



Gardens Well Planned

***Purposeful gardens that reflect
the passions of their owners.***



By Moya Andrews
Photography by James Kellar

All gardens are unique, of course, and reflect the individual passions of the people who conceptualize and create them. Behind every spectacular garden there is a defining purpose and a resolve to create a particular type of garden. Presented here are three gardens that successfully realize their owners' ambitions.

When Sue Speichert fell in love with a historic home, she and partner Mick Harman took on the challenge of re-creating and expanding the equally historic and romantic garden surrounding it. Ed Paynter and Sandra Miles are environmentalists who wanted not only an ecologically friendly house, but also an exuberant, sustainable garden to produce food for both body and soul. For Diane Dormant, this, her third garden in Bloomington, is the culmination of a lifetime studying the elements of garden design.

To access the front door, visitors walk through lush plantings on a path to the stairs on the side of the porch. To the right, the plantings slope down the steep hill and, just past the dark green of the magnolia tree, a distant bit of Hartstrait Road is visible. On the near right of the path there are focal points such as the big leaves of a variegated *Hosta* contrasting with *Amsonia 'hubrechtii'* with yellow splashes on its thread-like leaves.



A Historic Garden for a Historic House

According to legend, Sue Speichert and Mick Harman's house was the Ellettsville, Indiana, stop on the stagecoach route that ran from Bloomington and Spencer on over to Terre Haute. Speichert says she fell in love with the white house on the hillside overlooking weathered stone walls and terraces, and she and Harman have been restoring it and the garden that surrounds it since 2011. The house, which they believe was built in the 1860s, is now painted sunshine yellow with white railings and gray steps. The porch has a white floor and a southern-style, pale blue ceiling and is adorned with hanging baskets of ferns.

The garden had become overgrown, and ivy was rampant, so Speichert, an experienced gardener, resorted to smothering it with a thick layer of cardboard covered with mulch, manure, and straw. Four

overgrown pine trees in front of the house were cut down to allow for better views and more light. Harman climbed up the remaining pines and inserted metal rings so that roses and *Clematis* could scramble up their trunks. A magnolia tree with its shiny foliage and abundant *Hydrangea* shrubs ('Incrediball,' 'Limelight,' 'Quick Fire,' and 'Pinky Winky') now create a lush romantic planting in front of this hillside home.

Bricks from the original kitchen floor were used to create garden paths, though occasionally a brick had to be omitted when old tree roots intruded. Near the front steps is a charming combination of variegated comfrey and shrubs such as 'Blue Mist' *Spiraea*, dark-leaved ninebark 'Coppertina,' variegated dogwood 'Wolf Eyes,' and *Weigela* 'My Monet.'

Another romantic feature, on the right as one faces the house, is a pavilion that

Harman converted from its previous use as a slat house (an open-sided structure used to provide shade to young plants). The pavilion is festooned with gauzy panels that drift in the breeze. The evening air is perfumed by honeysuckle that climbs the upright posts, adding immeasurably to the ambiance. Speichert and Harman use the pavilion to enjoy drinks and dinner under the stars at the end of their busy days.

A sunken garden on the left of the home is framed by a recently acquired archway. This space was a challenge to plant as it used to be a parking lot. Under the existing grass, Speichert and Harman discovered an impenetrable blacktop layer. Although they added topsoil, they had to resort to utilizing only shallow-rooted plants such as *Hosta*, iris, *Lamium*, lamb's ears, and *Prunella*, as well as newer additions such as perennial



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1. (opposite page) High on the hillside overlooking Hartstrait Road, the front porch with its blue ceiling, white floorboards, and lush hanging ferns is the ideal place to sit and rock on a hot summer day. (inset) Sue Speichert and Mick Harman.

2. An airy, wire archway frames the entrance to the sunken garden where one of the property's many original stone walls (hand-constructed long ago and still in good repair) can be seen.

3. The plantings in front of this historic house include many varieties of *Hydrangea* shrubs interspersed with colorful annuals and perennials.

4. A pavilion, repurposed from an old slat house, has gauzy white panels that float in the breeze. The honeysuckle growing on the posts perfumes the air.

5. Repurposed antique bricks were used to pave the path that wends its way in front of the home. Note the old pine trees that Harman limbed up to improve both air circulation and the view. These trees and the bamboo tepee now provide support for climbing *Clematis*.



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Geranium 'Dark Reiter,' *Ajuga*, catmint, wild petunia, and red-blooming *Dianthus*. Where it was possible to dig deeper, there now is a lovely stand of thread-leaf *Amsonia*, an old-fashioned single yellow rose, and the pink 'Belinda's Dream.' Exotics in pots, such as a tender banana tree, are moved around as focal points.

There are a few whimsical touches as well. An old-fashioned water lily, 'Chromatella,' looks magical when it blooms in a horse trough, and the rusted trough evokes memories of times past when perhaps the stagecoach stopped here on its way to destinations down the road.



A Wild, Exuberant Eden

Long ago, the Romans grew *Sedum* on the roofs of their dwellings to ward off evil spirits. Ed Paynter and Sandra Miles weren't worried about evil spirits when they covered the roof of their eastern Greene County home with *Sedum*—they were designing and building their retirement home with environmental concerns in mind.

The back of the house is inserted into a hill; to access the green roof, one walks uphill through plantings along the side. At the top, it is an easy step onto the roof where one is literally standing in *Sedum*. From there, the view includes a sloping front garden with two ponds, persimmon trees, a riot of colorful native flowers, and the countryside in the distance.

"Standing on the roof, looking south, the county road is to the left and the state road behind, but the house is not visible from passing cars," Paynter says. "In winter, when the trees have lost their leaves, the roof can be seen but appears as a small

clearing." Two mature trees—a sassafras and a walnut—help support the roof; additional support is provided by timbers from a dismantled barn.

For two years, while they built the house in the woods below, Paynter and Miles lived in an apartment they built over the property's pole barn. For the past nine years, they've enjoyed the fruits of their labor, living in their distinctive, energy-efficient home that features an open floor plan and expansive, south-facing views.

The woods come close to the home on the right side, so ferns and other shade-loving plants inhabit that part of the side and front gardens. "And persimmon trees are everywhere," Miles says. "There is also a big pawpaw patch. We love their dark purple blooms. We tie bags over their fruit to save them for us."

Behind the garage, vegetable beds and various berry bushes are found. "Ed is the vegetable grower," Miles says. "He's built

support structures and covers for some beds to deter foraging animals." In summer, the covers also protect cool-season plants, like lettuce, from the strong sun. "Sandy is the flower gardener, and we start many plants from cuttings," Paynter says. They like to sit on the deck and listen to the frogs in the pond and enjoy the blooms from native perennials such as *Rudbeckia* that, once established, withstand drought. The natives also attract birds and a large number of beneficial insects.

This knowledgeable, hard-working couple still has many projects they would like to complete in their garden. However, Miles' daughter operates Huckleberry Hill Winery in the pole barn they once called home, and they have easy access to the fruit wines produced there. So, after a busy decade creating their personal Garden of Eden, some evenings it is tempting just to sit outside and sip.



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1. (opposite page) A *Sedum*-covered roof provides living insulation for the house. *Sedum* are drought tolerant and their fleshy leaves retain water. Mat-forming varieties such as this *Sedum* 'Aureum' are common on the roofs of houses that back into a hillside. (inset) Ed Paynter and Sandy Miles.

2. Visitors turn left to enter the front door of the house or walk up the slope at the right if they wish to step onto the roof.



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3. A white *Hydrangea* shrub.

4. Daylilies, black-eyed Susans, coneflowers, and lavender *Hosta* plants provide a splash of color in front of the deck.

5. A vibrant red daylily.

6. The front of the house with bits of green *Sedum* peeking over the roofline.



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Small on Space, Big on Design

For as long as she can remember, Diane Dormant has had a garden. By the time she moved into her current home 25 years ago, she already had created two gardens in Bloomington and was ready to design a third.

“When I moved here, there were only six large maple and oak trees, a yew, and an arborvitae hedge,” she recalls. “The backyard sloped precipitously to one corner, so I had 40 loads of soil and compost delivered to create a low hill that allowed for flowering bushes and a crab apple tree at eye level. In the front, I had curved beds built and pebbled paths laid out.” Throughout her garden, most of the paths are edged with limestone from local quarries.

Dormant’s interest in design was influenced by writers like Thomas Church and local landscaper Charles Steele who, she remembers, emphasized the importance of refuge and prospect. “I wanted my garden to be a sanctuary like Rodin’s garden in

Paris, and other famous gardens I’ve visited,” she says.

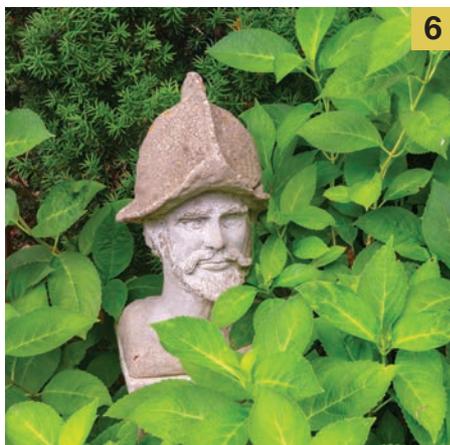
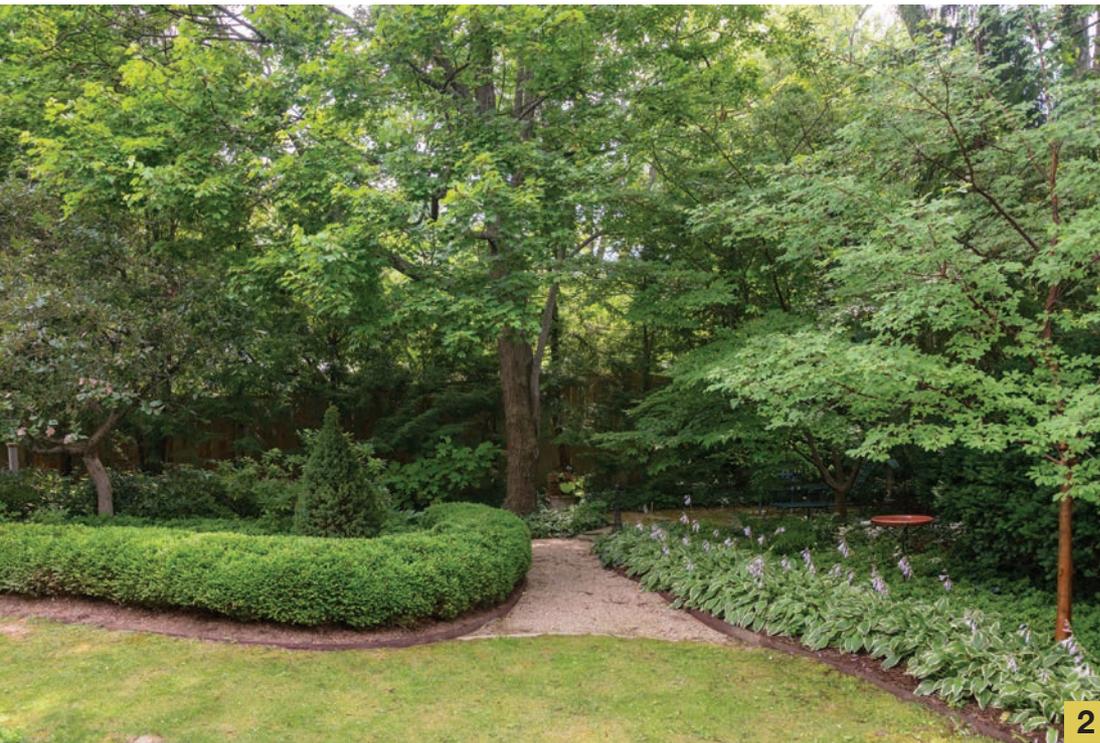
Dormant also invested time in the concept of prospect. First, she put focal points in place, then she would observe, ponder, and move things around. The expansive view from her home office changes across the seasons, and the light plays on different focal points during the day, most notably in the early morning when the sun hits the flaking bronze trunk of a paperbark maple.

Although the garden is on a fairly small suburban lot, the tall trunks of the mature oaks, as well as the uncluttered plantings and curving paths, create a sense of space in the front of the home. In the back garden, the repetition of plantings, such as the boxwood hedges, moves the eyes horizontally, also creating a sense of openness.

Dormant says she only gradually became aware of the international aspects of her garden. The south-side brick terrace, for example,

has a Hispanic flavor, with a table for alfresco dining, Mexican marigolds and pottery, and a concrete bust of Cortés. The Asian Walk is a space where most plants can’t thrive. Now it features large variegated stones, a windsock, Japanese pots, and a Hinoki cypress. The back garden has a European flair, with formal yew hedges and a butterfly garden. The shady rear corner, near the fence, has plants reminiscent of Africa, such as Elephant Ear and *Acanthus mollis*, and masks brought home from Liberia. The north side of the home plays host to her Indiana vegetable garden.

The excellence of the original plan, the use of restraint, and an understanding of proportion are all apparent as one walks through Dormant’s garden. Experience is a great teacher, and this gardener has been playing and working in gardens since she was a child. And she’s been creating them, as well as visiting them around the world, most of her adult life. ✨



1. Paths and stepping stones, changes in elevation, and ground cover merge to create an expansive effect in the back garden. Three stone pillars and a tall, smooth tree trunk inject verticality, while one large-leaved *Hosta* provides a chartreuse bloom as a focal point amid the shades of green. (inset) Diane Dormant.

2. A flowing curve of boxwood, a sweeping line of variegated *Hosta*, and an open area of lawn create a feeling of spaciousness while distracting the eye from the fence at the bottom of this small yard.

3. A wide path leads to the deck stairs at the back of the house. Small, neat plants at ground level keep the area uncluttered.

4. Tall trees, a pebbled path with a perfectly placed bird bath, and serene green foliage plants create an impression of openness and calm at the front entrance to the house.

5. A pop of color is provided by annual *Impatiens* and coleus on the wall.

6. A stone bust of Cortés is framed by understated deciduous and evergreen foliage so that contrasting textures are effective in all seasons.