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transforms an Armonk residence

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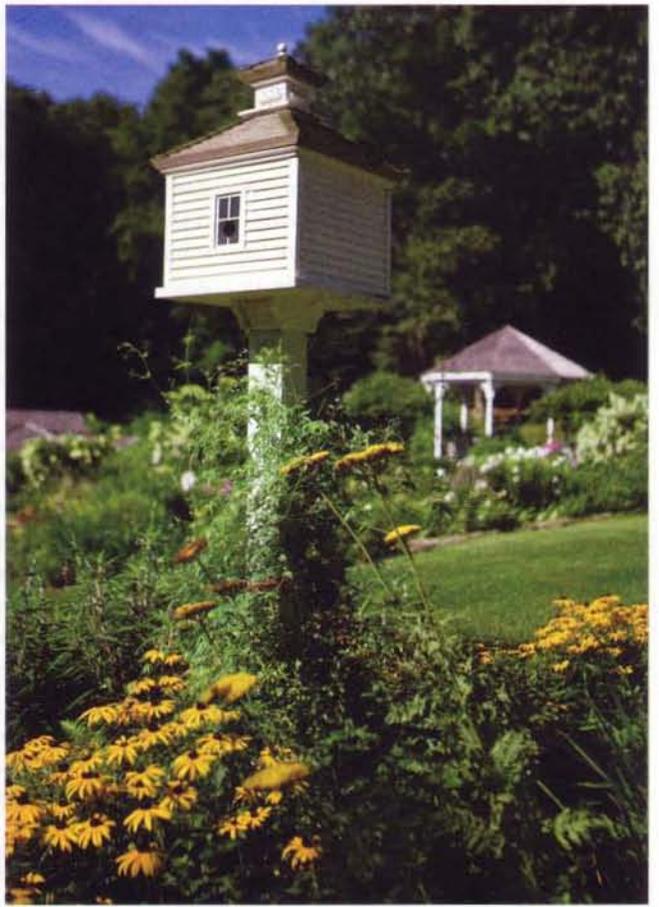
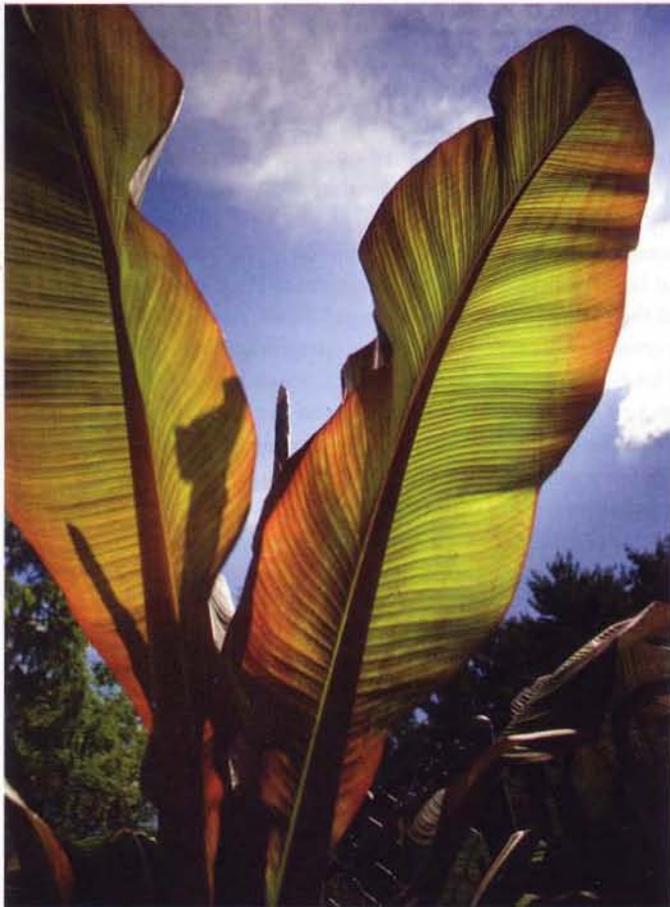


Text by Tovah Martin
Photography by Thomas Moore

the family TREES

A photograph of a swimming pool with lounge chairs and umbrellas, surrounded by dense green trees. The scene is set in a lush, green environment with a clear blue sky and scattered clouds. The pool is in the foreground, and the lounge chairs and umbrellas are arranged around it. The background is filled with tall, dark green trees.

When entrepreneur Michael Fuchs dug deeper into his pre-Revolutionary property in Katonah, he found himself immersed in the green movement.





IMM

MICHAEL FUCHS CAME TO WESTCHESTER COUNTY

for the trees. All it took was a passing glimpse at the arboreal canopy while walking by the neighborhood off Cherry Street, and the entertainment magnate of HBO, Time Warner, C-Span, and Comedy Central fame (to mention only a handful of Fuchs's connections) was lured straight to Katonah. And he couldn't have done better than the pre-Revolutionary Van Cortlandt farm that became his home. The farm was cosseted in a veritable grove of venerable maples, sculpturally gnarled apple trees, and other august characters of the woody kind, and Fuchs didn't think twice before making the leap to Westchester County, though he still maintains a Manhattan residence as well. But it was the untimely demise of some of those stately trees that actually put him over the edge environmentally.

Fuchs hardly remembers what the house looked like when he first purchased the Van Cortlandt farm nearly 20 years ago. The 18th-century abode required extensive work. "Every inch was done over on the inside" is as much as he wants to recall of the facelift that the structure required. And when the carefully wrought cosmetic surgery was completed inside, there was the Great Outdoors to revamp. The land was straightforward; nothing remotely akin to a bucolic rolling terrain was on site. So, Fuchs arranged to regrade the property and instill "natural contours" that now give the spread its seductively curvaceous lines.

(Previous Spread, Clockwise from Top Left) To infuse unabashed color into the seating area on the back patio, **garden artist Mary Larkin worked a brilliant combo of million bells combined with coleus spilling from an urn**; a metal fleur-de-lis gate separates the pool from other segments of the landscape; the solar-powered pool provides plenty of lounging space for guests; to give the garden heft, tropical bananas (*Ensete maurelii*) take a summer sojourn outside; to echo the Colonial mood of the homestead and reverberate it in the garden, Fuchs found a birdhouse that seemed apropos for his garden.

(Opposite Page) The wisteria crushed its original arbor, requiring a major haircut and a more sturdy structure to shoulder its heft.

(This Page) Clockwise from top left: A monarch butterfly pays court to a zinnia blossom; although the everlasting flowers of gomphrena aren't typical actors on everyone's playbill, they're in the chorus line of the Fuchs garden. In lieu of a diving board, Fuchs said it all with a spritely statue on a granite plinth entitled Joy by sculptor Leonard Craske.





(Clockwise from Top Left) The guesthouse is surrounded by windows rather than walls so visitors can partake of the scenery in panorama. The wall behind the pool is softened by a riot of perennials and ornamental grasses all performing to beat the band; even the small wading pool beside the gazebo was given a frill of accent annuals such as ipomoea and xanthosoma by [garden artist Mary Larkin](#).



While on a side trip during Wimbledon week, Fuchs paid a call to Sissinghurst and its legendary gardens. Although the segmented spaces for which Sissinghurst is famed weren't directly translatable, he took the flavor of the place and brought it home to his six-acre property. "I came back with two thoughts: 'it would be nice to do something formal' and 'a pale color palette was what I wanted.'"

Instead of compartmentalizing, he opted for flowing curvilinear paths that beckon from one area to the next. He installed destinations—an antique gazebo, a tennis court, a pool—and his gardener softened them with a connoisseur's array of plantings. So, the big, blowy borders cushion the scene and show the way to go. In addition to the tapestry of textures, the perennials serve as natural partitions—and their flowers are a major perk. "There's no such thing as too many flowers" has always been his philosophy. Harmony is equally important, and sometimes harmony only can be had by dampening the decibel level color-wise.

The sculptures Fuchs selected to adorn his landscape are so absolutely befitting that they don't steal the scene. There's a sense of highbrow humor throughout the reclining maidens, reptilian benches, and other lighthearted spins on classical themes that reside in the garden. Everything is totally original and in good taste. Fuchs also married art and nature to ratchet up the color spectrum with accent containers of antique pedigree, billowing with courageously colorful blossoms and foliage.





(Top) A curvaceous perennial border with plenty of Annabelle hydrangeas for left leads into an antique gazebo that Fuchs found in Vermont, carefully disassembled, and relocated to Westchester. (Bottom) What happens in the gazebo stays in the gazebo—thanks to the vines that serve as a privacy screen.

Unfortunately, many of the trees on the property had fallen over the years. In addition, there was a localized freak tornado that ripped through the property in 2007. It turned out that a 300-year-old Norwegian maple, seven feet in diameter but hollowed by age, came tumbling down when the twister hit late one night. “It sounded like a canon going off,” Fuchs recalls. Actually, a domino-effect train of calamity occurred as trees took each other out, slightly grazing the house, but it was the oldest and most beautiful tree that crushed his brand-new Porsche.

The car was a gas guzzler. To replace it, Fuchs bought a hybrid. And that was just one of several green moves. The pool utilizes solar power, the house is heated geothermally, and the property is being gardened as organically as possible. Moreover, when Fuchs goes for “locally grown,” he isn’t messing around. A new herb patch and organic vegetable garden were installed to furnish food for family and guests. When friends come to bask on his stone porch beneath the hundred-year-old wisteria, when they venture out to swim laps or warm themselves by the fire pit, they share the gracious hospitality of the place that Fuchs calls home. Throughout its past, the farm always had a green emphasis. Fuchs is making sure that green will forever remain in his home’s future. 🌱

Tovah Martin gets her green movement going in nearby Litchfield County, Connecticut, where she tends her own garden indoors and out. Her most recent book is The New Terrarium (Clarkson Potter/Publishers, 2009), featured this spring on the CBS Early Show.

