



In the Garden

DESIGNER MARSHALL WATSON FINDS INSPIRATION AND JOY IN THE GARDEN HE CREATED AROUND HIS HOME ON GARDINERS BAY.

BY JEAN NAVAR

Coming as he does from a long line of gardeners, it's little wonder that designer Marshall Watson would have a passion for landscape design that rivals his love of interiors. "My father took great pride in his weedless lawn, privet hedge and 250 rose bushes, and my mother was the president of the local chapter of her garden club, so I grew up working in the garden—though at the time I saw clipping hedges and mowing the lawn as chores," Watson admits. Over time, however, the talented designer has not only honed his skills in tending gardens, but also in designing and cultivating them. Proof of this fact is on spectacular display at the East Hampton property he shares with his husband, Paul Sparks, where a magnificent pair of Japanese dappled willow standard trees have exploded into amplified bloom at the edge of a reflecting pool just beyond the home's front door. "They look like a pair of pink powder puffs," the designer jokes. As glorious as the gardens that surround the couple's classically

inspired home may be, they didn't happen overnight—nor did they evolve without considerable trial and error. "We decided to build our house on the last vacant lot on the bluff overlooking Gardiners Bay," Watson says. And so, with meticulous care, he took on the task of designing both his home and gardens from scratch. "I had to learn the hard way about which plants would grow on a bluff," he explains, recalling several failed attempts to grow even indigenous grasses, trees and plants, many of which were overcome by invasive bittersweet, hungry deer and even Hurricane Sandy. "Gardening keeps you humble," says Watson. "No matter how much you do to prepare, Mother Nature often has other plans." Yet, with persistence and a little help from friends, the designer persevered and developed a thriving multilayered garden that would no doubt make his parents smile. "I love gardening, but I'm not a professional landscape designer," he notes. "I'm really a plants man. I love plants. So I talked to some of the best



From left: A tropical view of Gardiners Bay is classic; domed gazebo peeks out from behind English rose and Wolf Eyes dogwood. Opposite design: Impregnable Japanese draped willow welcome visitors to the door of Watson's East Hampton home.

PHOTOS BY ANDREA TORRES

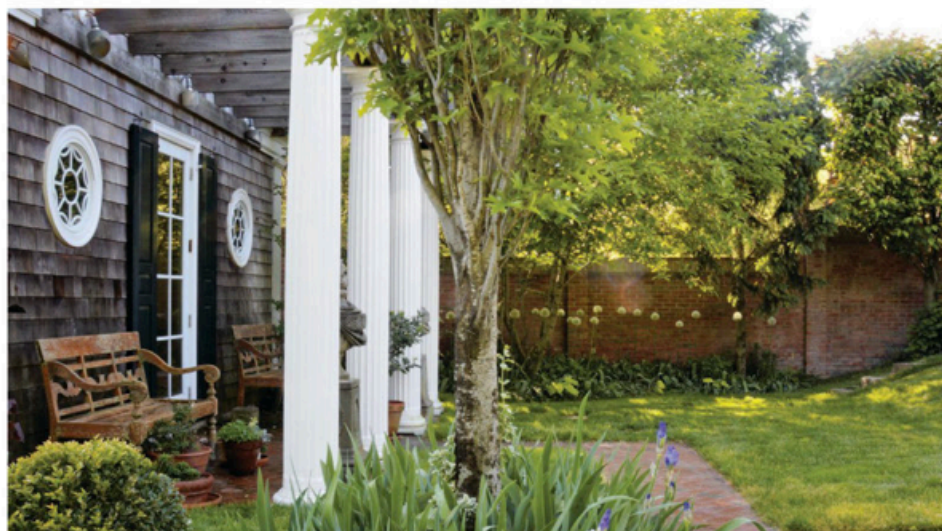
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Watson drew inspiration from well-known English, French, Italian and American Colonial gardens and infused pops of vibrant color into his landscape design.



landscape people in the business here, like Craig Socia, Geoffrey Nimmer and Jack deLashmet, who helped me think things through when I got stuck."

Not unlike his interiors spaces, the gardens he ultimately created are grounded in Classicism. "I started by dividing the plan into four rooms," says the designer, who placed a vegetable garden on one side of the house. Brimming with spinach, kale, Jerusalem artichokes, tomatoes, basil, sage and dahlias, the vegetable garden was developed as a decorative extension of the gardens near the garage, which was designed to look like a carriage house. Atop a raised mound opposite the

vegetable garden, a classic domed gazebo—hugged by English roses, Wolf Eyes dogwood and the dripping yellow racemes of a laburnum tree—overlooks Gardiners Bay. "We sit in the gazebo at breakfast and enjoy the view of the bay and the garden," Watson says.

While the garden's overall plan is classical, its style is eclectic and borrows from different places and eras. "My inspiration came from several well-known gardens—Italian, English, French and American Colonial," explains the designer, who approaches his interiors in much the same way. In contrast to the domed gazebo, for instance, a Chinese

Chippendale-style gate—inspired by a railing from a 19th-century Federal structure—opens onto the grounds in front of the house, where the long reflecting pool extends like a central axis toward the bay. "I also looked at local public gardens like Madoo, LongHouse Reserve and the Bridge Gardens to get a sense of the plants that would thrive here," he adds.

Among those that have stood the test of time are birch, weeping willow and fruit trees, including pear, plum, apple and peach (a few of which have been espaliered in French fashion by the designer). Shoots of purple iris and crocus, plump beds

of lavender and languid vines of wisteria also inject shots of color and scent into the air. And 25 varieties of hydrangea, including some along an allée leading to the bluff, add more fleeting hues and textures. "I chose varieties that bloom in shades of red, white and blue for about four weeks around the Fourth of July," says the designer, who has just spent the weekend pruning and shaping some of the ornamental plants in his garden. "My aching back is not so joyful, but my spirit is," he adds, pointing out a posy of butter-hued King Alfred jonquils as a byproduct of his efforts. "It's a gardener's reward." ■

PHOTOS BY MELISSA POWELL