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May 2009

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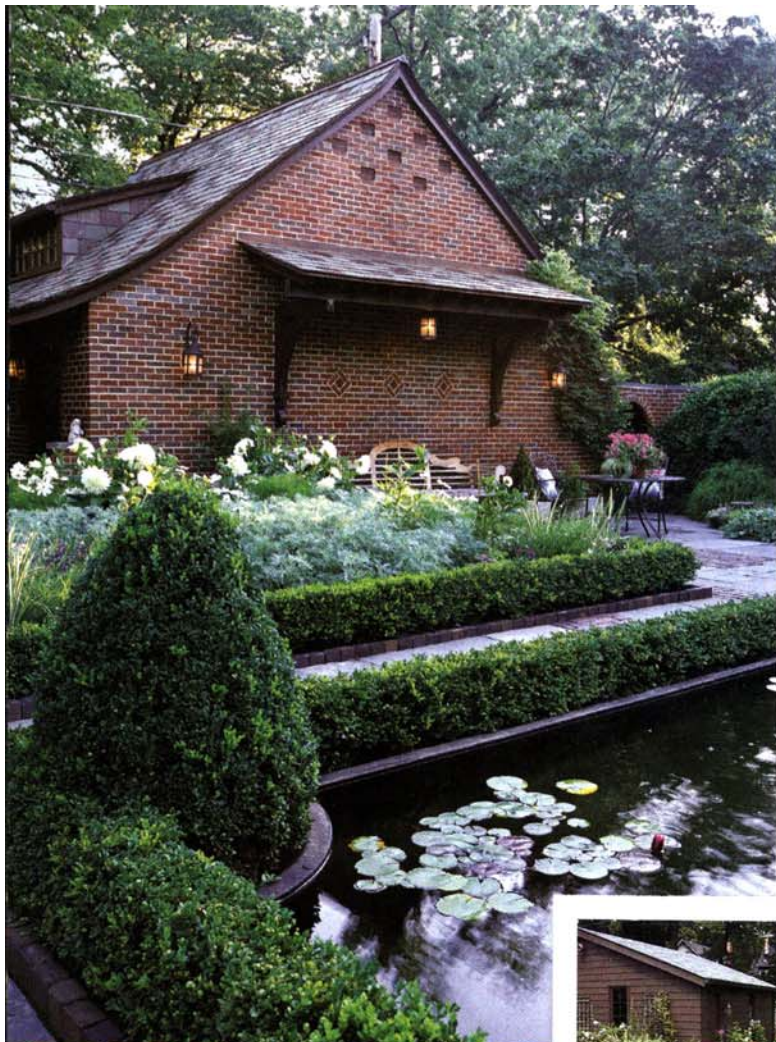
BY ELVIN McDONALD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KRITSADA





English
garden
on the
prairie

AN ILLINOIS COUPLE
TURNS A SUBURBAN
BACKYARD INTO A
PLACE THAT **"FEELS
LIKE A GARDEN"**



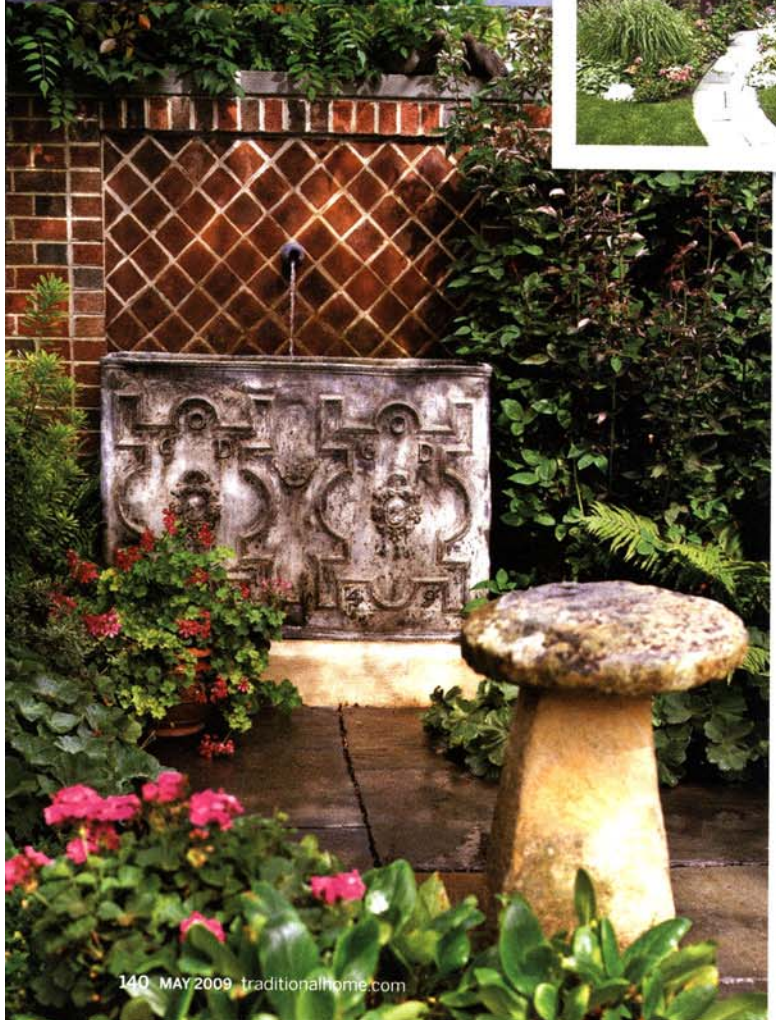
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It took some nerve to tear up a yard full of plantings they'd lovingly tended for years, but that's exactly what Rosie and Bob Drucker did. After visiting gardens in England, they came back to their 80x100-foot lot in Wilmette, approximately 18 miles north of downtown Chicago, with fresh eyes. "We both have green thumbs and grow beautiful plants," Bob says, "but something was missing—it didn't *feel* like a garden." That's when they called in landscape architect Douglas Hoerr (pronounced Hare), and the fun began.

Hoerr saw right away that the Druckers had what it takes to have an English-style garden. "They have the English spirit about gardening," he notes, "the right attitude. They like to fuss, weed, fertilize—and rejoice in the process." The word "fertilize" has particular meaning here: The Druckers are in the cattle business and have an endless supply of well-rotted manure at their disposal. In fact, Bob says, "We use no chemical fertilizer. Everything gets top-dressed in the fall, and at the outset we worked tons of compost into the native clay soil. That's why I can grow choice rhododendrons and azaleas beyond their usual range."

The Druckers' slate-roofed brick home had "cottagey charm" in Hoerr's estimation. "I envisioned a 6-foot enveloping masonry wall to enclose the garden and then worked out sight lines from inside the house. What would they be seeing from the rooms where they live and work? When combined with a rich horticultural overlay, this would achieve the English garden look they desired."

When Hoerr showed the Druckers his design, they questioned, "Shouldn't things be curving?" His response was, "No. If you look at the great English gardens such as Hidcote and Sissinghurst, they are strongly architectural, which complements a billowy planting style. In other words, squared beds show off rounded plants." The new plan organizes the yard into three segments based on a north-south axis from the terrace to the back of the property: an allée of columnar beech trees framing a serene swath of lawn, a formal garden



Right: Seen through the ironwork above the cistern, the formal lawn is framed by an allée of columnar beech trees underplanted with flowers. **Top left:** A dovecote in the gable end of the new garage adds to the structure's appeal. **Bottom left:** Bob and Rosie Drucker found the water trough and saddle stone (aka "mushroom stone") in England. **Preceding pages:** Box-edged beds of white dahlias and cosmos with gray 'Powis Castle' artemisia flank the water-lily pond.





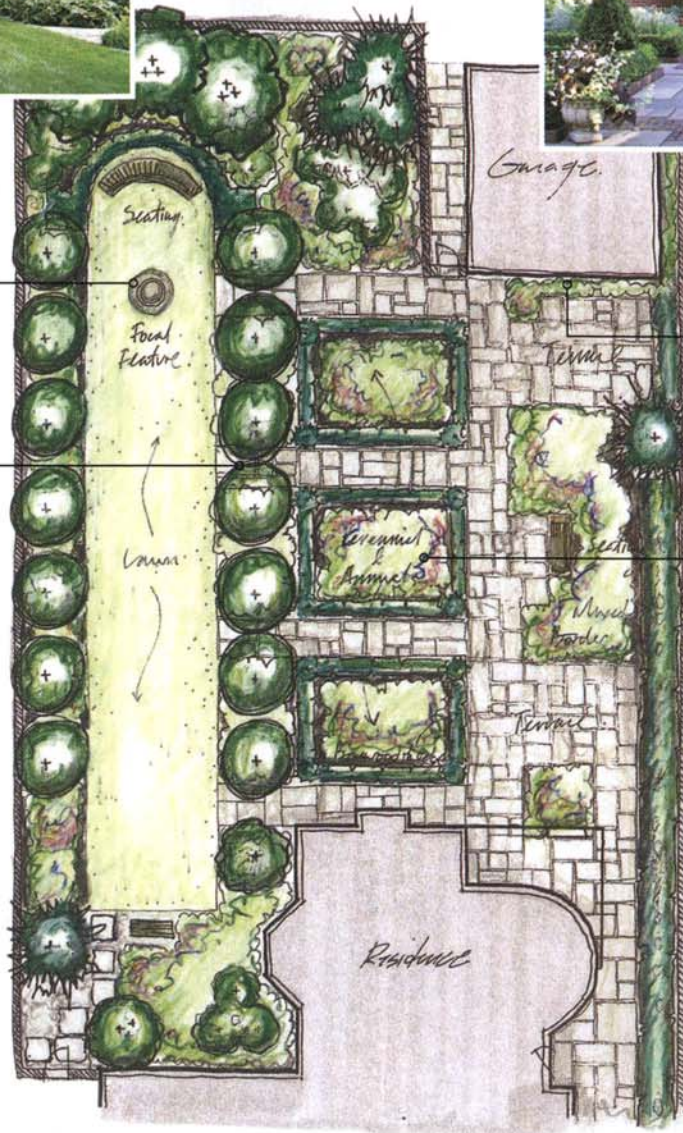
As seen from the boxwood parterres, the flower border features white 'David' summer phlox, yellow snapdragons, roses, dianthus, and butterfly bush. Pink mandevillas grow on the arch.



The cistern with its iron cover stands at the back of the beech allée garden. It is one of the Druckers' favorite sights from inside the house.



A Lutyens bench sits against a wall of the new garage and under an arbor on which wisteria is being trained by Bob Drucker's able green-thumbed hands.



The flower border that grows under the allée of columnar beech trees can also be seen through inviting handcrafted iron arches positioned at the cross-paths.



A water-lily pond replaced the "perennials & annuals" indicated on Doug Hoerr's original sketch. The splashing music of the fountain masks the sounds of suburbia.

of three boxwood parterres, and a terrace with water features, all linked by intersecting cross-paths.

The view from the back of the lot to the gable end of the 1920s brick house was aesthetically pleasing, but looking the opposite direction, Hoerr saw what he politely refers to as "a pathetic garage." Bob's daughter, an architect, designed a new structure, which Hoerr sited on the other side of the garden to make a theatrical backdrop.

Hoerr was well-equipped to handle the intricacies of creating an English garden. After he completed his formal training as a landscape architect in the United States, he spent two years working in English gardens and nurseries. "When the Druckers asked me for an English-style garden, I knew we could play with a lot of ideas. We trained vines on trees, added water elements—three wall fountains and a big open pond—and handcrafted iron gates and rose arbors."

The Druckers' old plan for the yard featured planting beds backed up to the straight lines of the perimeters and fronted by all curving lines defining sweeps of lawn. "Any garden is a living, changing thing," Bob says, "and there's always something innovative you've seen someplace and want to try. But the difference with the new plan is that we spend more time enjoying the garden rather than feeling frantic that we must always be doing something."

Rosie says their favorite spots for viewing the garden from inside the house are the living room and the master bedroom. "We face the beech allée and the iron-covered cistern," she says. "Last year, from our breakfast table we watched a pair of wrens set up housekeeping and feed their young. Our sanctuary had become theirs. It was fabulous!"

Landscape architect: Douglas Hoerr

For more information, see resources on page 156

