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Exterior Spaces – Gardens & Landscapes

Winner: Parker Design Associates, Inc.



Project: Turkey Hill Farm,
Millbrook, NY

Landscape Architect:
Parker Design Associates,
Inc., New York, NY; Janice
Parker, principal

Natural Rewards

“Mother Nature is generous,” says landscape architect Janice Parker in regard to her recent project in Millbrook, NY, which borders the northwestern corridor of Connecticut. Although Parker’s statement is accurate, in the case of Turkey Hill Farm, Mother Nature definitely got more than a helping hand from Parker. An award-winning landscape architect, working on such endeavors as Million Trees NYC, Parker has coaxed seemingly listless landscapes into states of pure Eden for more than 25 years. With offices based in New York City, Southampton and Connecticut, Parker is well versed in the topography, climate and flora of the region.

In 2006, interior designer Darren Henault and his partner, Michael Bassett, bought Turkey Hill Farm, a 47-acre Christmas tree farm that included a 19th-century Greek Revival house, dilapidated outbuildings and rows and rows of Christmas trees. The couple turned to Parker for her expertise and ingenuity.

“Henault and Bassett not only wanted to transform the grounds into a beautiful property, but they also envisioned vegetable and cutting gardens, long-grass meadows, as well as creating outdoor spaces for entertaining and recreation,” says Parker. “They also wanted a place where they could raise bees and harvest fruit from their own orchards – they were very involved in the whole process.”

“We needed to reinvent the land that had been let go for many years. The idea was to re-create and expand on the agrarian landscape while creating new points of interest. We also wanted to introduce elements of surprise.”



Trees from the original farm were repurposed to create a border around the pool room; the two rows of trees create a layered effect. All photos: Neil Landino



Above: Parker layered elements into the design to create the long axis of the gardens as well as texture. Limelight hydrangea borders a native fieldstone wall, framing the central hedge room.

Right: The pool room is on axis with the urn room. The pool sits in grass edged with native bluestone coping.

The challenges Parker and her team faced in re-creating the property – aside from what to do with hundreds of Christmas trees ranging from 6 to 8 ft. in height – were the drainage channels that crisscrossed the fields and the many outbuildings that had been abandoned for years.

“There were row and rows of Douglas fir, blue spruce, and Norway spruce,” says Parker. After a long site analysis and vegetation inventory, the team was able to identify key maple and pine trees that were laid out in a grid. These trees would become the structure for the axis of the design. “We also realized we had loads of border plants in the way of the Christmas trees,” says Parker. “The design intent was to honor the site’s history, and reusing the trees would facilitate this goal.”

The clients’ first thought was to clear the trees to create a meadow,



but after careful consideration, Parker saw that these trees would be cost effective and useful in the design. “We saw the opportunity to use the trees for the new design and began a study and classification of the tree inventory.” Conscious of cost, Parker sourced a small tree spade and a three-man crew capable of moving about eight trees a day. “We moved over 400 trees,” says Parker. Once the structure of the landscape was established, Parker introduced graceful arcs and well-proportioned axial connections throughout.



Above: Custom iron arches and trellis covered in weeping Norway spruce (moved from another part of the property) frame the entry to the vegetable garden. Stone edge planting beds surround the organically grown vegetables and flowerbeds.

Left: A cedar pergola laden with wisteria vines frames the entry and dining space. Blue stone and native gravel were also used in the area.

The trees – two rows deep – became the border around the pool area. An unfinished cedar pergola covered in wisteria frames the entryway of the pool area and a gravel dining terrace edged in blue stone. The pool is on axis with another hedge room – the urn room – which is enclosed by the trees as well.

“Vistas from the house were very important to the client,” says Parker. An urn, which was supplied by Pomona, IL-based Classic Garden Ornaments and is the focal point of the room, is on axis with the center of the house and is framed with an iron trellis overgrown with trumpet vine, softening the stone piece. The urn room is flanked on two sides by fieldstone walls. The local fieldstone was cut to give the walls a more architectural look.

“The long axis of the garden is created by layering,” says Parker, who introduced one of her favorites – limelight hydrangea – behind the wall. “This variety turns wonderful shades throughout the blooming season and adds such color and beauty to the garden.”

“Vistas from the house were very important to the client.”

The cedar pergola is unstained so it will weather to an earthy gray tone.

Another challenge was reviving old apple trees on the property. Parker had the trees pruned over the course of three years to give them new shape and life. They create the front stage of hedge rooms as seen from the house. Parker also positioned the vegetable and flower gardens on a strong center axis. Bordered in the same dark green fencing in the crossbuck style as the pool fence, the vegetable garden fence is raised to eight feet and inset with wire to deter deer.

“Weeping Norway spruce, which grows on the arch at the opening of the garden, came from behind an old barn,” says Parker. “This use gives them new life in this context.” Another dramatic design element is an arc of deer-resistant Korean lilac bushes, which were added to the side yard and can be viewed from the open porch.

“When you follow the rules,” says Parker, reflecting on the project, “you are rewarded with what Mother Nature can do.”
— Nancy E. Berry

Nancy E. Berry is the editor of New Old House magazine and the author of two books on design. She lives in Yarmouth Port, MA.

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Older barn structures remain, keeping the agrarian feel of the property intact.