



Sweeping swaths of plants and splashes of color tie a landscape to its manor on a grand estate in the backcountry

BOSTO STOCKES







they instantly fell under its spell. They liked the place, which isn't a bad point of inception, and they were particularly impressed with its proximity to New York. Ray Joslin, who recently retired as head of the entertainment division of Hearst Corporation, is currently chairing a medical company based in White Plains called 3TP. With connections to the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot, Israel, the company is developing an algorithm that assists radiologists in the early detection of cancers. The Greenwich property was deep country with convenience tossed in.

It didn't take long to work a partnership between the couple and the countryside, and the exchange of ideas began soon thereafter. Although gardening (but really, the Joslin landscape is more like a park than a garden) started the moment after they purchased the land, there was a house to construct first. In that department, Alicia knew exactly what she had in mind. In fact, she sat down — with no formal training in architecture, mind you — and drew out the floor plan freehand. She turned her almost-to-scale graph-paper design over to Robert Lamb Hall, the New York architect, and amazingly, her sketch became 80 percent of the actual creation.

As for the land, Alicia had even stronger impulses. She felt deeply that something personal would be more expressive — and therefore more successful — than what she calls "the cookie-cutter landscape." "Ray and I walked the property," she says, "and realized how beautiful the raw land looked. What we wanted to do was appreciate and embel-

lish what nature had given us." That noble pursuit started with the alteration of the entry drive; it was rerouted to pay homage to wetlands as well as to wooded areas. The leisurely driveway was Ray's vision (and he's jokingly threatened to put in a tollbooth at its entry to pay for the plowing), to provide a strong sense of ecology for anyone who visits. The rest of the land-scape followed along in the same vein.

Of course, it wasn't as easy as it sounds. In truth, the Joslins didn't leave the land exactly as they found it. When all was said

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and done, some elements had to go to prevent both Joslins from suffering the forest-obliterated-by-its-trees syndrome. Some thinning was necessary. "But cutting down a tree was painful. Sometimes, something has to go, but it kills us to do it," Alicia readily admits. And interven-

Point is, they were both invested, so it was a dynamic partnership. Ray was originally the "down and dirty" member of the family, but Alicia now jokes that she's sur-

tion really was minimal.

passed him. They had had a garden in Westport and one at a California home. As a result, the Joslins came to Greenwich with plenty of experience backing them up.

Which explains why Alicia can't quite understand the prevailing fear and trembling that accompanies the installation of gardens. As she puts it, "There's nothing to be afraid of, you can't really make a mistake. The only error you can commit is to forsake the environment." The same line of thought brought the Joslins to leave a hefty rock formation in place and wedge their garage beside it. Similarly, the pool is nestled into a backdrop of stone outcroppings. "Who else would backfill to build a pool?" Alicia later wondered after considerable dust had finally settled. Instead of meddling, they left the view of the lake and its wooded ambience in the distance to create a slight rise for the pool and its pavilion. The one concession made to the typical house/land configuration was a flat pad of lawn spreading from the back patio. But the emphasis is definitely not on greensward at the Joslin house. Instead, the lawn is just wide enough to frame everything else that's going on.

And there's plenty happening. Don't imagine for one minute that it's all woods and native shrubs at the Joslins' property. There's a lot of that, for sure. But the property features an ample dose of other thrills as well. Alicia is clearly a plant aficionado, and testimony to her infatuation is rife throughout the grounds. Not content with the usual suspects, she's fond of connoisseur plants and willing to hunt them down. In addition to the juniper on the rock outcroppings, she adds cotoneaster plus creeping thyme to









work the lines. The beds are filled with several different types of ipomoea (burgundy, chartreuse and variegated), coleus, dusty miller (the coleus and dusty miller combination is a signature of Alicia's handiwork), hypoestes (aka polka dot plant), ageratums, Begonia 'Whisky' and dahlias. Working bronze foliage against green and chartreuse is something that this gardener does extremely well. Another favorite motif is white and blue.

That's where interior design theories are played out. Alicia likes to say that the garden is just an extension of the interior décor. "It's like choosing fabrics" is how she sums up her methods. Colors and textures have a lot to do with it. And quantity is critical to create the color echoes that she needs. Which is why Alicia raises plants from seedlings or divides what she has on the premises. Due to her inherent green thumb, Alicia can propagate to bulk up the numbers and make a bold statement, even when the nurseries don't supply the rarities that she happens to love in the needed quantity.

As for colors, she opts for quiet. Rather than the hotter shades, she selects from the cool part of the spectrum. Alicia blames it on her childhood. "I grew up in a town in California," she explains, "which is the asparagus capital of the country. It's hot and agricultural. Now, all I want is something cool to counteract the heat of summer." For Alicia, lavenders, blues, mauves, greens, whites and burgundies bring down the temperature psychologically.

Toward this goal, the property works a balance between annuals and perennials. To give plants the space they'd

require at maturity while still keeping the scene cheek to jowl in the meantime, Alicia cleverly tucked annuals in the blank spaces. Repetition of colors, textures and specific plants prevents the composition from coming off as a hodgepodge. In fact, the formula is so carefully wrought that the property could vie favorably with any botanical garden in the country. But the inevitable result of the method has brought a deeper appreciation for annuals with a simultaneous shrinking of blank space where they can perform. Alicia sees

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it as a mixed blessing — she'll miss the annuals when they can no longer fit in, but she's becoming increasingly fond of perennials.

Of course, Alicia doesn't go it alone. In addition to consulting her own instincts, she knows when to seek professional advice. The landscape firm that has worked on the property from the beginning is Ceci Bros. Mike Ceci and John King help with plant selection, toss back and forth ideas and accomplish the

actual installation. And Alicia continually credits their input.

To achieve the mature size in the ornamental tree department (and the property features a few prominent specimens), Alicia moved several treasured arboreal members of the family from the Joslins' former Westport property. For example, a pink-flowering dogwood made the transfer after a period of root pruning to prepare it for the transplant. Continuing that level of expertise, she now has a "hospital" area on the property where plants are taken when they need nurturing. Often, she nurses something that's failed for someone else. Occasionally, she sends a plant that's been traumatized to the recovery unit. "Sometimes I forget about the animals," she confesses — speaking of the deer, of course, that are the most common cause of cases dispatched to Alicia's intensive care facility.

Not only does she heal the afflicted, Alicia propagates her own plants, and winters them over as well. Knowing that she's unlikely to find such rarities as pinwheel jasmines, agapanthus and mandevillas for her urns at local nurseries, she trundles them indoors in autumn. In fact, the pinwheel jasmine traditionally takes up residence in the bathroom, making the tub experience a sensory delight.

The Joslin garden never shuts down. Spring is a riot of azaleas and daffodils while summer has its stampede of coleus and dahlias. In autumn, leaves change color so that, by winter, the naked bark stands out. Alicia admits that she's often thought of a greenhouse to further expand her winter escapades. "But don't you think that would be taking it too far?" she wonders aloud.





You don't drive right into the Joslin property.

No one speeds up to the front door of the Joslins' Conyers Farm home. Instead, you slowly swoop and glide your way through the scenery before arriving at the parking circle that Alicia Joslin planted with a crazy quilt of coleus and other foliage plants. If you haven't picked up on the mood — if Alicia hasn't succeeded in decompressing you into leisurely Sunday mode by then — you haven't been paying attention. Because Alicia is doing her best to send you straight to nirvana.

As far as gardens go, Alicia Joslin answers to no one. First of all, Ray and Alicia Joslin bucked the trend toward reshaping the land when they built on their twelve-acre property. Although everyone else might be playing amateur geologist and putting hills where valleys used to be, the Joslins took one look at their property on Lake Converse and decided it would be foolish to fiddle with perfection. Instead, Alicia has spent the last twelve years highlighting the natural contours that came with the land. Rather than meddling with the genius of the place, she's accented the beauty

of the natural geography. And, in this case, glorifying the Good Earth brought brilliant results.

What Alicia does best is punctuate the landscape so its contours are accentuated. If asked to describe her impulses, Alicia uses the interior design analogy. She likes to talk about décor, but fashion might be a better parallel, because Alicia really works with shape, outlining the property's figure to best advantage. And fortunately, the Joslins found a place that's curvaceous to the extreme. Still, you might never notice the risings and fallings were it not for the fact that cues are thrown out continually. With the use of ground covers that shape lines, with the placement of evergreens that follow and sink into a dip or swell on an elevation, she sends your eye where she wants it to go. Like a designer outfitting a supermodel, she knows how to outline a good figure.

Ask Alicia Joslin to chronicle her romance with the land, and she'll start with the saga of love at first sight. When the loslins went to see the Conyers Farm property,



