

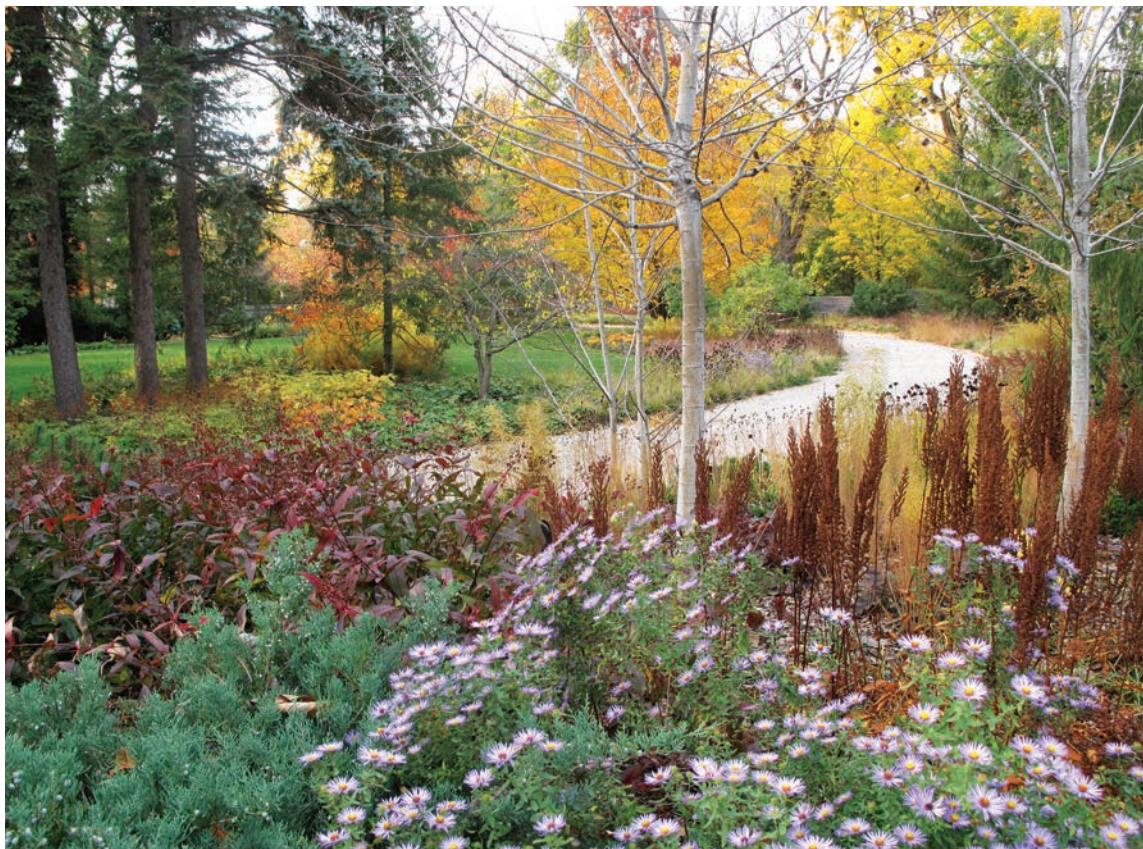
FOREGROUND / **PALETTE**

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
A driveway planting was designed for all-year performance: fall, early winter, and summer.

Douglas Hoerr, FASLA, talks a lot about the weather—Midwest weather. He calls it “brutal” and “tough.” When he talks about the plants that he relies on, he describes them as “survivors” or “tough as nails.” You expect his landscapes to look like gulags, but instead you find horticultural marvels of exuberant color, parklike home gardens, and naturalistic forested landscapes where sumac displays its “expressiveness” and white redbud its “purity” and hawthorn its “honesty.” Hoerr’s sense for midwestern plants comes from spending his life and career in the area—he grew up on a farm in northern Indiana—and absorbing its often overlooked beauty.

He left Purdue University in 1979 with a degree in landscape architecture and faced a nearly nonexistent job market in a collapsed economy, so he went to work in a cousin’s landscape contracting business. He spent nine years “getting dirty, working Saturdays and Sundays, learning how to build and maintain, and seeing firsthand what plants survive the brutal Midwest climate.” Thinking that he wanted to broaden his experience,

LAKE MICHIGAN BLUFFTOP RESIDENCE, CHICAGO

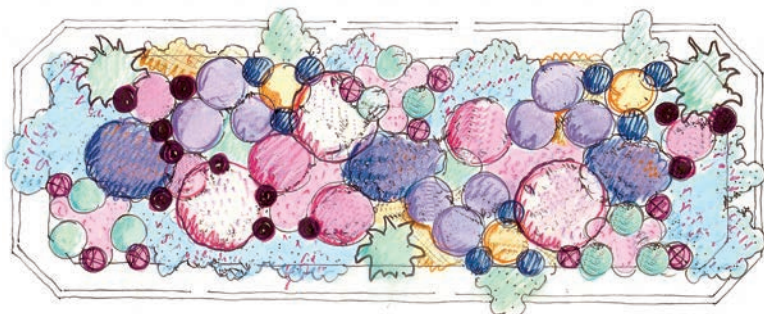


THE GREATER MIDWEST

IT HELPS TO BE A NATIVE LIKE DOUGLAS HOERR TO DECODE THE BEAUTY OF THE REGION. BY BILL MARKEN, HONORARY ASLA



MICHIGAN AVENUE STREETScape, CHICAGO



TOP
A planter at the peak of summer.

BOTTOM
A sketch plan for a typical median planter suggests plant placement.

he “sold everything” he had and took a two-year sabbatical in England. He started with an internship for Blooms of Bressingham and then moved on to work as a gardener for Beth Chatto and John Brookes, two of the world’s most influential designers and horticulturists.

When he returned to the United States, Hoerr moved to Chicago, where “everything fell together.” He went into business as Douglas Hoerr Landscape Architecture, and in 1993, his first significant project became a centerpiece of Mayor Richard M. Daley’s successful efforts to green the city. Hoerr designed the well-known median plantings for downtown Chicago’s Michigan Avenue: Thirty planters spread over 14 blocks, stuffed with hot colors, butterfly-attracting plants, and other horticultural goodies that drew visitors downtown, provided settings for countless wedding photos and sparked nearly 100 miles more of landscaped parkways and median strips in the city.

But creating nonstop hot color has been just a slice of his projects. He has since designed a broad spectrum of civic, commercial, and residential projects. In 2008, he and Peter Lindsay Schaudt, FASLA, joined their practices to form Hoerr Schaudt Landscape Architects, based in Chicago.

Hoerr plays down his mastery of plants. “I’m not a plantsman per se,” he says. “I’m a designer of spaces for a client. I know enough about plants to paint with them.”

The midwesterner in Hoerr has his own set of priorities for planting

design. The first is plant performance for three or even four seasons. Spring bloom and fall color are easy. He says, “Design for the bleakest season of the year.”

Hoerr works in layers—from the outside of a site inward, particularly on larger properties. He starts with the biggest pieces at the property’s edges: screening plants to create privacy, to block or edit views. He likes evergreen conifers such as Norway spruce, white pine, native red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana* ‘Canaertii’). He prefers a natural look, not sheared, and tries to get the largest possible specimens, up to 30 feet high, which he handpicks for shape and size and personally places.

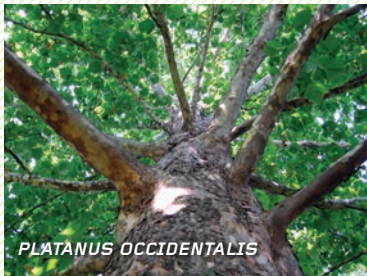
The next layer is the “supporting cast,” the trees and shrubs that provide seasonal interest for at least three seasons—with flowers, fruit, or form while leafless. These are shade trees such as white oak, sugar maple, and locust, and flowering trees such as redbud, cherry, and Washington hawthorn. The third layer consists of shrubs: evergreens such as mugo pine and Sargent juniper; flowering shrubs such as viburnum, Cornelian cherry, hydrangea, bayberry, and bush honeysuckle. The ground-level layer consists of perennials and grasses. The final layer is made up of bulbs and ephemerals.

Michigan Avenue Streetscape, Chicago

Twenty years after their installation, Hoerr’s median planters on Michigan Avenue still meet his original goal: “to open eyes to a more naturalistic style of civic plantings and create gardens, like public art, that rival the downtown architecture.”

TOUGH STUFF

Hoerr relies on a number of what he calls “workhorses” that stand up to the elements and help create landscapes that look as if they’ve always been there.



PLATANUS OCCIDENTALIS

DECIDUOUS TREES

ACER SACCHARUM (SUGAR MAPLE): “Plant it for future generations.” Hoerr likes the single-stem form (up to 70 feet high). Beautiful fall color.

QUERCUS BICOLOR (SWAMP WHITE OAK): “Rugged even when young.” Transplants well and grows fast—unusual qualities for an oak.

PLATANUS OCCIDENTALIS (AMERICAN SYCAMORE): “I love the mottled bark and great big lobed leaves.” The tree is massive, up to 100 feet high or more.

TAXODIUM DISTICHUM (BALD CYPRESS): Use it as a tall accent plant (50 to 70 feet) or in groves. Deciduous foliage has delicate texture and rusty fall color. “Don’t put it near evergreen conifers—people think it’s dead in winter.”

LARGE EVERGREENS

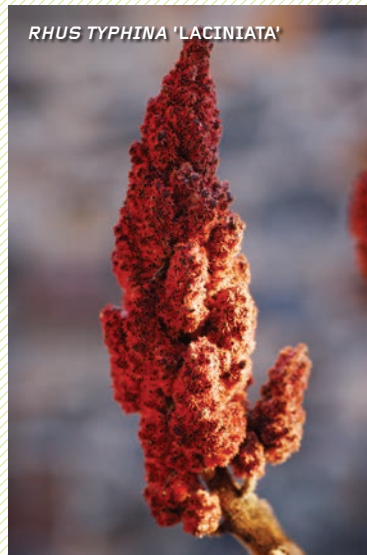
TSUGA CANADENSIS (CANADIAN HEMLOCK): Graceful and shade tolerant, 40 to 70 feet high. “For a feathery natural look, buy trees grown in the shade—the others look like sheared Christmas trees.”

PICEA ABIES (NORWAY SPRUCE): “Tough as nails, and beautiful the way it catches snow.”

THUJA OCCIDENTALIS (AMERICAN ARBORVITAE): ‘Wintergreen’ is a fast-growing columnar form that’s tall and slender enough to fit into small spaces. For a natural look, group plants of different heights.



PICEA ABIES



RHUS TYPHINA 'LACINIATA'

FLOWERING TREES

MALUS (CRABAPPLE): The most reliable and productive flowering tree of the northern states. Make sure to choose disease-resistant species and varieties. Hoerr likes **MALUS SARGENTII**, a tidy, rounded shrubby species up to 10 feet high, with “phenomenal” red-to-white blooms and bright red fruit. “Prune to clean it out so you can see the structure.”

CRATAEGUS PHAENOPYRUM (WASHINGTON HAWTHORN): Medium-sized to large tree with white flowers and red berries. Hoerr considers it “honest” and admires its seasonal changes. He favors the multistemmed forms.

CERCIS CANADENSIS 'ALBA' (WHITE REDBUD): “I love the purity of its clean white flowers and the length of their bloom period.”



CERCIS CANADENSIS 'ALBA'

SHRUBS

VIBURNUM: “I like them all, especially their growth habits”—Alleghany, blackhaw, Koreanspice, doublefile. Good choices for layering under shade trees; mass together plants of different sizes.

COTONEASTER APICULATUS (CRANBERRY COTONEASTER): “It has a presence even in winter—great texture especially for a bare deciduous ground cover.” Plant in masses, and growth becomes so thick you can’t see individual plants. Bright red berries in fall.

RHUS TYPHINA 'LACINIATA' (LACELEAF STAGHORN SUMAC): “Feels so very midwestern.” Brilliant fall color, “expressive” winter form.

HYDRANGEA: “People love them.” Plant **H. PANICULATA 'GRANDIFLORA'** in masses and **H. QUERCIFOLIA** in groves. “Hydrangeas are tough.” Cut them back to rejuvenate.

JUNIPERUS (JUNIPER): “Many types are so great to use for infill.” **SARGENT JUNIPER (J. CHINENSIS SARGENTII)** is a dependable ground cover for erosion control. ‘GRAY OWL’ is a low spreading form of the native species (**J. VIRGINIANA**).



ASTER TATARICUS

PERENNIALS

Hoerr’s choices are tough, with strong forms and clean texture—“good for intermixing.” Perennials for sun: aster, peony, sage, purple coneflower, lady’s mantle. Perennials for shade: hosta, Solomon’s seal, epimedium, alumroot.

LAKE MICHIGAN BLUFFTOP RESIDENCE, CHICAGO



Structure/Accent: *Canna* 'Pretoria,' *Pennisetum purpureum* 'Princess,' *Alocasia macrorrhiza* 'Lutea,' *Cordyline baueri*, and *Eupatorium capillifolium* 'Elegant Feather.'

Lake Michigan Blufftop Residence, Chicago

In an urban neighborhood where formally clipped boxwood reigns, Hoerr created a parklike "Midwest natural" landscape on three acres of lakeside property. Layering the plantings gives needed privacy as well as beauty all year.

Along the property lines, Hoerr hand-picked large evergreen conifers as screens: Norway spruce, white pine, native cedar, Douglas fir, and hemlock. Throughout the property are shade trees (white oak, sugar maple) and flowering trees (redbud, Washington hawthorn). Among the flowering shrub layer are viburnum and Cornelian cherry; evergreen shrubs include mugo pine and Sargent juniper. Hoerr singles out a group of plants for heroically facing the fierce winds off the lake: bayberry, rugosa rose, Sargent crabapple, and dunegrass.

Plantings along a 450-foot-long winding driveway show Hoerr's all-season performance. In spring, camas and grape hyacinth bloom in blue waves, among swaths of lawn scattered with flowering crabapples. In the same spot in late summer, patches of purple coneflower and onion bloom at ground level, against a green backdrop of aspens and oaks. In fall, most prominent are blooming asters and brown dry seed heads of false goat's beard, along with vivid yellow sugar maples and already leafless aspens. In winter, tall conifers (Norway spruce, hemlock, native cedar, balsam —)

→ There are now 79 planting beds in 28 blocks, and Hoerr continues to change the designs every year, adding new varieties to test them out. Seasonal displays go in during March, May, and September, and are maintained by the city under the close watch of Hoerr's office.

Tall buildings created tricky patterns of sun and shade. White flowers didn't show up well in the urban light and background—a hot color palette turned out to look best.

The planters have been modified over the years. Made of concrete, they vary greatly in size: from six to 190 feet in length, from nine to 25 feet in width, generally three feet deep. A two-inch lining of Styrofoam insulation keeps tulip bulbs from freezing. The planters are typically filled with 24 inches of lightweight soil mix and eight inches of washed gravel. Fast drainage is essential to flush salts through the soil; weep holes help.

Soil is mounded toward the middle of each bed to add verticality to the plantings. City trucks water and feed the beds every two weeks.

Here is his plant palette for the summer of 2013, as an example:

Edging or trailing plants: *Petunia* 'Easy Wave Blue' and 'Sky Blue,' *Ipomoea batatas* 'Marguerite,' *Coleus* 'Trailing Plum Brocade,' *Verbena* 'Homestead Purple,' and *Lantana* 'Radiation.'

Low: *Angelonia angustifolia* 'Carita Purple,' *Zinnia* 'Profusion Double Fire,' *Begonia* 'Gryphon,' *Impatiens* 'Fusion Glow,' *Capsicum annuum* 'Black Pearl,' and *Alyssum* 'Clear Crystal.'

Mid: *Salvia farinacea* 'Evolution,' *Helianthus helianthoides* 'Summer Sun,' *Perilla* 'Magilla,' *Asclepias curassavica*, *Solenostemon scutellarioides* 'Fishnet Stockings,' *Zinnia* 'Envy,' *Rudbeckia* 'Irish Spring,' and *Gomphrena globosa* 'QIS Purple.'

ABOVE
A tall background border of redbud, willow, rugosa rose, and arborvitae screens the pool area from neighbors. The shade trees are honey locust; the ground covers are spindle tree and Sargent juniper.

FOREGROUND / PALETTE

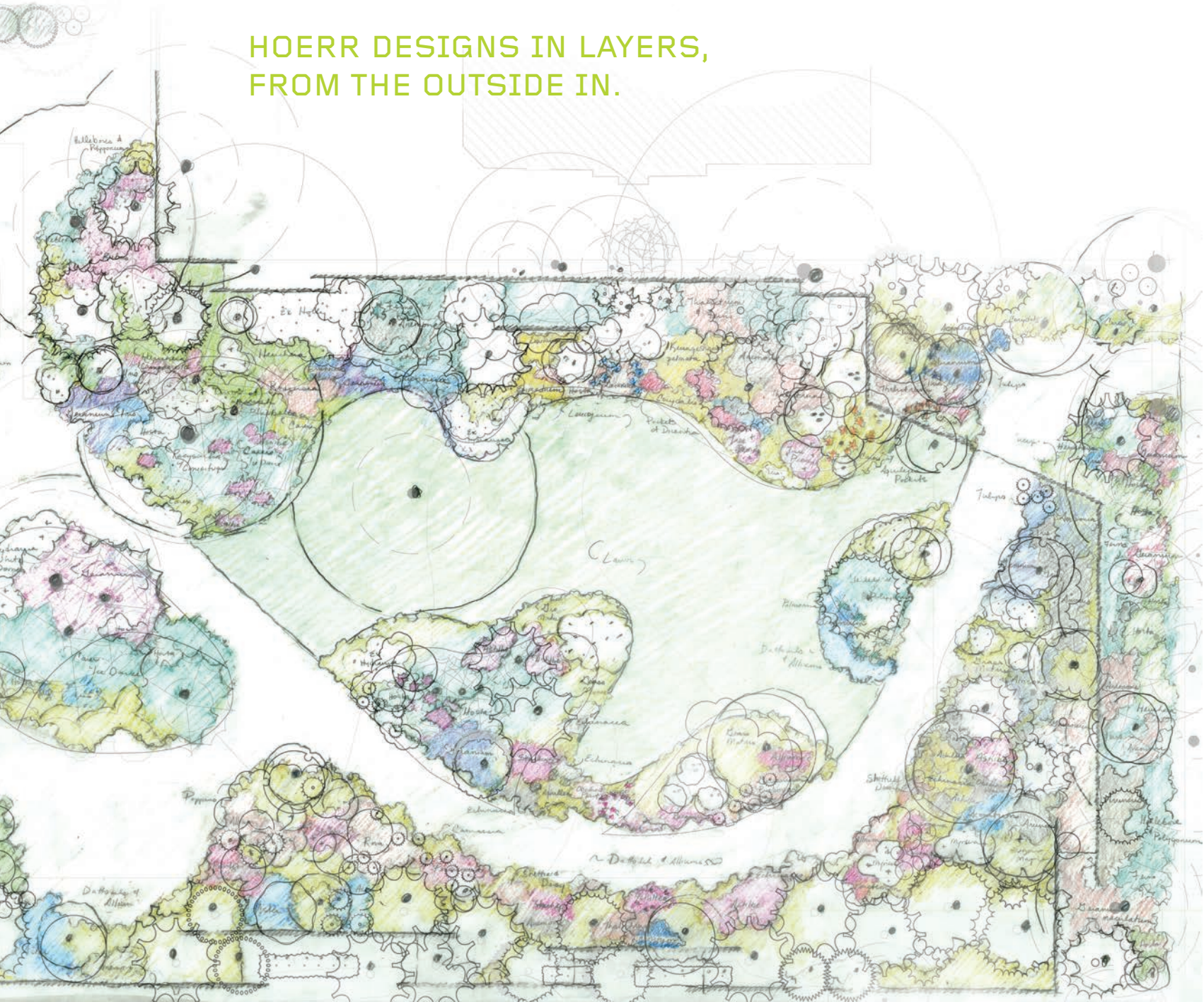
LAKE MICHIGAN BLUFFTOP RESIDENCE, CHICAGO

COURTESY HOERR SCHAUDT



PLANTING PLAN
A long drive winds through a landscape planted in layers, from tall evergreen screens to low-growing perennials.

**HOERR DESIGNS IN LAYERS,
FROM THE OUTSIDE IN.**



LINCOLN PARK RESIDENCE, CHICAGO



TOP LEFT
Whitespire birches rise from pachysandra ground cover.

TOP RIGHT
Tall, narrow trees near the property lines enclose the gravel garden and lawn.

LEFT
A hypertufa fountain among yucca and lavender at the edge of the gravel garden.



→ fir, white pine, Douglas fir) stand out against the statuesque bare oaks and maples; ground-level views include dry grasses and seed heads of perennials among deep green, low mounds of mugo pine.

to turn the eye inward to the garden, Hoerr edged the site with tall, narrow trees that take up minimal space: a row of columnar Chanticleer pears underplanted with spiky, yellow *Ligularia* 'The Rocket.'

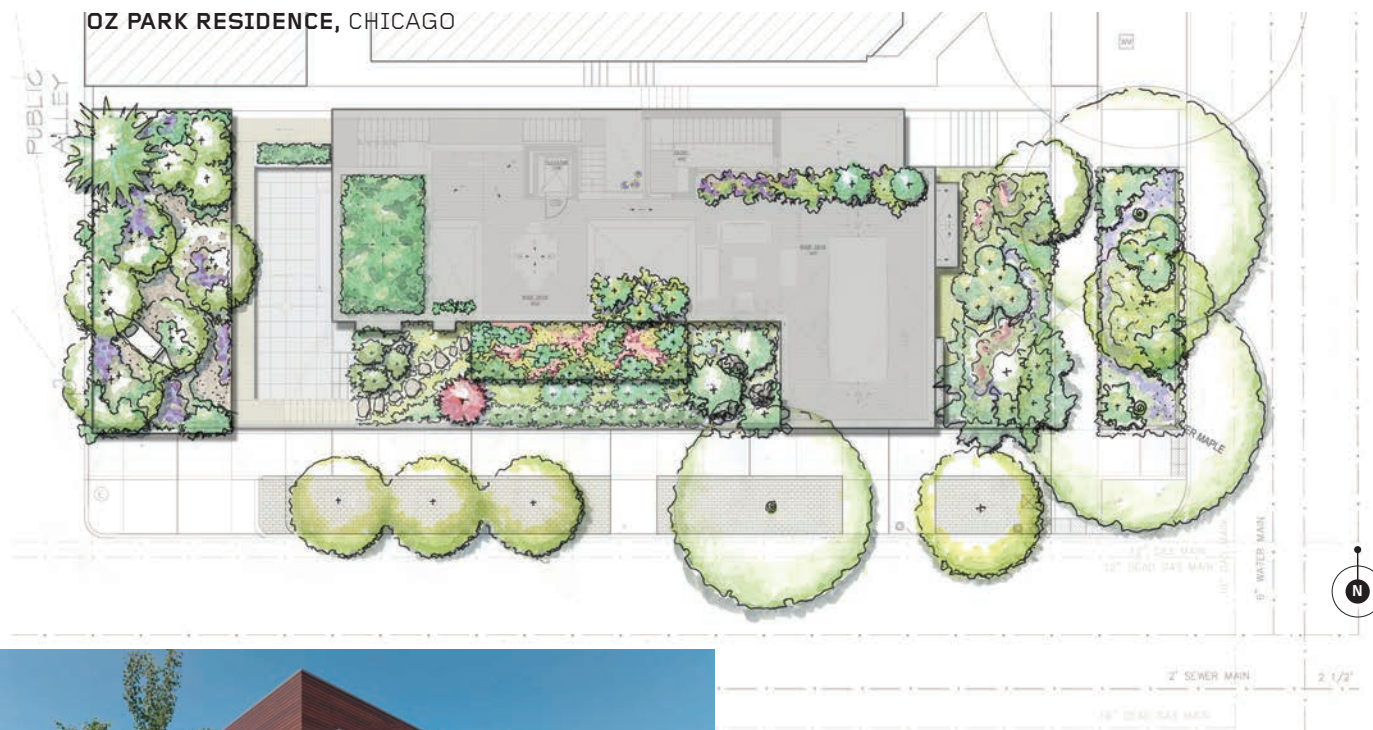
Lincoln Park Residence, Chicago

In a historic Chicago neighborhood, Hoerr relied heavily on plants to create a sheltered oasis and play space for a young family. The property consists of five 25-foot-wide city lots, totaling approximately half an acre. After the site was cleared, 18 inches of soil mix was added to improve soil quality and drainage. The plan's underlying grid, reflecting the proportions of the house, is based on a strong geometric pattern of gravel paths, a limestone terrace, lawn, planting beds, and a gravel garden.

To block views of neighboring tall apartments and power lines and

The overall look of the planting design is a clean green and white—emphasized by three groves of Whitespire birch underplanted with deep green pachysandra. The birch groves help to soften the mass of the house, which is one of the largest on the block. More pachysandra (with its “calming effect”) in massed blocks is used to offset paving. Another key white-flowered shrub is oakleaf hydrangea.

Gravel paths through the garden give close-up looks at the planting beds. Perennials such as variegated hosta and lamb's ears soften the edges of the paths and the terrace.



TOP
Almost all of the garden space for the Oz Park Residence is on roofs.

BOTTOM
A small garden grows atop a screened porch.

The sunken gravel garden off the back of the house has room for a table and chairs near a raised hypertufa fountain holding water lettuce and papyrus. Perennials such as *Alchemilla*, *Stachys officinalis*, and *Belamcanda chinensis* spill from the planting beds and come up through the gravel—“fuzzing the edges,” as Hoerr describes it.

Oz Park Residence, Chicago

The owners are plant lovers who wanted an eclectic garden—from clipped conifers to native aspens, a moss garden, and traditional midwestern perennials. But the slope was steep and offered almost no outdoor space around a four-story, glass-and-wood, contemporary house overlooking Chicago’s Oz Park. Hoerr designed a series of rooftop and balcony gardens planted with tough species.

Above the house, a rooftop deck has room for furniture and a portable fire pit. Balcony planting boxes, designed by the architect of the house, Dirk Denison, are an extension of the house and direct views over the city and park. The boxes—90 square feet, generally with two feet of soil depth, and irrigated by drip lines—hold trees (ginkgo, limber pine, Japanese white pine) and shrubs (Coral Beauty cotoneaster, pendulous French pussy

willow). Two small (180 square feet and 165 square feet) rooftop planters hold succulents: six varieties of *Sedum*, *Sempervivum* ‘Ruby Heart’ and ‘Purple Beauty,’ and *Delosperma* ‘Mesa Verde.’

The largest rooftop space (18 by 40 feet), over the garage, is reached from the house by way of wooden steps to a catwalk extending the length of the roof garden. A mulch path winds through a grove of quaking aspen, Scotch pine, and weeping Norway spruce that gives a forest feeling. Facing the full brunt of the wind, the trees are given extra stability by a subsurface rebar system with tension wires that run over the tops of their root balls. ●

BILL MARKEN, HONORARY ASLA, IS THE FORMER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF *SUNSET* AND *GARDEN DESIGN* MAGAZINES.

COURTESY HOERR SCHAUDT; TOP: THE MICHELLE LITVIN STUDIO; BOTTOM