

Long Island

Special Issue: The Arts

Section 14

Art in the Garden: A Monet Brought to Life



Mark McAteer, right, with Rich Entel at Mr. Entel's house, where landscaping includes a patio and fireplace, above.



with variegated boxwood growing out of giant cast-bronze fish. A stone path leads to an Alpine garden, with plantings set around boulders and cast-stone benches that look like wood, along with a gazebo with a curlicue wrought-iron dome and a life-size deer made of wicker.

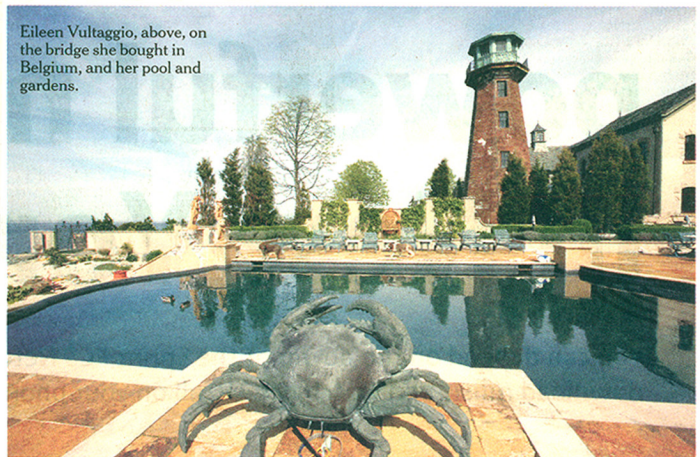
Mr. Schrader said he tried to incorporate several types of gardens. "You can stroll from one area and feel like you are in Italy, and then you are in the desert, and then you are in the jungle," he said. "The element of surprise is very important."

A Southwestern garden with cactus that can survive Long Island winters creates a stark contrast to the beach garden with potted palm trees beyond. Within a few weeks, containers overflowing with bananas, canas and other tropical plants will punctuate the pool and spa area with blasts of color.

Even for less grandiose properties, gone are the days when borders of pink and coral impatiens, potted geraniums, a trio of hydrangeas or a perimeter screen of Leyland cypress would suffice.



Eileen Vultaggio, above, on the bridge she bought in Belgium, and her pool and gardens.



Photographs by Phil Marino for The New York Times

Gone Are the Days
Of Potted Geraniums.
Now, There's a Fantasyland.

Mark McAteer, a certified professional landscape designer and an owner of the Laurel Group, a landscape design and contracting company with offices in Huntington and Bridgehampton, helped with the plantings at the Vultaggio home and has done a different project every year on Rich and Deborah Entel's five-acre property in Muttontown.

"It evolves, like decorating your house," Mr. McAteer said of the latest trends in landscape design. "There is a fashion aspect to it."

Mr. McAteer said that sculpture in a garden does not have to be important art — although he recently installed a Fernando Botero sculpture in a Brookville yard — to serve an important function and allude to "casual wealth." Birdbaths, fountains, a couple of Adirondack chairs or an urn "communicate a lifestyle" fitting the tastes of the homeowner, Mr. McAteer said.

"It's the image of leisure and a retreat, more than someone's actual use of it," he said. "Landscape is not just decorated borders of the property. It's places to go to, and things you may experience in your property. It's the idea that you could go out there and read a book, rather than actually doing it."

Two years ago Mr. McAteer built an outdoor fireplace with a 15-foot chimney in a walled section of the Entels' property, near a small English garden accented with a sundial. Beyond that garden wall are a putting green and driving range.

"Now my son is playing golf," Mr. Entel said proudly. "The putting green really got him into it."

Mr. McAteer said the trend toward features like fireplaces and putting greens makes backyards more inviting. "It is no longer just mid-May to

mid-September," he said.

The options cover every base. Besides a covered terrace and an outdoor kitchen at the Entel home, Mr. McAteer built a court that can be used for basketball, volleyball or short-court tennis. A rectangular pool with a spillover spa is under construction, with plans for an outdoor billiard table nearby.

Mr. Entel, who has spent more than \$1 million on the landscaping projects, including a screen of 35-foot Norway spruce, said his goal was to include enough enticing elements in the backyard to have his children, Jacob, 13, and Lexi, 11, bring their friends over rather than play at a park.

"This will be like the rec room in the basement before you go hit the pool," Mr. Entel said.

BESIDES the children's and grown-ups' toys, he noted, the property is a mini-arboretum.

"A conductor conducts his orchestra, and every couple of seconds there is a different arrangement going," Mr. Entel said. "That's what happens with the flowers. As one thing dies off, another thing blooms."

Gary Martin, the general manager of Ireland-Gannon Associates, a Muttontown designer and builder of fine landscapes, attributed the move toward four-season functionality in the garden to lofty real estate prices.

"The cost of developing a landscape is exorbitant," Mr. Martin said, estimating that his North Shore clients spend an average of \$100,000 to \$300,000 on landscaping. A granite pool alone can top \$100,000. Fencing, patios and a resurgence of garden ornaments like statues, fountains, trellises and arbors that frame a view

add to the tab.

"People feel they are getting more of a return on their investment by not just dealing with the summer season," Mr. Martin said.

They are also spicing up curb appeal. Instead of ho-hum driveways that lead straight to the garage or circular driveways, front lawns are being bulldozed to make way for entrance courts with fountains, seating areas and large flower-filled urns.

Homeowners use their yards much like rooms in a house, Mr. Martin said: "They may flow together, but they could have a formal dining room and yet have a family room and a den. That is true outside, too. They might have a formal terrace and they may have a more casual area around the pool or a flower or hobby garden area."

Jim and Laura Smiros, architects from Oyster Bay, are working with Mr. Martin to create "a secret garden" for their daughter, Christina, 13, with a fountain and garden benches, reached through a long covered arbor. Through a separate entrance their son, Dean, 10, will have a garden to call his own, with a treehouse that spans three trees and has a rope bridge.

The rest of the two-acre lawn at the Smiroses' Federal-style house includes a patio area and a newly completed lower garden with a pool and a spa covered by a sliding awning for sun protection.

"We created outdoor rooms without question," Mr. Smiros said. "It's part of your well-being. If you are in the house and you can see the outside, it calls to you. For me it recharges my batteries. Even if you don't get out there, just seeing it and knowing it's there, it makes me feel good."

By MARCELLE S. FISCHLER

ON an antiques-hunting jaunt to Belgium, Eileen Vultaggio bought a bridge. Not a small arched footpath for pedestrians that would droll up a corner of the backyard, but a vehicular viaduct that Dennis Schrader, a landscape designer, tropical plant grower and owner of Landcraft Environmentals in Mattituck, used to design the Monet-esque entryway to Ms. Vultaggio's lavishly landscaped five-acre estate in Sands Point.

Once there was a bridge, there needed to be a stream. So Mr. Schrader designed a pond with a wishing well at its edge and added a stream flowing under the bridge and cascading down a lushly planted hillside to a second pond below. The water recirculates to the top.

The cobblestone bridge leads to a front entry courtyard that was inspired by Ms. Vultaggio's trip to visit gardens in England. Ms. Vultaggio found the imposing fountain that crowns the courtyard's center in France and surrounded it with huge sculptured stone seashells that spout water and double as planters.

"I'm just a passionate gardener making a dream come true," Ms. Vultaggio said the other day as she trimmed the lavender border near her infinity-edge pool, taking out the deadwood and pruning to make it grow back thicker. "It's my own little fantasyland."

Each pocket of Ms. Vultaggio's landscape is like a corner of a painting: a cutting garden that was lush with tulips a few weeks ago; one patio area with a bowl-shaped fire pit and another with a chiminea for wood-burning fires that extends the

use of the garden through fall. A bird sanctuary has a trellis with trumpet vines whose red flowers invite hummingbirds, an aviary for doves and multiple birdbaths.

Long before she moved to her fanciful turreted castle on the Long Island Sound, Ms. Vultaggio worked at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden doing propagation in the greenhouses, giving tours and helping visitors learn about plants.

"When I'm depressed, I'm in the garden," said Ms. Vultaggio, fussing over a wooden wheelbarrow stuffed with colorful flower flats waiting to be planted. "Most women go to jewelry stores. I go to nurseries."

If Ms. Vultaggio finds solace in her gardens, she also finds inspiration. And while her property is more unusual than most, lawns are a blank canvas for many an avid suburban gardener.

For those without a green thumb, landscape designers and architects are increasingly being charged with using nature's palette to transform properties into masterpieces filled with trees, flowers, plants and, lately, a whole lot more. Gardens are being outfitted with stone benches, putting greens, fireplaces, spas with waterfalls that spill into pools, and lighted multiple-use sports courts.

Seashells are embedded like mosaics into the stucco walls on the Vultaggio property. Stone archways, whimsical iron gates and cherubs punctuate the outside décor.

"The gardens were more important to me than even the interiors," said Ms. Vultaggio, and the wings of her castle are linked by greenhouses where she can putter with plants year round.

Behind the property's Normandy-style house is an English knot garden