

QUINTESSENTIAL

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NEW TRIER

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The Garden Issue

Members of the Garden Guild of Winnetka create living art for their home and garden walk.

Plus: A historic garden revival in Lake Geneva, tulip spotting in Ottawa and a chat with the royal gardener.

style

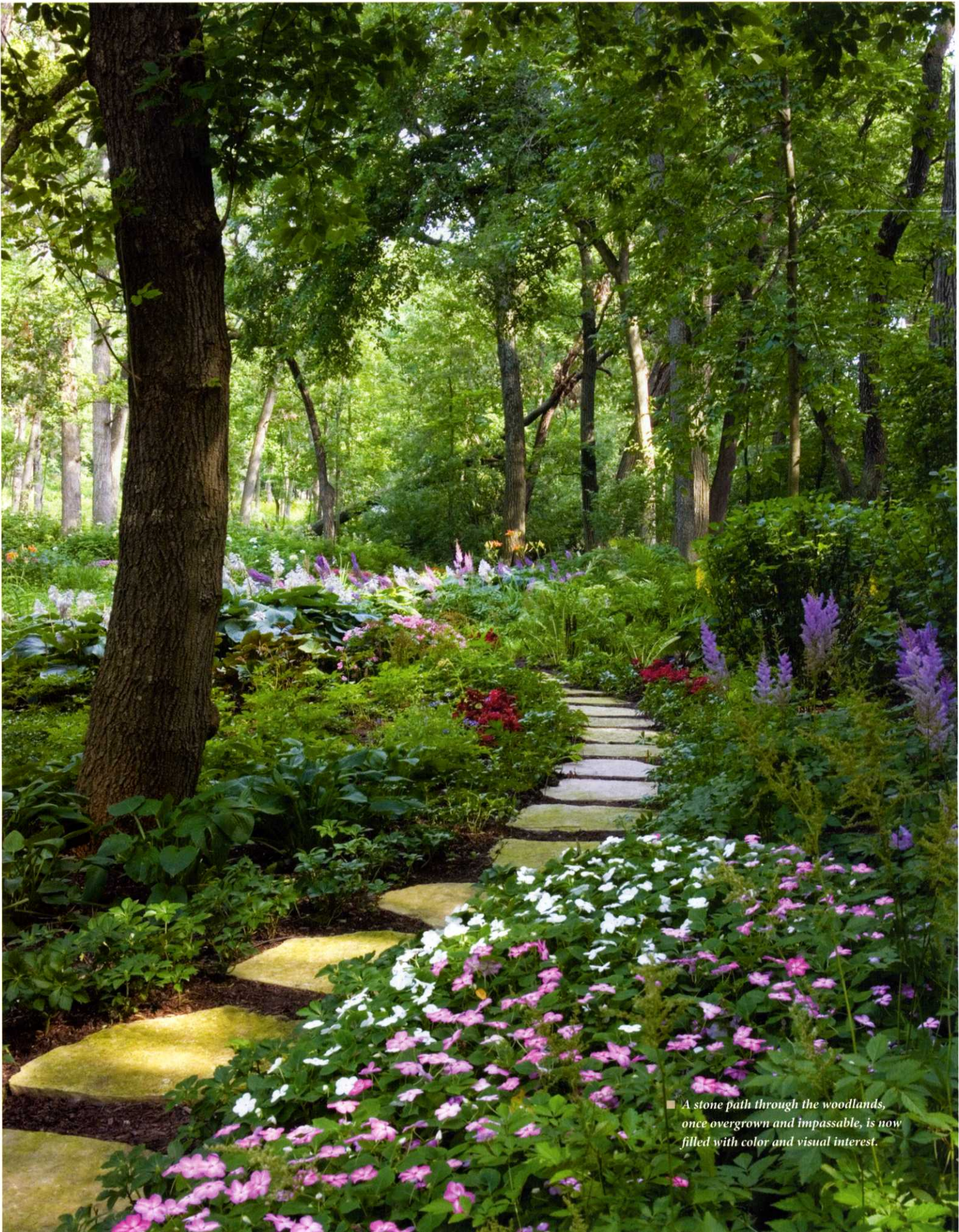


The Lake House

When Howard Van Doren Shaw built the “Allegheny” estate on the shores of Lake Geneva in the early 20th century, he collaborated with legendary landscape architect Jens Jensen to design a prairie garden to go with it. Nearly a century later, another area landscape architect has rejuvenated and expanded the historic landscape, creating a lakeside oasis enjoyed by the homeowners and garden walk visitors alike.

By Sherry Thomas

■ Beds in this historic garden were overrun by Buckthorn before the renovation began. The redesign removed these plants to make room for shade-loving annuals and perennials. The original white bridge over the creek was restored and preserved.



■ A stone path through the woodlands, once overgrown and impassable, is now filled with color and visual interest.



■ Designed by Howard Van Doren Shaw for Lewis Edward Myers in 1924, this sprawling Lake Geneva estate is an example of the architect's "country house" design. Dubbed "Allegheny," the home has been in the current owners' family since 1945. Myers was said to be an avid orchid grower with some 200 rare specimens on the property garnering international attention. The recent landscape renovation has put the historic home and garden back in the spotlight.

IT CAN'T BE EASY walking in the path of Jens Jensen.

The iconic landscape architect is known throughout the Midwest for prairie style designs that could be found everywhere from the grand estates of the North Shore (including 7 gardens in Kenilworth alone) to the urban city parks of Chicago (Garfield Park, Humboldt Park and Lincoln Park among them).

So imagine being Chicago area landscape architect Dave Van Zelst, and taking on a garden renovation project in Lake Geneva, Wisc., that involved a Howard Van Doren Shaw-designed landmark property with a Jens Jensen pedigree.

One would imagine it would be like being asked to "spruce up" a water lily canvas by Monet.

"Obviously you have to be respectful of the history," says Van Zelst, who began working on the 1920s-era "Allegheny" estate with his Van Zelst Inc. firm in 2005. "The original property

layout we kept intact. The layout, the flow, the mature woods, we didn't change anything in that regard.

However, time and the elements of nature had taken its toll and the clients had some very specific requests for improvement.

The original house and gardens were built for Lewis Edward Myers, said to be an avid orchid collector, sometime around 1924. While the Shaw-designed mansion is heated and can be enjoyed year-round, Myers used it mainly as a weekend or summer home. The current owners, who have had the historic property in their family since 1945, do the same — coming to their beloved lake house for weekends and summer gathering.

Simple maintenance, they could handle. But simple maintenance was no longer enough.

Inside, Van Zelst says the house is like a "slice of time," a fully preserved testament to the

glory days of Lake Geneva estate living. Other than adding glass to a screened-in porch, the homeowners have made few changes over the last century.

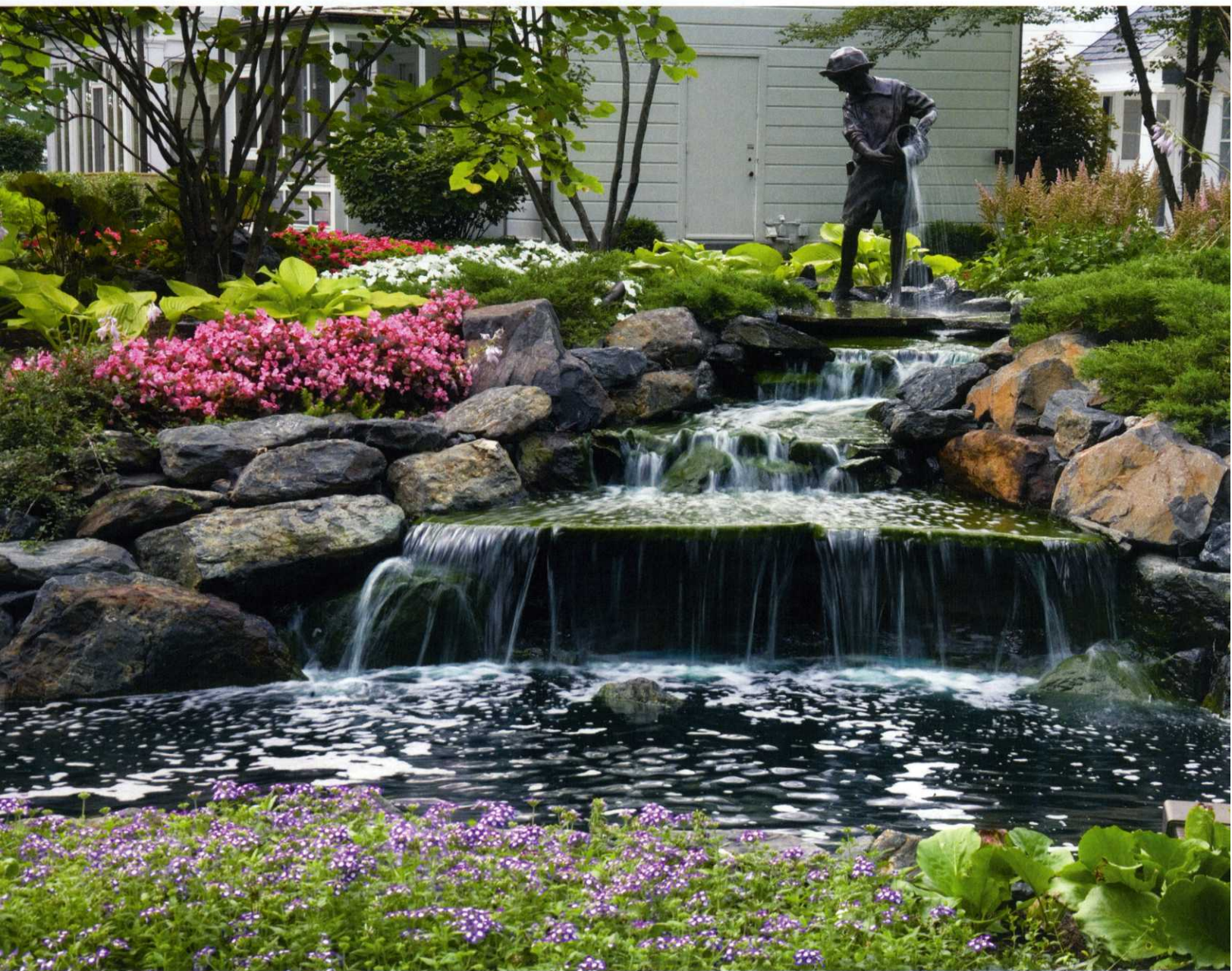
Outside was another story.

While the Jensen footprint was still visible, the waterway that ran through the garden was in terrible shape. Rocks had fallen into the water and buckthorn had grown out of control in the woodlands, to the point where the homeowners could no longer enjoy the property or the views.

"Even the stone bridges that went over the creek had to be redone," says the homeowner. "They have been redone from what it was from years ago, and we're very pleased with it. He even put in a waterfall, which is really nice."

Van Zelst says they started small, with some phases of the project focusing on merely bringing the garden back to life.

"The wood bridges were there (in the



■ *Left: A sculpture of the homeowner was placed above a waterfall by his wife as a testament to his boyhood and love of the family property. That feature is now her favorite part of the renovation.*

original design) and those were rejuvenated. But the lady of the house wanted to be able to get through the garden and enjoy it, so we put in these large stone slabs. When the plant material is up, they disappear and it gives you access to the other side of the creek.”

From the beginning, the plan was not to tear out what Jensen installed but to restore and enhance it.

Native and original plantings were preserved but perennials and annuals were added for a much-needed splash of color. A similar approach was taken with “hardscape” materials in the

garden. Existing structures were kept intact but additional enhancements resulted in a more cohesive, more functional garden for this modern family.

“Personally, I was just very excited about the opportunity to update the property,” adds Van Zelst. “It’s such great history and just a wonderful site. It really blends itself into something fantastic in the end.”

The homeowner says her favorite part of the project was the waterfall Van Zelst installed to go with a sculpture she commissioned of her son as a boy — a lasting monument to his family’s



property. "Looking at the waterfall, and looking at the statue above it ... it's just peaceful," she adds.

But for Van Zelst, and perhaps for the more than 1,000 guests who have walked through this garden since it was rejuvenated, the jewel would have to be the view of Lake Geneva.

"Once we got the buckthorn out, it opened up some great views," he says. "Our goal was to further enhance those views."

After all, it is the view of the lake and the location that inspired Myers and his famous architect/design team to build "Allegheny" all those years ago. And given the response from those who have seen the garden on the Lake Geneva Garden Club House and Garden Cruise, it will continue to inspire for generations to come. 

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