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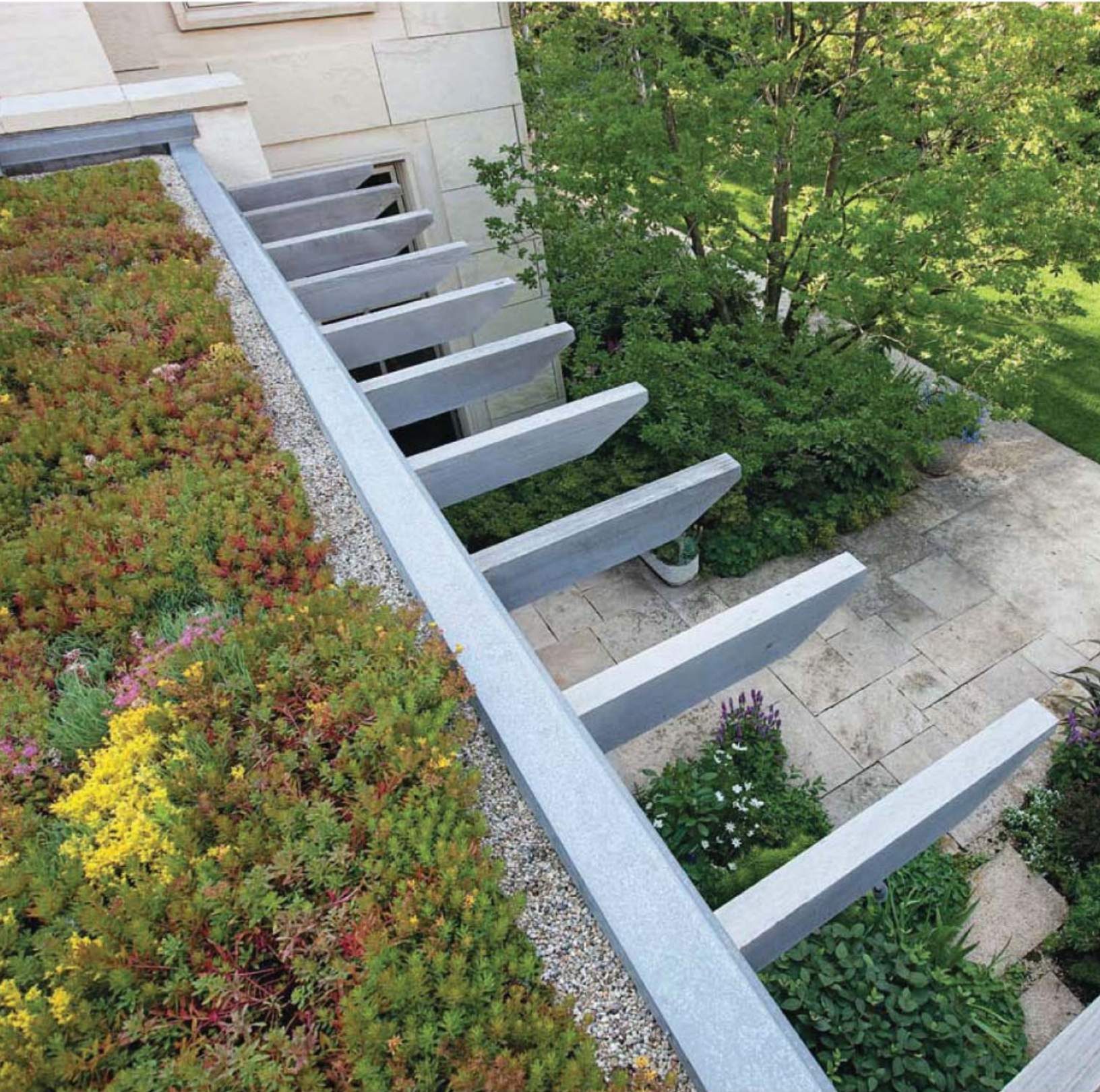
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City vibe meets Midwest charm in this harmonious
Lincoln Park garden designed by Douglas Hoerr

STORY BY LAUREN GRYMES ■ PHOTOGRAPHY BY SCOTT SHIGLEY

The deeper one moves through the friendly confines of this urban enclave by Chicago landscape architect Douglas Hoerr, the more the outside world ebbs away. Hoerr tends to use fewer plant varieties and repeats them as sculptural statements, as with the birches (*Betula mandshurica* var. *japonica* 'Whitespire') in the plein-air gallery (opposite), and in groves underplanted with oakleaf hydrangea and pachysandra at the front of the limestone house.







Far Left: Hoerr is known for his roof-raising green-roof designs and didn't skip the chance to install one here using a variety of sedums above the screened porch. "I am a firm believer of getting as much green as you can between you and the city," he says. The Eden Stone limestone terrace below is shaded by a *Magnolia x loebneri* 'Merrill'.
Left: The calming rhythm of 'Chanticleer' Callery pears and *Ligularia* 'The Rocket' drowns out the urban surroundings.

cultivating the quiet life in a city isn't exactly easy, but a dulcet Chicago garden offers an inspired example of how one cosmopolitan family nurtures tranquility from the ground up. The ground in this case is on the city's North Side in the Lincoln Park neighborhood, on a deep five-lot-wide parcel — quite a stretch of real estate considering the average city lot in Chicago is a scant 25 feet wide.

The landscape, by Douglas Hoerr of the Chicago firm Hoerr Schaudt Landscape Architects, is an abstract paradise influenced in part by the most ancient and esoteric elements of garden design, but grounded in easy Midwestern earthiness — a refined Eden in the fearless Chicago tradition of significant architecture paired with exuberant horticulture.

Urbane more than starkly urban, this unexpected oasis — with its boldly planted corners, meditative walkways, colonnade of pleached Callery pears and a gem of a sunken garden — is a cloistered antidote to the city stressing against the property's strong borders. The garden, it would seem, is as protective of its family of four (businessman, a film-industry set designer and two very active young sons) as the family is of it.

Initially four lots wide, Hoerr urged the homeowners to buy the fifth lot so he could balance the bulk of the house (a monolithic contemporary limestone building that makes one think of a high-style abbey) with a rectangular greensward



and give the family a place to play. “It just needed more elbow room,” he explains. From the sidewalk, creamy birch-tree trunks soften the edges and “give the house shoulders,” Hoerr says; beyond are glimpses of a sunlit plane, an implied meadow reminiscent of Prairie School great Jens Jensen.

There is space for intimate moments and also larger life celebrations: A terrace that is a warm spot for contemplating the coming day with coffee is also the perfect staging area for a summer lawn party or an autumn game of touch football. The walled, sunken gravel garden — like a Persian carpet brought to brilliant living color — is a romantic enclave for winding down with a glass of wine, solo or with 30 friends. The built-in retreat of a screened porch accommodates yoga deep breathing as well as laid-back breeze shooting. “This whole project is based around people who wanted their landscape to be usable, functional and beautiful,” Hoerr says. “It’s a garden for life — for their family’s recreation — and for beauty.”

As ordered as this space is — the garden evolved from an underlying grid pattern reflecting the house proportions, the way Hoerr’s designs often do, into an asymmetrical play on rectangles — an abundance of plants tolerant of the Zone 5 conditions soothe the geometry

of the dwelling and unifying hardscape, and create a sense of mystery by strategically framing views. From the street, the solid house is impressive but not imposing. The garden is inviting, with its white-trunked birch groves and oakleaf hydrangeas tumbling through a metal lattice and limestone wall, but a passerby doesn’t get the feeling the landscaping was done up for show. The composition is a lived-in work of art, and there is a sense — as one sometimes gets when visiting a museum — that the real treasures are kept hidden from public view. “It is a house designed by people who recognize the importance of seeing nature from every room on every level in all four seasons,” Hoerr says. “It’s unique in the city because it allows nature in.”

That this project succeeds as an organically integrated living space rather than a house and garden divided is the result of clarity overcoming standard home-building chaos: Defying convention, the homeowners called in Hoerr at the same time architect Laurence Booth, of Booth Hansen in Chicago, was assigned the house. The early invitation gave Hoerr the opportunity to shine at his oeuvre, creating civilized and gorgeous outdoor city-living spaces. As usual in an urban situation, physical



For more Douglas Hoerr gardens, see GARDENDESIGN.COM/HOERR



This is in a city? The ipe wood screened porch — cloaked on three sides by garden — is the family's cool warm-weather hot spot. "I live out here," the homeowner remarks. "It's my retreat." Opposite: Neighborhood-blocking pears are skirted by a shade-tolerant textural arrangement including hostas, 'Henna' coleus, *Heuchera villosa* 'Autumn Bride', *Rodgersia pinnata*, *Ligularia* and *Lysimachia*.

Hoerr envisioned a "hip porch swing" for the limestone-and-wood pergola; climbing hydrangea (*Hydrangea anomala* ssp. *petiolaris*) and native wisteria (*Wisteria frutescens*) give the structure the mystery of a lost monument. In city gardens especially, he likes to create overhead privacy from nearby looming buildings. Opposite: Hoerr's trademark is perhaps his muscular public plantings, but in the sunken garden his softer side shows with lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*), *Stachys officinalis*, 'Green Velvet' boxwood and blackberry lily (*Belamcanda chinensis*). Water lettuce and papyrus populate the hypertufa pool.



DESIGNER PROFILE: DOUGLAS HOERR



Chicago landscape architect Douglas Hoerr catapulted to landscape-artist status in the 1990s when his unrestrained, concrete-busting Michigan Avenue median plantings helped change the way Midwesterners, and even the entire country, view streetscapes. A Purdue University graduate, Hoerr — lead disciple of Mayor Richard M. Daley's urban greening initiative — is also known for his green-roof designs. In 2008, powerhouse Hoerr Schaudt Landscape Architects was formed when Hoerr's firm joined forces with that of former rival Peter Lindsay Schaudt.

Q: You were a Midwestern farm lad now helping reshape Chicago's urban landscape. Are your residential designs rooted first in nature or in city?

A: Depends on where I'm designing. It's about context for me — I look at the larger landscape first and see how it relates. I imagine what I would want if I lived there. Every garden is a balance of nature, horticulture and architecture, with a goodly amount of emotion, wit and surprise baked in.

Q: How do you define Chicago style?

A: Chicago style to me is when public horticulture enters the urban fabric. It's about putting a crowbar to the pavement and prying out voids large enough to fill with nature. It's about breaking down the edges of borders and creating big, explosive plant schemes that reach for the sky and, at the same time, bringing nature to the windshield and to the pedestrian. It's bold, it's fresh, it's irreverent — it has to hold its own against some of the greatest architecture in the world.

Q: What is it about Chicago style that sets it apart from, say, New York style?

A: When I go to other cities the public plantings are so neat and restrained and monochromatic. It was that way when I moved here in 1991 — it was so safe, with everyone using the same one-season recipe. Now, we let the plants do their thing. In one generation we have nearly 100 miles of landscaped parkways and median strips, and some 4 million square feet of green roofs. People see these things and think: "Whoa! Anything is possible."





challenges — including enormous overhead power lines, a looming seven-story apartment building (both detractors now hidden behind the pleached-pear colonnade and a fence) and rubble-strewn compacted earth (excavated and filled with 2 feet of prize soil) — were plenty. But the homeowners and their design team (which also included an interior designer) were tuned from the beginning to near-perfect harmony. “No one was singing off-key,” Hoerr says. “There was no missed opportunity. Every little detail was deliberated, and it comes off looking effortless.”

Hoerr’s years of crafting enjoyable private living spaces from cramped city yards (not that anyone would call this particular garden cramped) come into play here. A maintenance strip of locally quarried gravel doubles as a crunchy path alongside the house. A courtyard viewed from a glassed-in stairwell is an elegant open-air gallery featuring as sculpture a sinuous bench and a pair of birches — a privacy preference Hoerr sought over mundane evergreens — which, brought up close to the house, offer height, dappled shade and depth of field. The screened porch is surrounded by garden, making the neighborhood disappear. To one side is the lawn and terrace; to the other side is a pergola (providing structure, shade and overhead privacy) and a deck stepping down to the intimate gravel garden with seating areas and a small pool, the two spaces (the gravel garden and the lawn area) connected by a narrow path along the fence line. Even the top of the porch is garden, with a green roof of sedums and alliums, visible from bedroom windows above. “It is a magical space, with its feeling of shelter and the water,” Hoerr says.

The garden that seems too good to be true almost wasn’t. One day at the office, as Hoerr tells it, he was grumbling about traffic congestion and announced in dramatic exasperation he would no longer be taking on city projects. So when the Lincoln Park homeowner first called, a new receptionist unfamiliar with Hoerr’s “Doug-speak,” as he calls it, relayed the “message” that he was no longer taking on city projects. When the homeowner, undeterred, finally did get Hoerr on the phone, she told him, “I think you’re going to want to talk to me.”

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The larger garden's climax is a cloistered gravel courtyard with areas for seating and outdoor dining that work equally well for a private tête-à-tête and for larger soirees. Music is provided by birdsong, or the stereo's outdoor-speaker system. Opposite: An unrestrained bouquet of 'Big Ears' lamb's ears, 'Sonata White' cosmos, sweet alyssum and 'Blue Horizon' ageratum softens the edges of limestone pavers.

