and coastal resilience.



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

The scalable, spacious backyard enhances the residence while not stealing the attention of the coastal view. Kudos for making a stone selection that harmonizes with the house and for keeping the primary view to the water simple and uncluttered. Excellent decision to move the pool to the side of the house and the cooking/dining area out of the main view.

silver award



Pools just aren't built along Ivanhoe Drive above the Silver Lake Reservoir. This treacherous hillside, however, defied the odds. With steep elevation changes, dense overgrowth, and a prehistoric sedimentary riverbed, the site posed extreme challenges. Three 20-foot caissons anchor the pool into bedrock, finished with cobalt PebbleTec, deep green Tunisian tile, and Grecian travertine decking, all framed by glass railings to preserve sweeping views of downtown L.A. The landscape honors the 1920s Mediterranean bungalow aesthetic, using repurposed stone, brick, and concrete to define tiered planting and firepit areas. From a pergola-shaded entertainment space to flowering maples and agave gardens cascading down the slope, every element balances structural ingenuity with lush, old-world charm, turning an impossible site into a hillside oasis.



DESIGNER TIP: "Don't get attached to anything. Let the landscape, the engineering, and the budget show you the design." – Kevin Maynard

SILVER LAKE PROJECT

Residential Category Over \$100,000
Project Location: Los Angeles, California
Zone: 10b

KRM Landscapes

Website: www.krmlandscapes.com
Firm Location: Glendale, California

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JIMI SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY

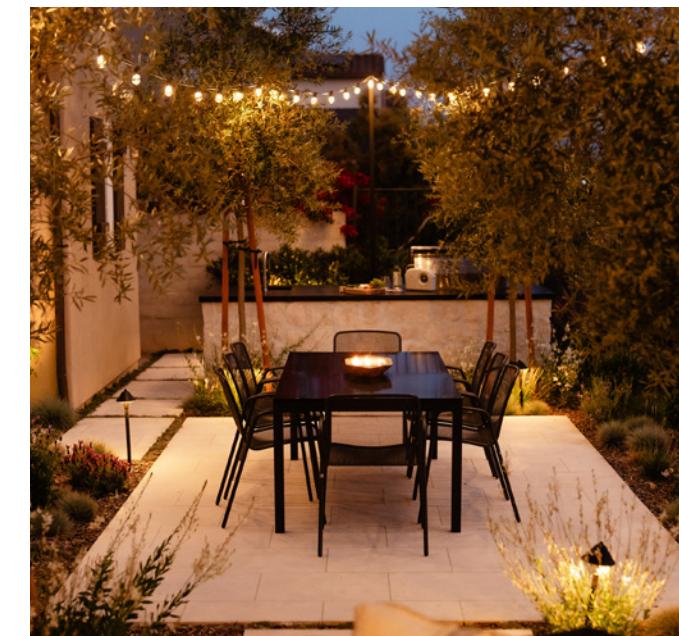
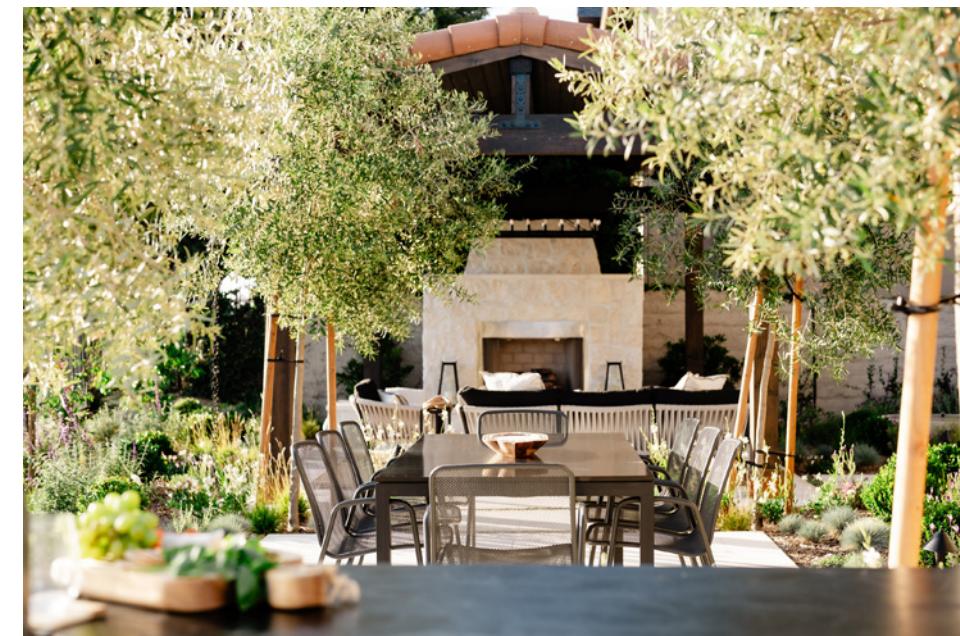


JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

This project is a great example of how constrained sites can be maximized to meet client wishes with varying surface types, luxurious amenities, and a creative approach to planting. Excellent job fitting lots of varied uses into a really difficult site, all with good flow, nice hardscape palette, blending of old and new, and maintaining the panoramic view.



silver award



SPANISH CALIFORNIA

Residential Category Over \$100,000
Project Location: Ladera Ranch, California
Zone: 10b

Living Gardens Landscape Design

Website: www.livinggardenslandscapedesign.com
Firm Location: Laguna Hills, California

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SARA FRANCE AT SHAY-STUDIOS.COM



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

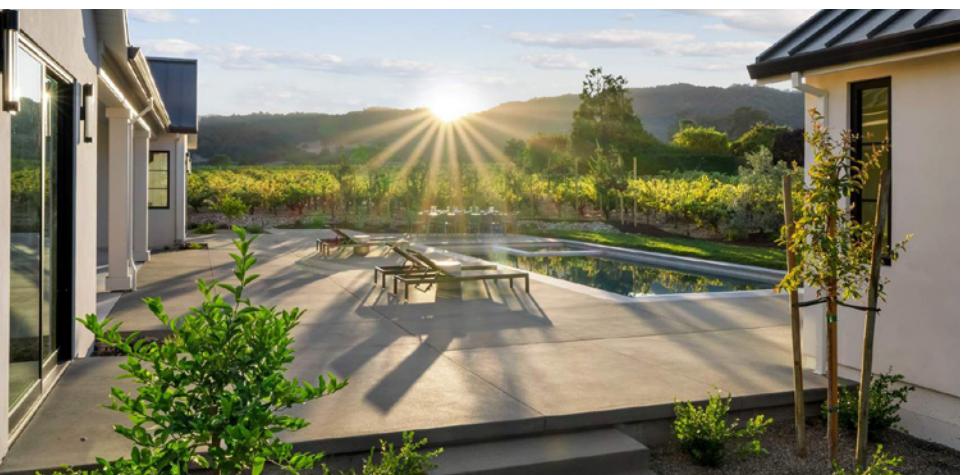
What an improvement to the space! Nicely done. The new space is beautiful, elegant, and inviting. It ticks all the boxes the client asked for and is an excellent solution for a small living area.



silver award



Set on a historic dry-farmed vineyard between the Sonoma and Mayacama Mountains, this project fulfills the client's dream of a wine country home that blends seamlessly with its surroundings. The redesigned south-sloping front yard features a modern farmhouse aesthetic, with a graceful entry, relaxing pool terrace, and elegant entertaining spaces that are all carefully integrated into the vineyard landscape to preserve grape production and maximize framed views. Fire-smart materials, low-water-use plantings, and a smart irrigation system were essential components in creating a resilient landscape on this drought- and fire-prone valley floor. A thoughtful drainage system redirects rainwater into stone-lined swales and planting zones, reducing runoff and recharging groundwater. The designer led a collaborative team, overseeing every detail from site planning and planting to coordination with local agencies and contractors.



VINEYARD DREAM

Residential Category Over \$100,000
Project Location: Sonoma, California
Zone: 9b

BK Landscape Design

Website: www.bklandscapedesign.com
Firm Location: Petaluma, California

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BKLD



DESIGNER TIP:

"Sometimes less is more. You can add by subtracting." – Brian Klein

JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

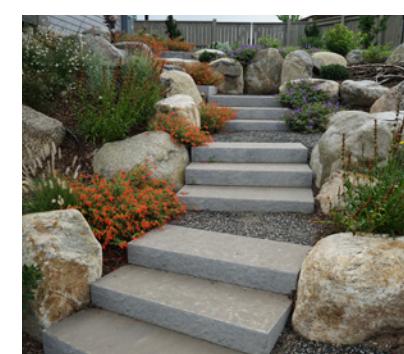
This elegant, restrained, thoughtful, site-appropriate solution fulfills the client's program beautifully. The project blends very well with the setting and architecture, and the design honors the intent of every farmhouse: highly functional, hard-working, pragmatic, nothing frivolous – and beautiful in its simplicity.

silver award



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

Kudos for making the most of a challenging site, executing the client's program creatively, and integrating play elements seamlessly into the landscape, all with a light environmental footprint.



WILDLIFE SANCTUARY MEETS NATURE PLAY

Residential Category Over \$100,000
Project Location: Louisville, Colorado
Zone: 6a

Wild Heritage Gardens

Website: www.wildheritagegardens.com
Firm Location: Boulder, Colorado

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHANTE ASH



As avid birdwatchers, the clients envisioned a landscape that would attract a variety of bird species and wildlife by offering natural food sources, water, and shelter— while also providing play areas for their children that seamlessly integrate with the natural surroundings. The design embraces the site's natural topography to create a multi-tiered outdoor environment that balances habitat creation with engaging play spaces. A Buffalograss lawn crowns the upper level, while stone steps lead to a mid-tier play area featuring a slide, sandbox, and native berry plantings. At the lowest level, winding paths connect a variety of interactive features from a firepit and dry streambeds to a willow tunnel, climbing wall, and reading nook all woven together into a continuous loop. Native plantings, brush piles, and a boulder water feature support local wildlife, creating a landscape that's as ecologically rich as it is imaginative.

bronze award



Tucked into a challenging hillside site with steep slope restrictions, setback limitations, and a narrow building envelope, this backyard project required thoughtful design to turn constraints into opportunities. The homeowners envisioned a private, garden-like retreat with space for dining, lounging, a fire feature, and poolside fun with their grandkids—all while preserving their third-floor meadow view. The result is a modern yet inviting landscape where clean lines and layered plantings soften hardscapes and guide movement across terraced levels. A gas fire table anchors the seating area overlooking the pool and sunset-lit meadow, while floating steps and subtle lighting bring a sense of elegance and ease. Every element, from tree placement to stormwater management, was carefully planned and collaboratively executed to ensure functionality, beauty, and a deep connection to the surrounding landscape.



A CURVED APPROACH

Residential Category Over \$100,000

Project Location: Kennett Square, Pennsylvania

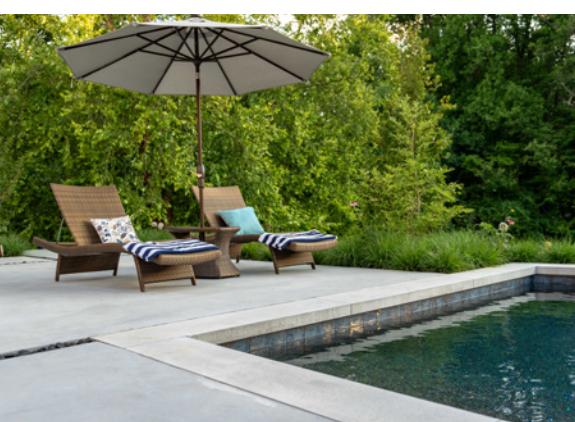
Zone: 7

GreenRoots Design Firm

Website: www.greenrootsdesignfirm.com

Firm Location: Kennett Square, Pennsylvania

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RUTT CREATIVE



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

The use of curved lines is a beautiful and effective transition from the house to the meadow beyond the pool. The open fence is a nice separation without being a visual barrier. My favorite feature is the curvilinear bed of perennials that wraps the pool. Overall, a gorgeous and functional transformation that will be enjoyed by the clients.

bronze award

CREEKSIDE HARMONY

Residential Category Over \$100,000

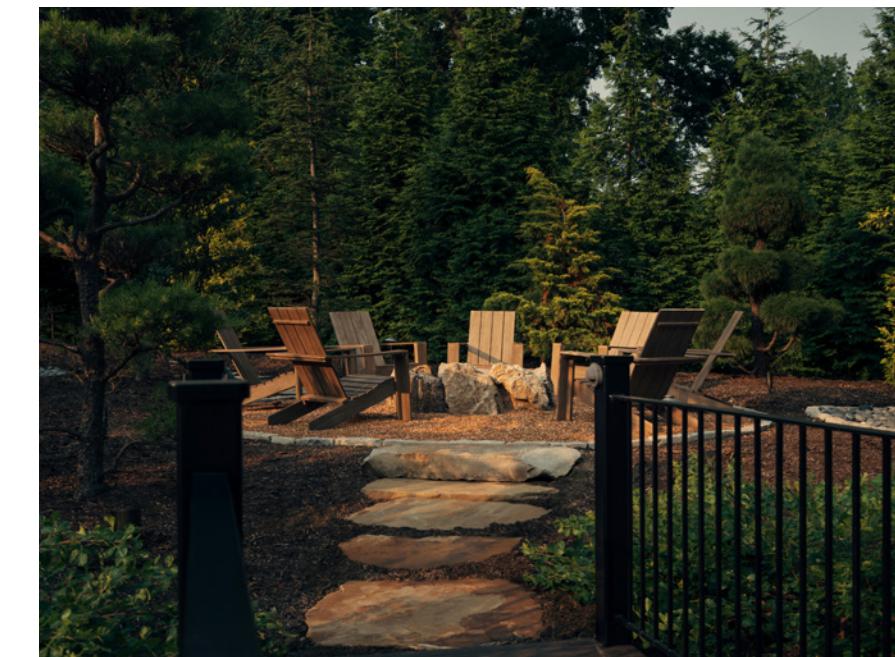
Project Location: St. Louis, Missouri

Zone: 6a/6b

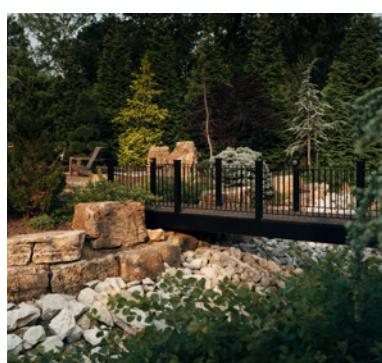
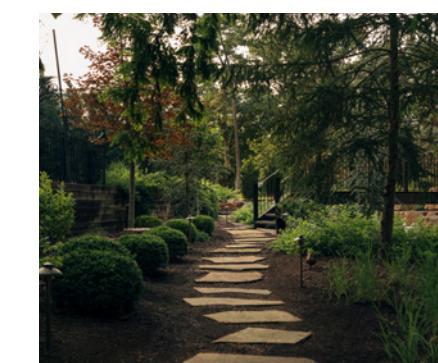
Frisella Landscape Group

Website: www.frisellandscapegroup.com

Firm Location: Richmond Heights, Missouri



Where winters bite and hardy perennials thrive, a fragmented backyard on a corner lot was transformed into a private, multi-functional retreat. The design embraced the natural landscape, turning a once-problematic creek into a focal point with boulder terraces and flowing pathways that unify the space. Layered plantings and specimen trees shield the yard from view, while fire pits, play areas, and a tranquil water feature invite family connection and outdoor living. Sustainability guided every step, with native plantings, eco-conscious materials, and a design that lets nature lead.

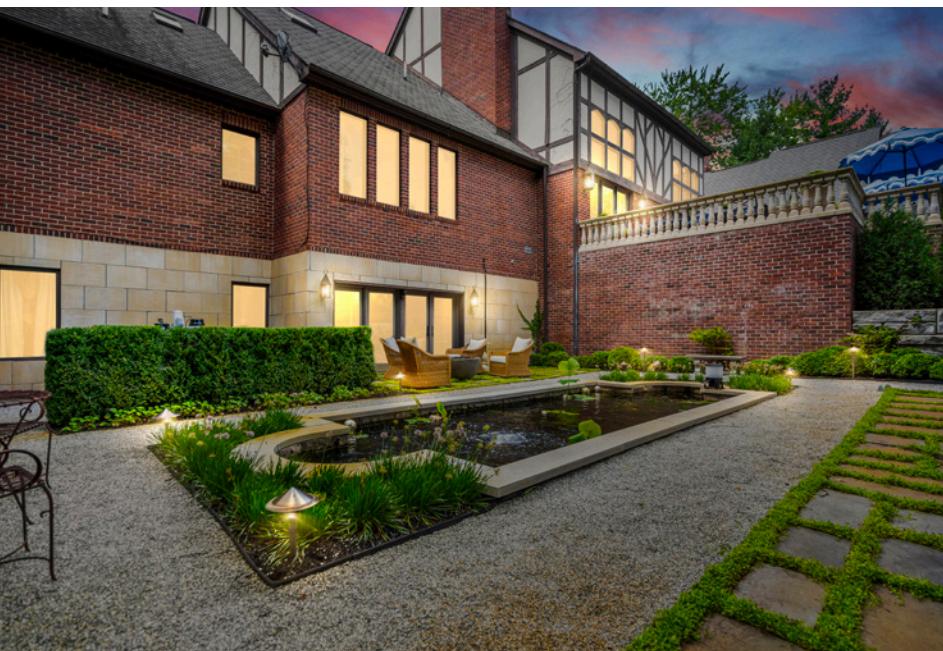


"The AHA! moment was realizing how completely the space had been transformed. What was once an unstable, unattractive area along the creek became a magical destination for the family—a place where they can gather, play, and truly enjoy being outdoors. The design turned a forgotten piece of the property into the heart of their home life, layered with beauty and function. To me, that's what made it award-worthy: the way the project erased the memory of what was there before." — Justin Verbryck

JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

Excellent choice and use of well-scaled boulders and hardscape materials to unify the disconnected space. The functional and inviting spaces meet the client's needs, and the use of conifers throughout demonstrates a sense of place and enhances the existing surroundings. Overall, an excellent transition of a mostly unusable space into a family gathering place in a natural setting. Very nice work.

bronze award

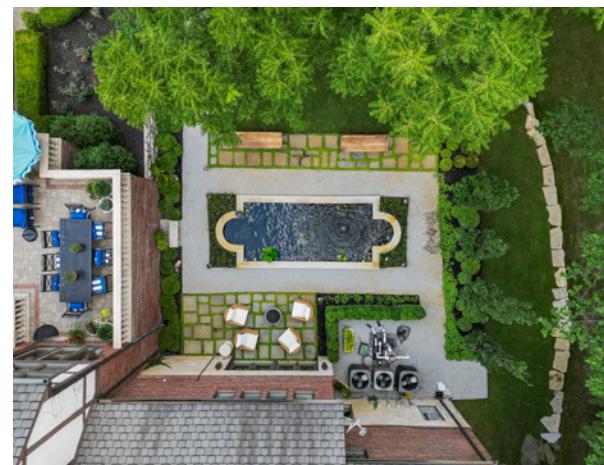


DON'T BE KOI

Residential Category Over \$100,000
Project Location: Northfield, Michigan
Zone: 6a

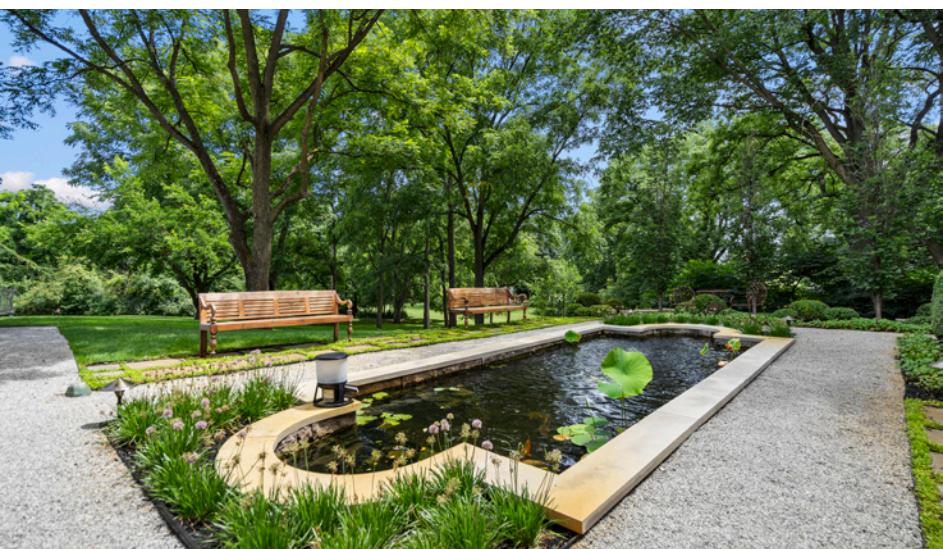
Great Lakes Landscape Design

Website: www.GreatLakesLandscapeDesign.com
Firm Location: Oak Park, Michigan



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

This is an amazing transformation. I love the materials used for the seating areas against the gravel around the pond itself. The see-through metal furnishings (a favorite element) work so well with the brick and keep sight lines open.



bronze award

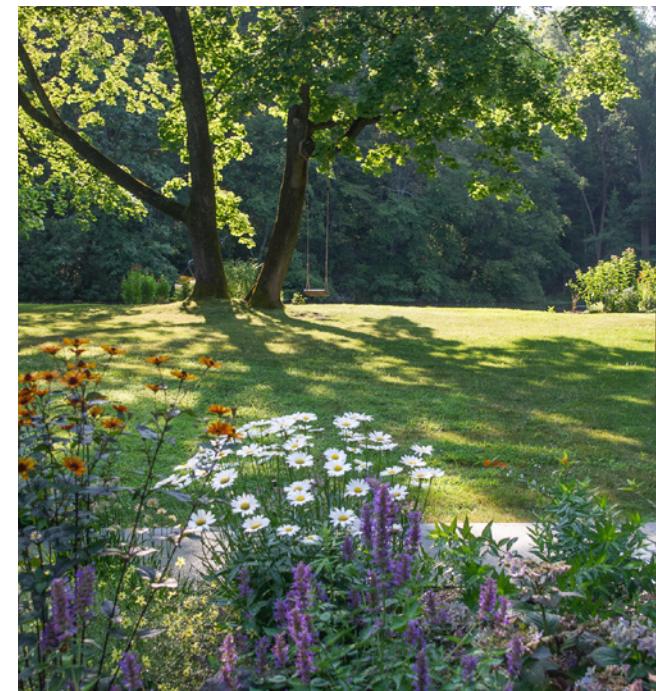


MODERN LIVING ON THE WATERFRONT OF THE WILD WORLD
Residential Category Over \$100,000
Project Location: Dobbs Ferry, New York
Zone: 7a/7b

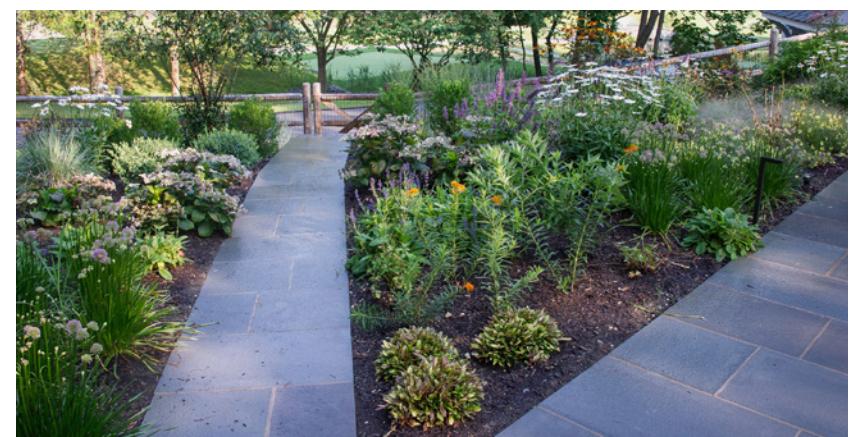
Kathryn Saphire and Jay Archer of Green Jay Landscape Design

Website: www.greenjaylandscaping.com
Firm Location: Rye, New York

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICHARD POMERANTZ



Following extensive home renovations, this property needed a landscape that could both heal and thrive. The site, marked by compacted soils and varied sun exposure, features a prominent man-made pond in the front yard and a steep backyard slope bordering a golf course. The clients sought a master plan that embraced a naturalistic aesthetic while solving practical concerns, such as erosion, stormwater runoff, and a lack of privacy. Native plants were the foundation of the design, creating biodiverse habitat corridors, stabilizing the slope, and filtering nutrient-laden runoff before it entered the pond. Thoughtful stormwater strategies like bioswales and improved drainage infrastructure were paired with organic, wildlife-friendly plantings, resulting in a lush, resilient landscape that blends ecological function with seasonal beauty.



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

This project manages water and views well while providing a tremendous respite for the residents and wildlife.

DESIGNER TIP: *"The best designs are collaborations drawing on multiple people's perspectives and a willingness to be flexible and adaptable when laying materials out in the field."* – Kathryn Saphire & Jay Archer

bronze award

SPANISH REVIVAL LANDSCAPE

Residential Category Over \$100,000

Project Location: Oakland, California

Zone: 10a, 10b and 9b

ART GARDEN DESIGN INC.

Website: www.artgardendesign.net

Firm Location: Oakland, California

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALANA CORPUZ



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

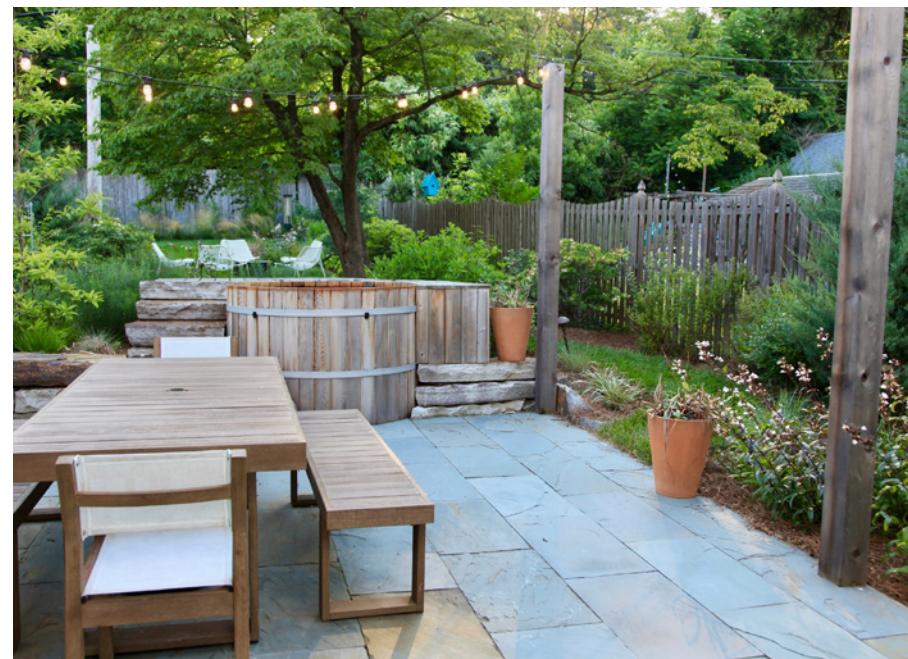
A small and effective outdoor living area. Kudos for incorporating edibles and client favorites into the design and including a variety of low-water-demand plantings.



Set on a steeply sloped lot, this split-level property posed both challenges and opportunities for transforming underutilized terrain into inviting outdoor spaces. The design blends Spanish and Mediterranean influences with custom tilework and thoughtful landscaping to create seamless transitions between indoor and outdoor living. The clients wanted functional outdoor areas that extended their home's livability by incorporating water and fire elements, lounge zones, a cottage-style garden, and guest-friendly front yard features like parking and a welcoming courtyard. Key highlights include a striking mosaic-tiled water feature in the front courtyard, a central backyard patio surrounded by dining and lounge areas, and a material palette that reinforces a cohesive architectural language. Environmentally, the project emphasizes sustainability through native and drought-tolerant planting, drip irrigation, intelligent drainage systems, and energy-efficient LED lighting designed to enhance both form and function across the multi-level site.



bronze award



THE ARCHITECT'S OASIS

Residential Category Over \$100,000

Project Location: Merion Station, Pennsylvania

Zone: 7b

Rebecca Dragonetti & Refugia Design

Website: www.refugiadesign.com

Firm Location: Narberth, Pennsylvania

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KAYLA FELL



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

This project is nicely executed, cohesive and pleasing. Contrasting shades of green and texture in the front yard is very successful, with finer textures near the house providing added depth to the composition. The space is very livable and welcoming, and I love the details of the deck boards scribed around the shape of the top stone step at the hot tub.



visit the website at
www.apld.org

2025 award winners

Planting Design





PHOTOGRAPH BY ROB CARDILLO

JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

Beautiful layering of plant materials with well-thought-out seasonal transition of colors and textures. I appreciate the repetition of plant materials to create a unified design and how the meadow below the slope appears to blend seamlessly into it.



PHOTOGRAPH BY ROB CARDILLO



PHOTOGRAPH BY DONALD PELL



PHOTOGRAPH BY ROB CARDILLO

gold award

ARDROSSAN FARM

Planting Design Category

Project Location: Villanova, Pennsylvania

Zone: 7a

Donald Pell Gardens

Website: www.donaldpell.com

Firm Location: Phoenixville, Pennsylvania

While this one-acre site presented many challenges, the designers were able to bring the client's vision of a dynamic, naturalistic garden that encourages interaction and exploration to life. The design intent focused on creating a progression of immersive spaces, enticing the homeowners to journey through and discover a constantly evolving garden.

The site, densely planted with a mix of native and cosmopolitan species, mimics natural ecologies to promote soil remediation, improve water infiltration, and support animal and insect habitats. From the entrance featuring Oak, Cornelian Cherry, and Ironwood trees underplanted with layers of spring bulbs, warm- and cool-season grasses, and flowering perennials to the groves of *Carpinus* and *Cercis* along the western edge, every corner was carefully designed and remediated with intentional plantings.

gold award

FROM POOL TO POLLINATOR

Planting Design Category

Project Location: Bethesda, Maryland

Zone: 7b

Backyard Bounty

Website: www.backyardbounty.net

Firm Location: Middletown, Maryland

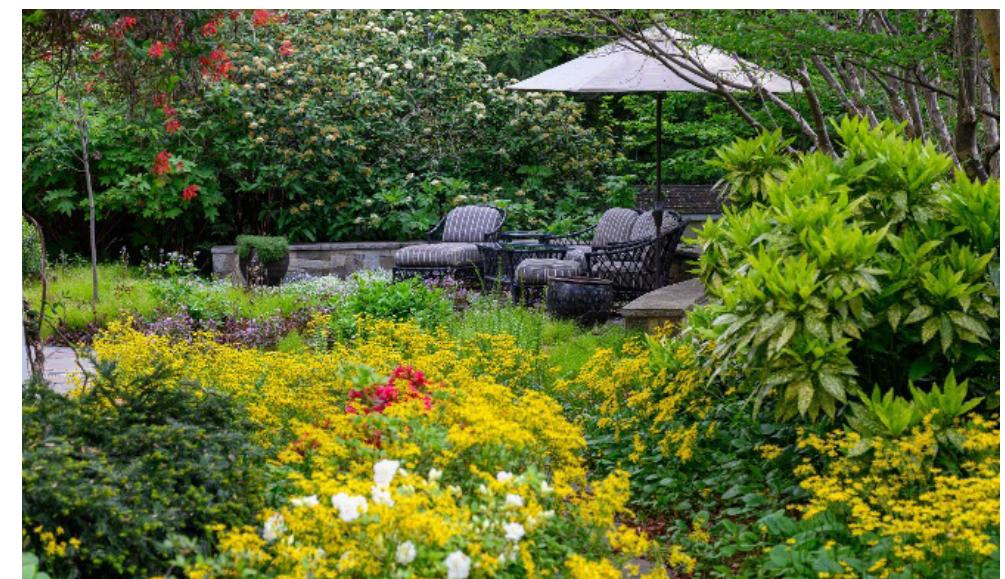
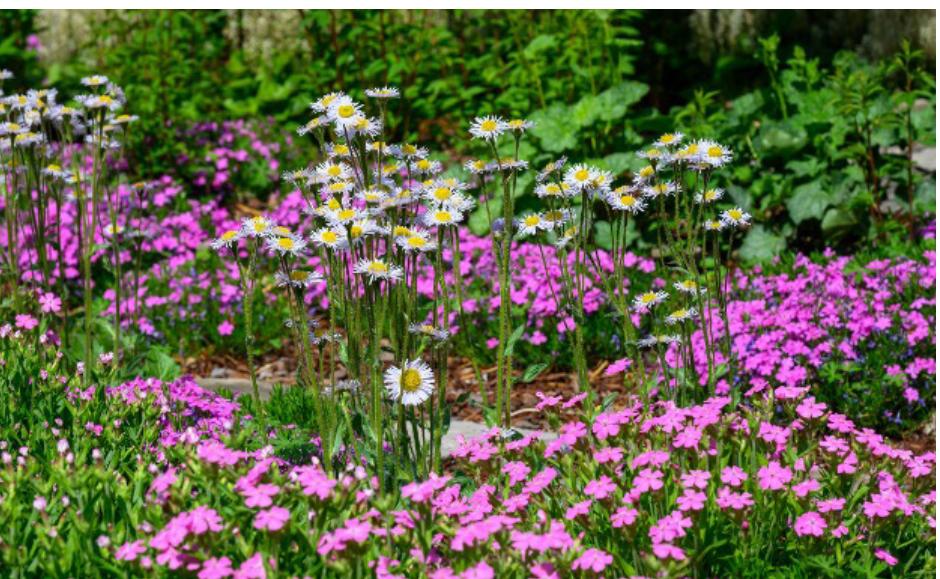
PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS WALKER

On a suburban lot in Bethesda, Maryland, a dramatic transformation unfolded in two stages. The backyard, once dominated by a disused swimming pool and plagued by stormwater runoff and compacted soils, was reimagined as a native plant haven designed to support biodiversity and manage water on-site. The design team regarded the landscape, added swales for drainage, and installed a custom-drilled boulder fountain to serve as a water source for migratory birds. Impressed by the success of the back garden, the homeowner commissioned a second phase to replace the traditional front lawn with a habitat-rich landscape that incorporated existing features like a mature Japanese maple and roses. In just two years, the property evolved from ecologically barren to a vibrant, functional, and visually cohesive sanctuary for pollinators, birds, and people alike.



DESIGNER TIP:

"Pay attention to the lines that carry you through a garden and the focal points and adjacent features that can trick your eyes into feeling that a space is expansive and connected to nature while remaining private for the client." – Edamarie Mattei



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

An abundance of texture and color – a pollinator's dream! Great use of a variety of sedges and groundcovers to create a nice transition to a flowering backyard.

silver award



BEACH HOUSE REVIVAL

Planting Design Category
Project Location: East Hampton, New York
Zone: 7b

McDermott Landscape Design

Website: www.mcdermottlandscapedesign.com
Firm Location: Portsmouth, New Hampshire

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SCOTT MCDERMOTT



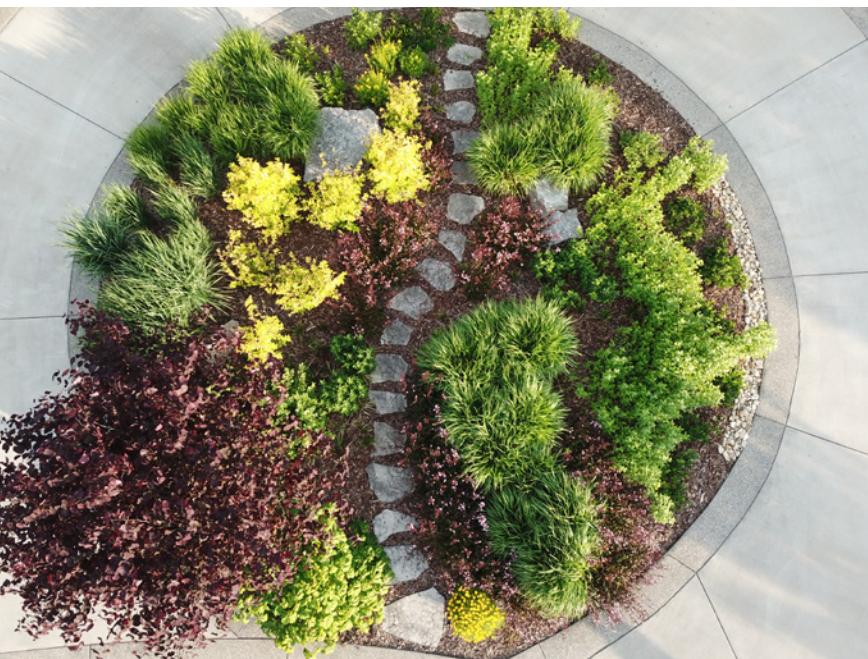
DESIGNER TIP: *"Listen to your clients and really try to learn what they are looking to get out of their space. Then use this, combined with careful site analysis, to guide your design decisions." – Scott McDermott & Jessica Engle*

JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

What a nice transformation and beautiful upgrade from the sheared shrubs of before! I certainly respect and endorse the designer's intent to remove turf and produce a more sustainable planting.



silver award



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

A great transition from a very boring entry to one filled with color and texture. I really liked the calmness by the front door of the Allium and Carex during the summer, allowing the eye to focus on the front door.



WILDLIFE WONDER

Planting Design Category
Project Location: Frankfort, Kentucky
Zone: 6b

Andrea Wilson Mueller, Inside Out Landscape Design

Website: www.kentuckylandscapedesign.com
Firm Location: Frankfort, Kentucky

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREA WILSON MUELLER



DESIGNER TIP: *"Don't be afraid to layer and make complex designs!" – Andrea Wilson Mueller*

This property, once a blank slate with heavy clay soil, steep grade changes, and intense sun exposure, has been transformed into a vibrant, ecologically rich landscape. Backing onto forested land and green space with a creek at the rear, the site posed both challenges and opportunities. The clients envisioned a phased installation centered on native plants, pollinator support, and wildlife habitat, along with a more functional layout. A circular driveway was introduced to improve access, reduce porch steps, and frame the front entrance with cohesive, multi-seasonal plantings. Layered native species, flowering perennials, forest-edge plantings, and dry-stacked stonework now support both biodiversity and beauty, creating a sanctuary where wild turkeys, butterflies, birds, and even salamanders thrive in harmony with the landscape.

2025 award winner

Non-Residential Under \$100,000



silver award



HERBACEOUS HIGH STREET

Non-Residential Under \$100,000

Project Location: Wayne, Pennsylvania

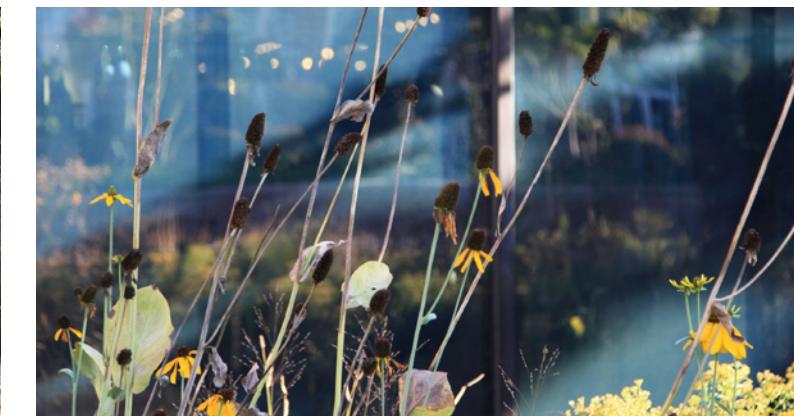
Zone: 7b

**Melissa Horner &
Refugia Design**

Website: www.refugiadesign.com

Firm Location: Narberth, Pennsylvania

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KAYLA FELL



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

A welcome redesign of the building surrounds with well-planned perennial and grass planting for multi-seasonal interest. The *Panicum* provided a nice unifying element to the design, and it certainly embraces environmental sensitivity.



SAVE THE DATE!

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September 10 – 14, 2026 in Columbus, Ohio

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September 10 – 14, 2026 | Columbus, Ohio



2025 award winners

Show Gardens



gold award

ERA OF ADAPTATION: CHIC SUSTAINABILITY

Show Gardens Category

Project Location: San Francisco Bay Area, California

Zone: 9

Shireen Zia, CPLD/ EcoGardens Landscape Design, LLC

Website: www.ecogardens.design

Firm Location: Los Altos, California

What began as a vision for a pollinator-friendly, low-water garden unfolded into a living showcase of adaptability, resilience, and spring's vibrant energy. Beneath the dappled shade of mature sycamores, over 800 plants were artfully arranged into hydrozones, supporting bees, birds, and butterflies all while minimizing water use. Unexpected cold weather reshaped the final layout, prompting quick-thinking substitutions that stayed true to the theme, "Spring's Splendor." From a recirculating water feature to heated, eco-conscious furniture and a reimaged use of Bordo pavers, every detail invited visitors to think beyond the ordinary and embrace sustainable, beautiful design.



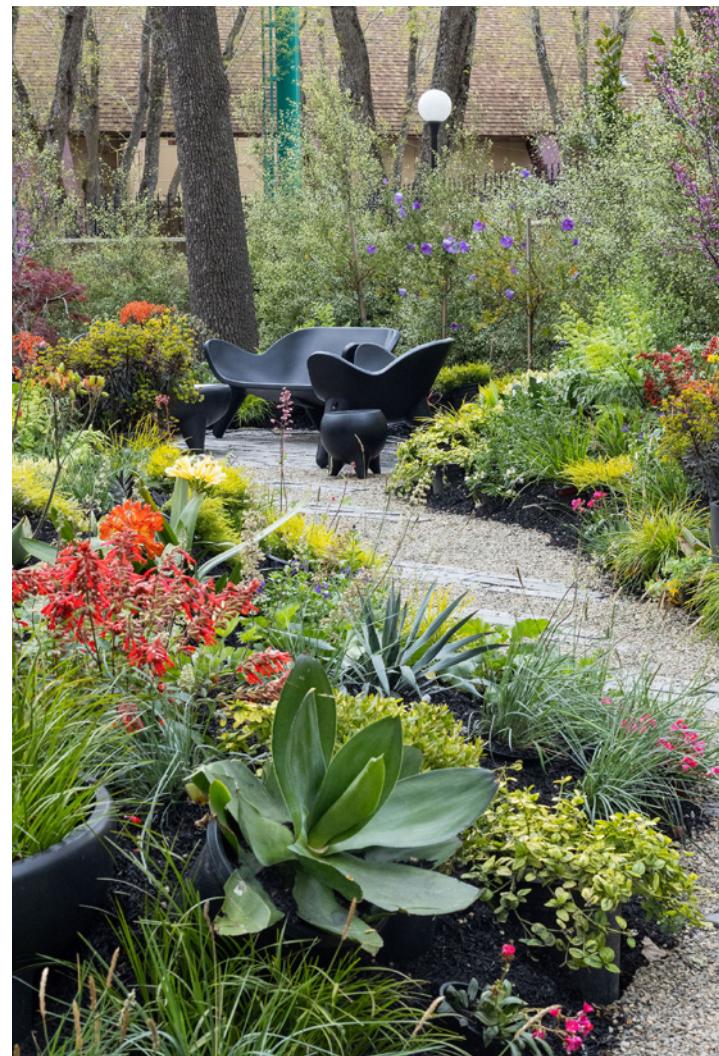
PHOTOGRAPH BY LINDA PETERS



PHOTOGRAPH BY SHIREEN ZIA

JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

A wonderful place, space and case for a working greenhouse and garden full of color. The blend of textures and color knitted throughout the space is beautiful.



PHOTOGRAPH BY LINDA PETERS



PHOTOGRAPH BY SHIREEN ZIA

gold award

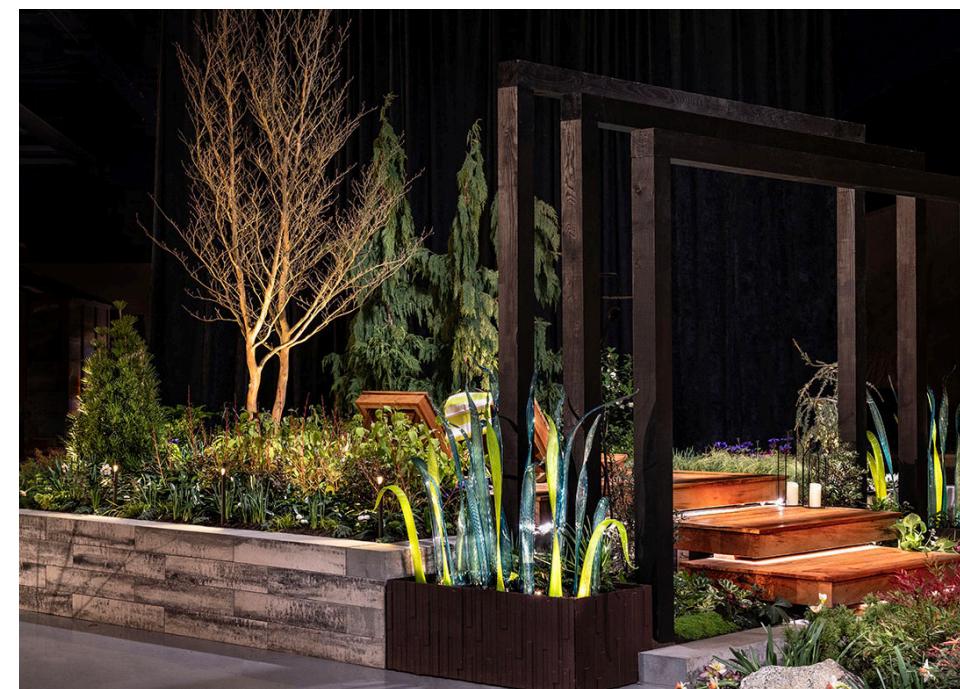
DESIGNER TIP:

“Function can be beautiful. Multi-functional spaces add another dimension to a space that is very dynamic and can add an element of delight and surprise.” – Kryssie Maybay



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

The layout of the space was unique and inviting, achieving the designer's intent of breaking out of the rectangular garden room. The orientation makes the space feel expansive in a confined space.



THE GATHERING GARDEN

Show Gardens Category

Project Location: Seattle, Washington

Kismet Design LLC

Website: www.kismetdesignco.com

Firm Location: Lake Stevens, Washington

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DOREEN L. WYNJA

Created for the 2025 Northwest Flower and Garden Show, The Gathering Garden invites visitors to imagine their own loved ones lounging poolside, grilling dinner, or curling up by the fire. Every detail was designed with togetherness in mind: from built-in tigerwood lounge chairs that tuck seamlessly into the deck, to floating underlit steps leading to an outdoor shower and firepit. With a restrained plant palette and pops of aqua and lime green echoed in art, accessories, and even pebble joints, the space balances modern elegance with cozy, playful touches. The versatile layout breaks from traditional show garden grids, drawing guests in and encouraging them to linger, explore, and dream of the memories they might make in a garden like this.

silver award



Set within the inherited landscape of a former Air Force pilot, this design honors the lingering presence of a life shaped by service. Anchored by a symbolic broken aircraft structure, the site offers a place of reflection, illuminating the unseen struggles veterans may carry post-service. The myriad of plantings, including *Tilia Cordata*, *Ficus hillii*, *Corymbia maculata*, *Angophora*, and *Cupressus sempervirens*, create a sense of healing and permanence.

A MOMENT IN TIME

Show Gardens Category
Project Location: Melbourne, Australia
Zone: 10b

Peter Donegan Garden Design

Website: www.doneganlandscaping.com
Firm Location: Dublin, Ireland

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER DONEGAN GARDEN DESIGN



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

An interesting theme and composition with a variety of layers and ground development. A very symbolic garden for people who served in the military. The plane certainly projects a very anxious and haunting mood to the garden, and overtakes other aspects, such as the interesting walkway to the shop.

2025 award winners

Small Gardens



gold award



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JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

Well-conceived circulation and continuity with the architecture. A nice blend of materials and plants that complement the surroundings.



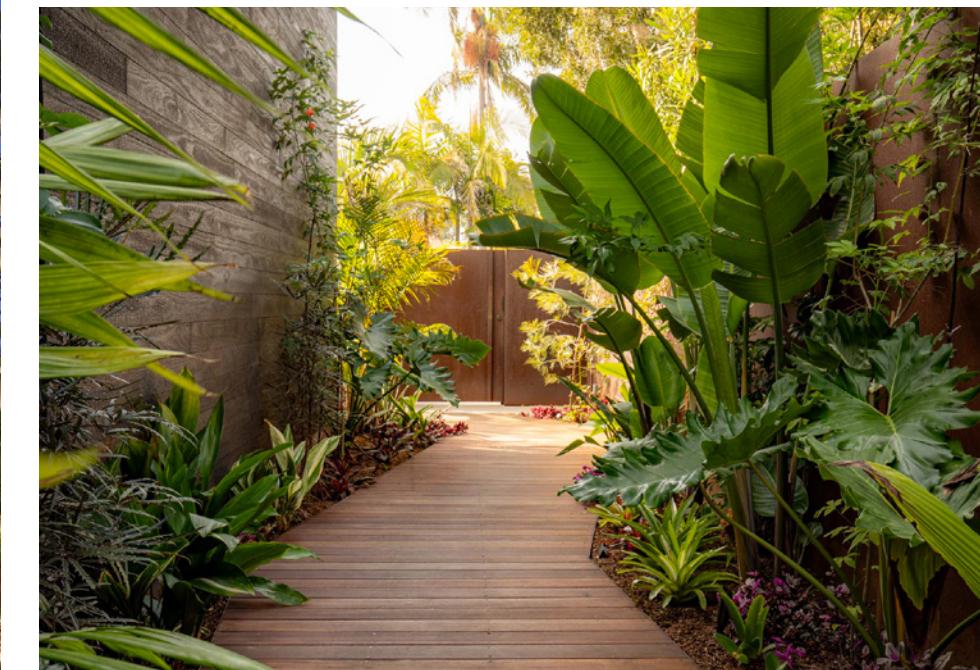
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VENICE ARCHITECTURAL

Small Gardens Category

Project Location: Venice, California

Zone: 10b

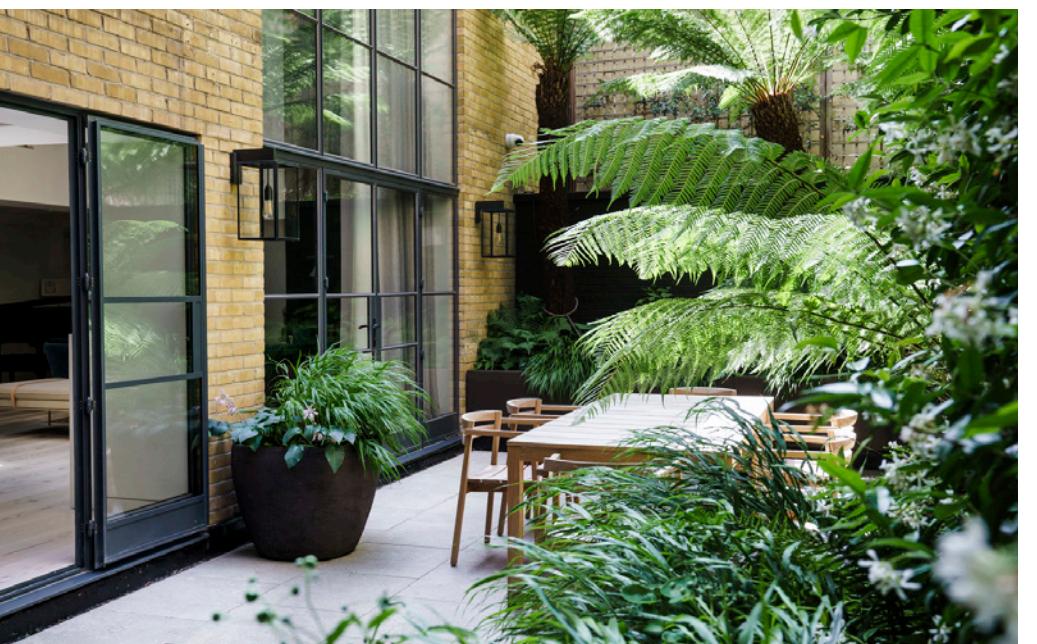
Laura Morton Design

Website: www.lauramortondesign.com

Firm Location: Los Angeles, California

Tucked behind Corten steel fencing, a sculptural home by Ehrlich Architects opens to the outdoors with sliding glass walls and decks that float above a reflecting pool. Though set on a narrow lot with minimal planting space, the home's skewed geometry and bold materials called for a landscape equally rich in character. The clients, an art-loving, tech-savvy couple, dreamed of a tropical jungle that could soften the architecture without competing with it, while also creating spaces for entertaining, lounging, and cooking. The resulting design weaves lush planting pockets, zigzag hardwood paths, and low, built-in lounging platforms seamlessly into the home's angular rhythm. Burle Marx-inspired plantings, staghorn ferns, and orchid "bombs" animate the space, while permeable surfaces, subtle lighting, and low-water strategies ground the garden in both function and beauty.

silver award



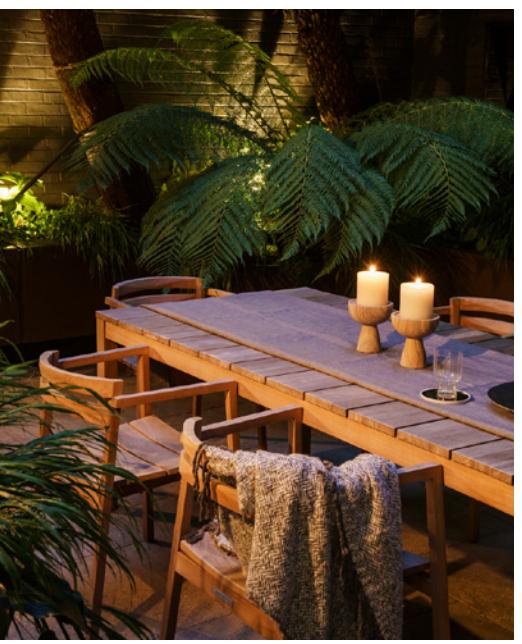
FARRINGDON COURTYARD GARDEN

Small Gardens Category
Project Location: London, UK
Zone: 9

Harris Bugg Studio

Website: www.harrisbugg.com
Firm Location: London, UK

PHOTOGRAPHS BY © RACHEL WARNE



This shady podium courtyard, once a forgotten slab of concrete, was transformed into a tranquil extension of the clients' contemporary home, offering views of immersive greenery from both kitchen doors and the balcony above. Inspired by the fern-covered meaning of "Farringdon" and the site's 19th-century history of fine metalwork, the design layers delicate tree ferns and rich bronze detailing to evoke both softness and strength. Lightweight construction and shallow soil depths demanded innovation, with tree ferns planted at staggered heights to offer privacy without blocking light. Painted brick walls, black mirrors, and carefully selected textures complete a secluded urban retreat that feels far from the rush of city life, while staying rooted in its history and place.

silver award



MALIBU DREAM
Small Gardens Category
Project Location: Pacific Palisades, Los Angeles, California
Zone: 10b

Laura Morton Design

Website: www.lauramortondesign.com
Firm Location: Los Angeles, California

PHOTOGRAPHS BY © ROSSWHITAKER2025



What began as an eroding corner property with an uninviting patio and obstructed views was reimagined into a layered, elegant retreat that grounds the expansive Mayan-Spanish home in both form and function. The redesigned patio unfolds in two levels: an upper lounge with built-in seating and a firepit, and a lower terrace off the primary suite, where a redwood hot tub nestles beneath an expanded balcony. Everywhere, texture and detail elevate the experience: colorful tile, vintage wood cabinetry, seeded pebble grout, and curving flagstone lines that echo the shoreline. With erosion addressed by Corten steel terraces and native, low-water plantings, the landscape not only anchors the home but celebrates its setting by welcoming coastal views, filtering stormwater, and inviting birds and pollinators back to the land.



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

A good, clean and clear space. The different sizes of the tree ferns is an asset to the overall design.

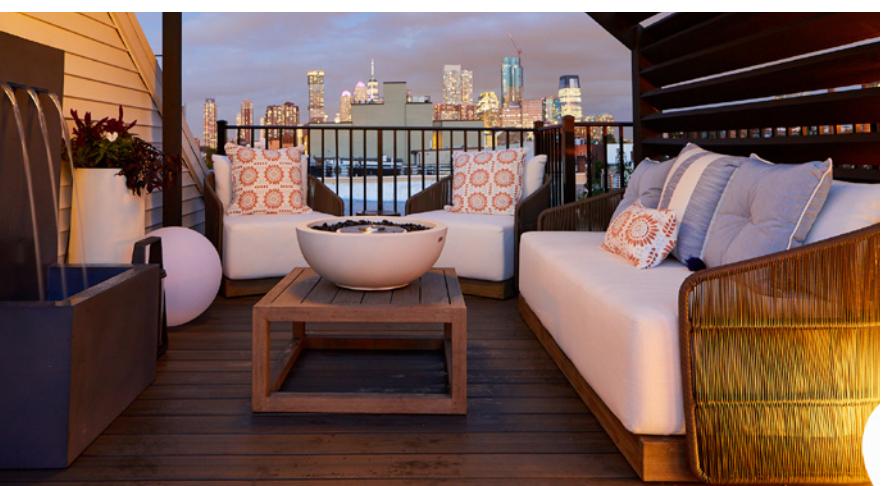
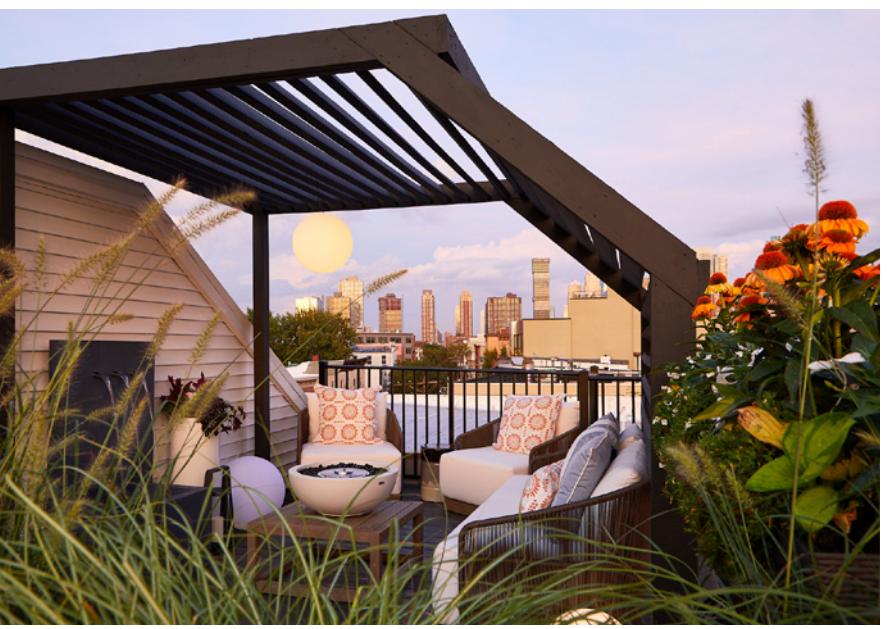


JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

Nicely detailed, planted and established with good textures and colors. The neighbor's brick wall is nicely hidden, and I like the xeric planting along the street.



silver award



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

Considering the harsh parameters of this design, the resulting space is very usable and effective. The fountain was a nice touch as it helps drown out some of the surrounding city noise.



SMALL ROOF DECK RETREAT

Small Gardens Category

Project Location: Jersey City, New Jersey

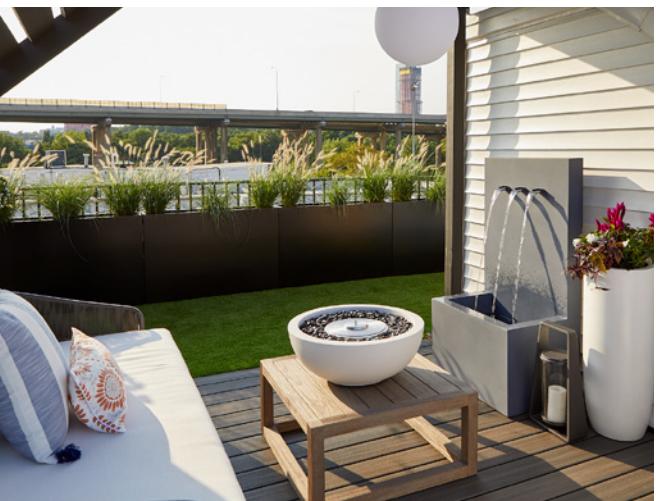
Zone: 7b

A Small Green Space

Website: www.asmallgreenspace.com

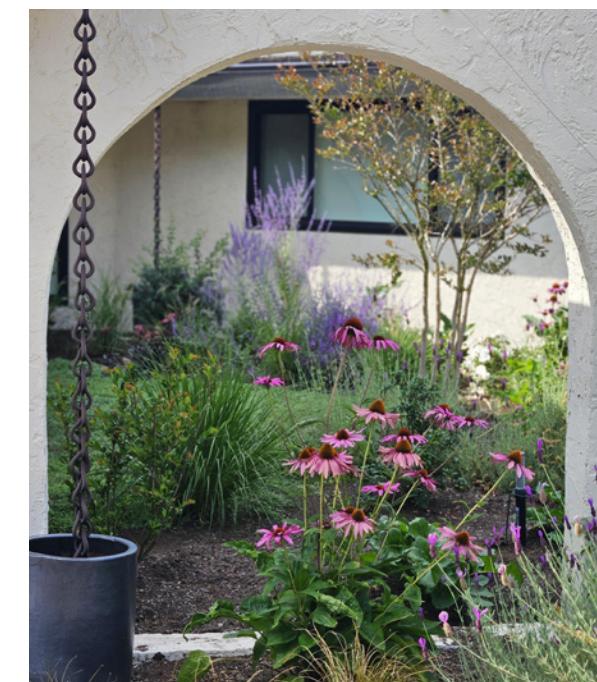
Firm Location: Jersey City, New Jersey

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MEGAN MALOY



Perched atop a newly built downtown home, this compact 275-square-foot L-shaped roof deck faced intense sun exposure, soaring daytime temperatures, and high winds, with no shade or comfort to speak of. The space's awkward layout and bulky furnishings rendered it virtually unusable despite its incredible city skyline views. The design team was tasked with transforming it into a cool, family-friendly retreat for a couple and their toddler, all while contending with weight restrictions and access challenges (four flights of stairs). A custom wood pergola with angled rafters, anchored to a newly built platform deck, became the key to adding shade without compromising the roof membrane. Light gray decking, compact furnishings, a turf play strip, low-maintenance container gardens, and a recirculating fountain completed the transformation, making the rooftop an inviting destination worth the climb.

silver award



SPANISH COURTYARD

Small Gardens Category

Project Location: Kirkland, Washington

Zone: 7b

Kismet Design LLC

Website: www.kismetdesignco.com

Firm Location: Lake Stevens, Washington

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KISMET DESIGN LLC



This Spanish-style home's courtyard had long struggled to complement the grand arched breezeway that defines its entrance. The client desired a low-maintenance, Mediterranean-inspired design that would connect the courtyard and driveway with year-round beauty, visible from both inside and outside the home. The new design introduced a carefully laid Quartzite flagstone path, a water feature framed from the living room window and layered plantings that brought softness and structure. Lavender, roses, and grasses lend a romantic, billowing effect, while evergreens like Osmanthus and Escallonia provide winter interest. Every archway now frames a thoughtfully composed view, and drought-tolerant selections bridge the sunnier driveway with the shaded courtyard, uniting the space in timeless harmony.

"I find this particular garden inspiring because of its unique style influenced by the home. I love working with varied styles and composition and it is always delightful to have a project with such a distinct style influence."
— Kryssie Maybay

JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

A beautiful reimagining of the space affording different views through separate arches. The lavender was a great plant choice and fit the architecture beautifully.

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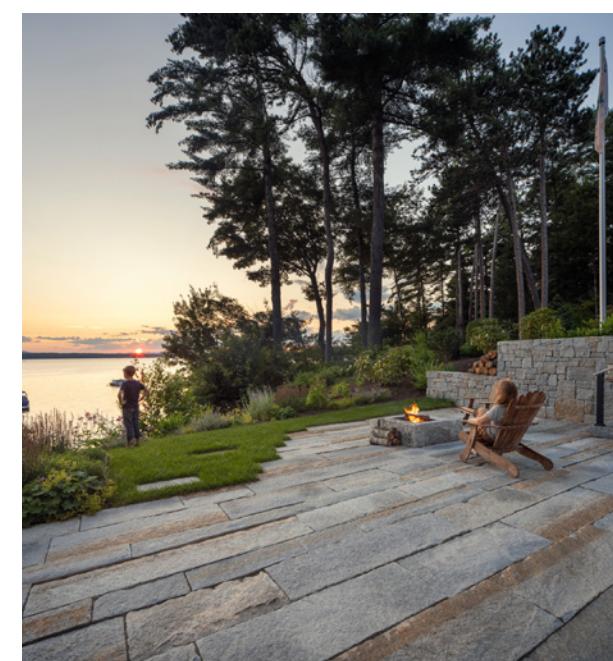
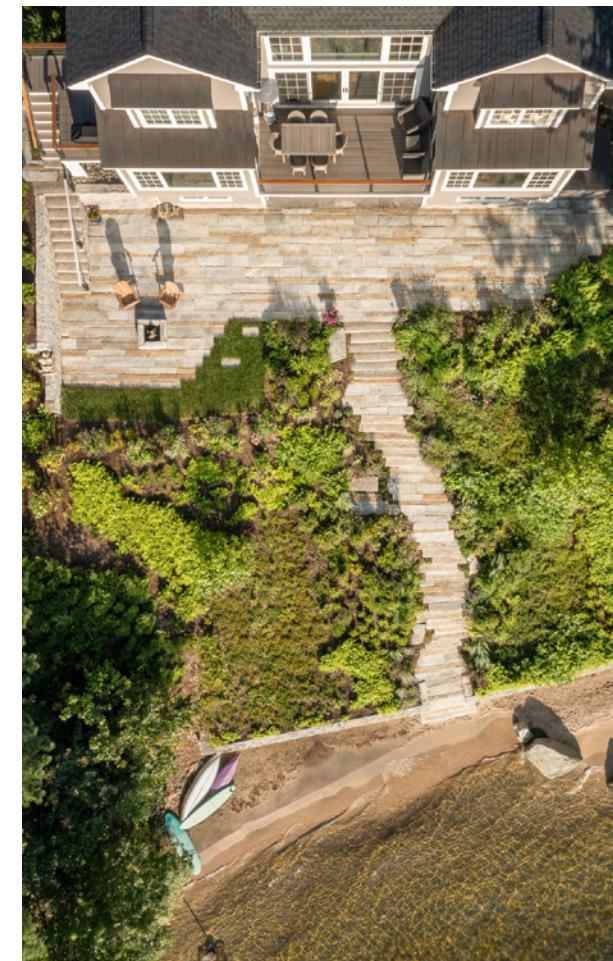
INSTAGRAM: @healthypotshealthyplanet @landscapedesigners

2025 award winners

Specialty Projects

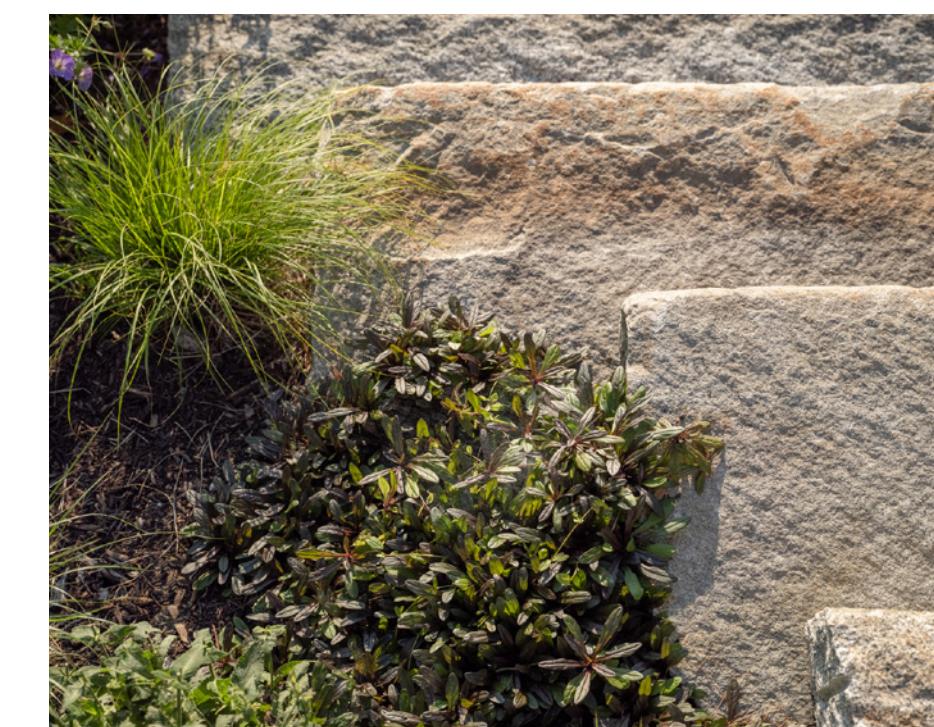


gold award



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

A wonderful site and design with excellent materials and craftsmanship. The stonework is great; the alternating bands of wider and thinner stones provide an interesting pattern to be seen from the house as well as the garden.



SEBAGO LAKE HILLSIDE GARDEN

Specialty Projects Category
Project Location: Windham, Maine
Zone: 5b

Matthew Cunningham Landscape Design LLC

Website: www.matthew-cunningham.com
Firm Location: Stoneham, Massachusetts

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TRENT BELL - TRENT BELL PHOTOGRAPHY

Set along the serene eastern shore of Sebago Lake, this once-eroded residential landscape has been transformed into a dynamic, ecologically rich retreat. What began as a series of aging terraces and thirty lawns is now a layered, biodiverse setting that gracefully navigates plantings, and carefully crafted gathering spaces come together to reflect the natural rhythms of the site while supporting both large celebrations and quiet family moments. Designed with sustainability and shoreline stewardship at its core, the project now serves as a model for lakefront restoration. It's a landscape that doesn't just sit beside the lake—it speaks to it.

gold award



SERENITY IN SPIRALS AT WELLINGTON PARK

Specialty Projects Category

Project Location: Lexington, Kentucky

Zone: 6b

Andrea Wilson Mueller, Inside Out Landscape Design

Website: www.kentuckylandscapedesign.com

Firm Location: Frankfort, Kentucky

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREA WILSON MUELLER

Beneath the dappled shade of mature trees, an underused corner of a public park has been quietly transformed into a contemplative retreat for visitors of all ages and abilities. What once was a simple turf lawn now hosts a hand-crafted stone labyrinth, anchored by a dry-stacked wall that offers seating, sensory exploration, and a subtle invitation to pause. Designed with accessibility, sustainability, and budget in mind, the space embraces the site's natural grade and tree canopy while introducing low-maintenance, nature-forward solutions. Locally sourced materials and preserved tree cover keep the design grounded in its environment, while thoughtful details like a commemorative plaque boulder reflect community collaboration. The result is a quiet, beautiful space that invites reflection, connection, and gentle movement.



DESIGNER TIP:

"Simplify when the time is right, especially when creating contemplative spaces." – Andrea Wilson Mueller

JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

A beautiful use of the space. Simple and contemplative. I appreciate the technical challenge of cutting the pavers to fit so precisely and the work to build the dry-stack stone wall. The wall also provided an essence of space and a seating area.

gold award



SPA BENEFITS AT HOME

Specialty Projects Category

Project Location: Barrington, Illinois

Zone: 5b

Larry Carnes/Reflections Water Gardens

Website: www.reflectionswatergardens.com

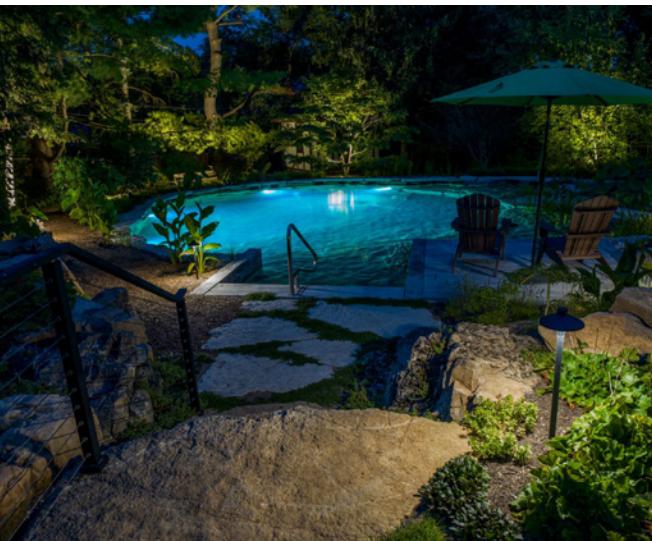
Firm Location: West Dundee, Illinois

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVE MALECKI

Tucked behind a narrow 10-foot side yard and framed by mature trees, a suburban backyard in Chicago has been reimaged as a serene, spa-like sanctuary. Despite tight access, the team carved out a space where natural beauty meets therapeutic function, centering on a beach-sand swimming pool shimmering with oxygen-rich microbubbles and flecks of mica. Raised garden beds, fragrant perennials, and a renovated waterfall enhance the sensory experience, while stone paths and soft turf invite slow, intentional movement. A separate lotus and lily pond adds a moment of stillness, blurring the line between garden and water. Designed for health, beauty, and biodiversity, the result is a private retreat that nourishes both body and soul.

JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

Truly a challenging site and a great accomplishment. It's an amazing transformation and the water feature is quite lovely.



silver award



BOULDER POND PARK

Specialty Projects Category

Project Location: Rancho Mission Viejo, California

Zone: 10b

RJM Design Group, Inc.

Website: www.rjmdesigngroup.com

Firm Location: San Juan Capistrano, California

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RJM DESIGN GROUP, INC.



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

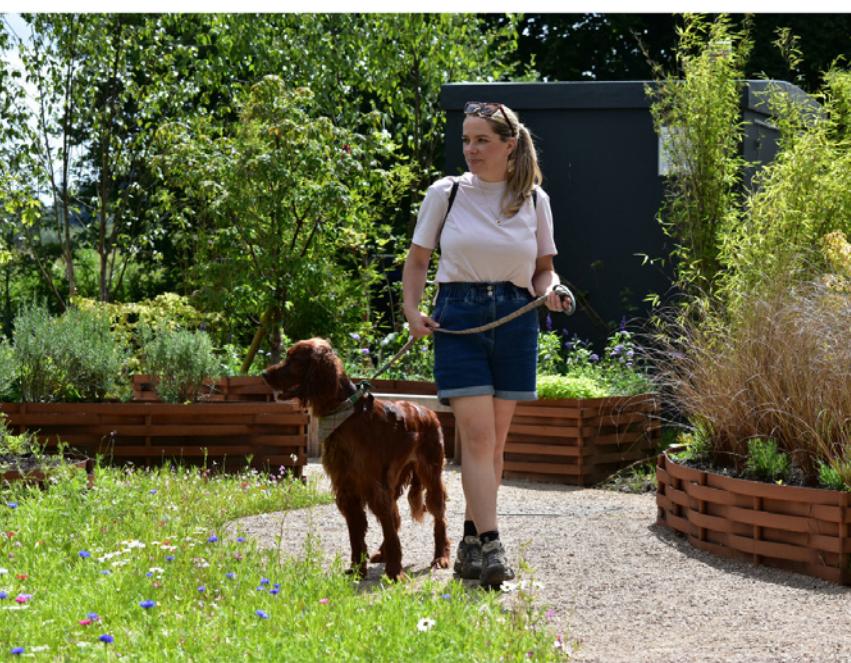
Very impressive. The site is well conceived and fits the narrative. I think it will be an asset to the community.

"This project has reminded me that our work is not just about creating physical environments but about building connections and fostering a sense of belonging among community members." – Zachary Muetting

JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

Very impressive. The site is well conceived and fits the narrative. I think it will be an asset to the community.

silver award



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

An interesting and fun project with good organization and sensory areas.



HOLLINGWORTH LAKE COUNTRY PARK SENSORY GARDEN

Specialty Projects Category

Project Location: Rochdale, England, UK

Zone: 8

DK Garden Design/ Bespoke Garden Elements Ltd

Website: www.dkgardendesign.co.uk

Firm Location: Manchester, England, UK

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID KEEGAN



At the edge of Hollingworth Lake Country Park, a sensory garden now invites visitors into a quiet world of touch, scent, sound, and color.

Commissioned by Rochdale Borough Council and brought to life with the help of dedicated volunteers, the garden surrounds the new park ranger offices with zones designed to engage all five senses. From fragrant herbs and rustling ribbons to textured foliage and edible plants, every element was chosen to foster calm, curiosity, and connection with nature. Accessibility and long-term maintenance were woven into the design, ensuring the space is welcoming, inclusive, and sustainable. The result is more than a garden: it's a living, growing collaboration between people and place.

silver award



THE LIBERATION GARDEN: CLOISTER OF SWEET SERENITY

Specialty Projects Category
Project Location: Sommers, New York
Zone: 7b

Green Jay Landscape Design

Website: www.greenjaylandscaping.com
Firm Location: Rye, New York

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICH POMERANTZ

In a quiet residential corner of Somers, New York, a gently sloped backyard has been transformed into a peaceful, walkable garden sanctuary tailored for healing, comfort, and year-round beauty. Nestled in shade and framed by mature trees, the space now features a meandering bluestone path, relocated stone seating, and layered plantings that create a cloister-like retreat just steps from the home. Designed with accessibility in mind, the garden offers both structure and softness, where native grass, fragrant perennials, and tactile textures invite slow exploration and sensory connection. Every detail, from the locally sourced stonework to the thoughtful planting palette, reflects a deep respect for ecology, health, and the nuances of daily life. It's a space that is meant not just to be seen, but to be felt.



JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

Good overall organization and established garden areas. The stonework in the walkways is beautifully cut and fit together.



2025 award winner

Outdoor Lighting



silver award



SIERRA OAKS VISTA RESIDENCE

Outdoor Lighting Category
Project Location: Sacramento, California
Zone: 6b

Viewpoint Lighting

Website: www.viewpoint.lighting
Firm Location: Sacramento, California

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEREMY MEEHAN



After years of hosting events with temporary lighting, this longtime client was officially ready to invest in a permanent solution that matched the elegance and functionality of their home. Removing the lackluster lighting system installed by the original landscape architect, the team installed a comprehensive design featuring 248 fixtures, including repurposed existing lights, that now wrap around the entire property. The result is a beautifully lit landscape with defined, usable spaces enhanced by a three-zone audio system for seamless outdoor entertainment. Thoughtful custom elements bring depth and personality, such as an antique family stove converted into a glowing art piece, and RGBW lighting on a central fire-feature sculpture. With layered techniques including wall washes, in grade lighting, illuminated glass rods, and a variety of path and downlights, the entire property now feels cohesive, dynamic, and full of color.

JUDGES' FEEDBACK:

Good overall illumination of all areas and accents.



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