



free rein

A sprawling Greenwich landscape is
reimagined as an equestrian paradise

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LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS
photographs STACY BASS





This property is beautiful—what did it look like before its transformation?

It was basically a large, single-family estate with a large garage area. The old house was in a slightly different location on the property, and there was a disorganized orchard, a lot of mature trees and a pool in the backyard. It hadn't been lived in for many years, so it was in ready-to-tear-down condition. It's thirteen acres, and a local school had actually looked into buying the property, but that didn't go through. Since it's a big piece of land, it had been on the market for a while, and it turned out to be perfect for what the homeowner wanted to do. She's an avid rider with three sons, and one of them is a rider as well.

This looks ideal for an equestrian family! What potential did you see in the landscape?

It's a spectacular setting with beautiful views. Since it had been used as a residence, it wasn't a wooded lot; there were a lot of open fields and mature trees. We didn't want to waste any of the trees, so we did a lot of transplanting. Although there wasn't an organized orchard, there were a lot of apple trees, and we moved the apple trees and lined the

driveway with them. We also moved a huge, cut-leaf Japanese maple from the backyard and put it in the front in the center of the driveway oval. There was also one sixty-foot-tall Norway maple that we moved fifty feet to the right because it was in the way of the driveway, and the homeowner didn't want to cut it down.

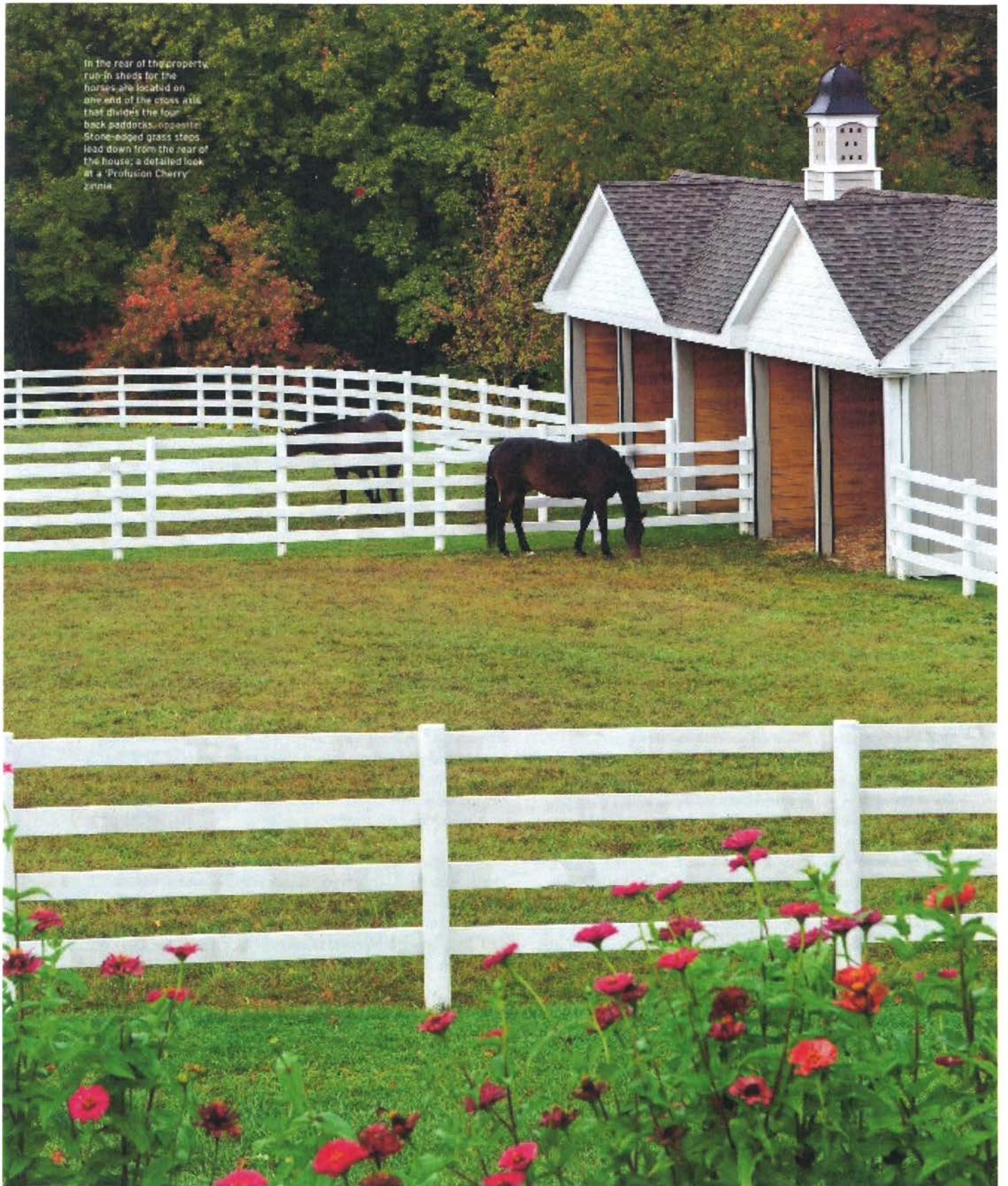
So preserving trees was a high priority?

The homeowner is very environmentally-friendly-minded, and she wanted to save whatever trees we possibly could. We sited the new house in a way that preserved trees, and the indoor riding arena was sited down behind a big stand of white pines in a way that didn't cut them down.

In addition to the Japanese maple, Norway maple and apple trees, what other existing elements did you keep?

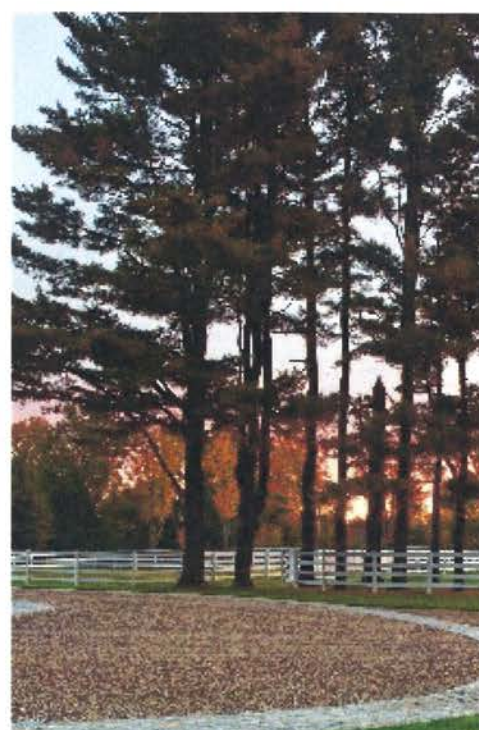
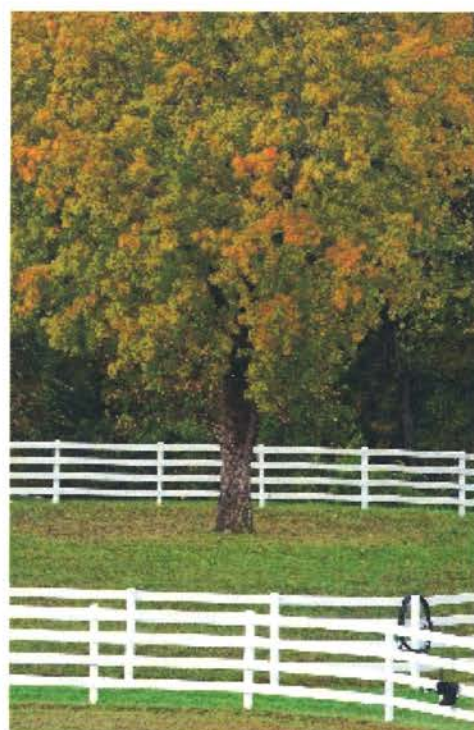
We kept almost all of the big trees; I don't think we cut any down. The old pool and all of the old buildings were demolished. The site was, within reason, re-contoured and reshaped to create areas for horse paddocks in the back, but we still worked with the topography as

In the rear of the property, run-in sheds for the horses are located on one end of the cross aisle that divides the four back paddocks, opposite. Stone-edged grass steps lead down from the rear of the house; a detailed look at a 'Profusion Cherry' zinnia.



Located in the southwestern part of the property, the stable, equipment garage and indoor riding arena were specially sited by Conte to work with the existing topography.





Conte designed the property's entry gate and pillars and capped off the existing stone wall that runs along the road. A sugar maple tree is a graceful presence in one of the horse paddocks, and the wide gravel driveway is lined with Connecticut fieldstone.

much as possible. It was very much an open-field kind of property, so there weren't a lot of obstacles to work around other than some stands of existing trees.

Entering the property from the road, how did you design the approach to the house?

The driveway entrance sits at the top of the crest of the hill, and it made sense to keep it in the same place. I sited the new house a little further up the hill from where the old house was and moved it a bit closer to the road, so it's set a little higher to take advantage of the amazing views from the backyard and rear deck. We realigned the driveway with an eye toward having the property feel like a residence. When you come in, the driveway makes a gentle turn to the right to the front of the house, and other than a few horse fences and paddocks, you don't really see the full working equestrian farm. If you veer left on the driveway, you go down the hill to the stable, equipment garage and indoor riding arena. They're all located in the lower southwestern part of the property behind a big stand of trees, but they aren't dominant; they don't scream at you when you come in. We

wanted the property to function like a residence and not a horse farm; it's rather a residence with a horse-farm theme. You really get the sense of being home first, and while the stables are very prominent, they're subordinate to the main house.

How are the horse paddocks arranged on the property?

There are horse paddocks on both sides of the driveway as you come in, and there are four paddocks in the front of the property and four more in the back. The ones in the front are more amorphous, fitting in with the land, and the ones in the back are more formal—they're rectangular and set in a formal axis.

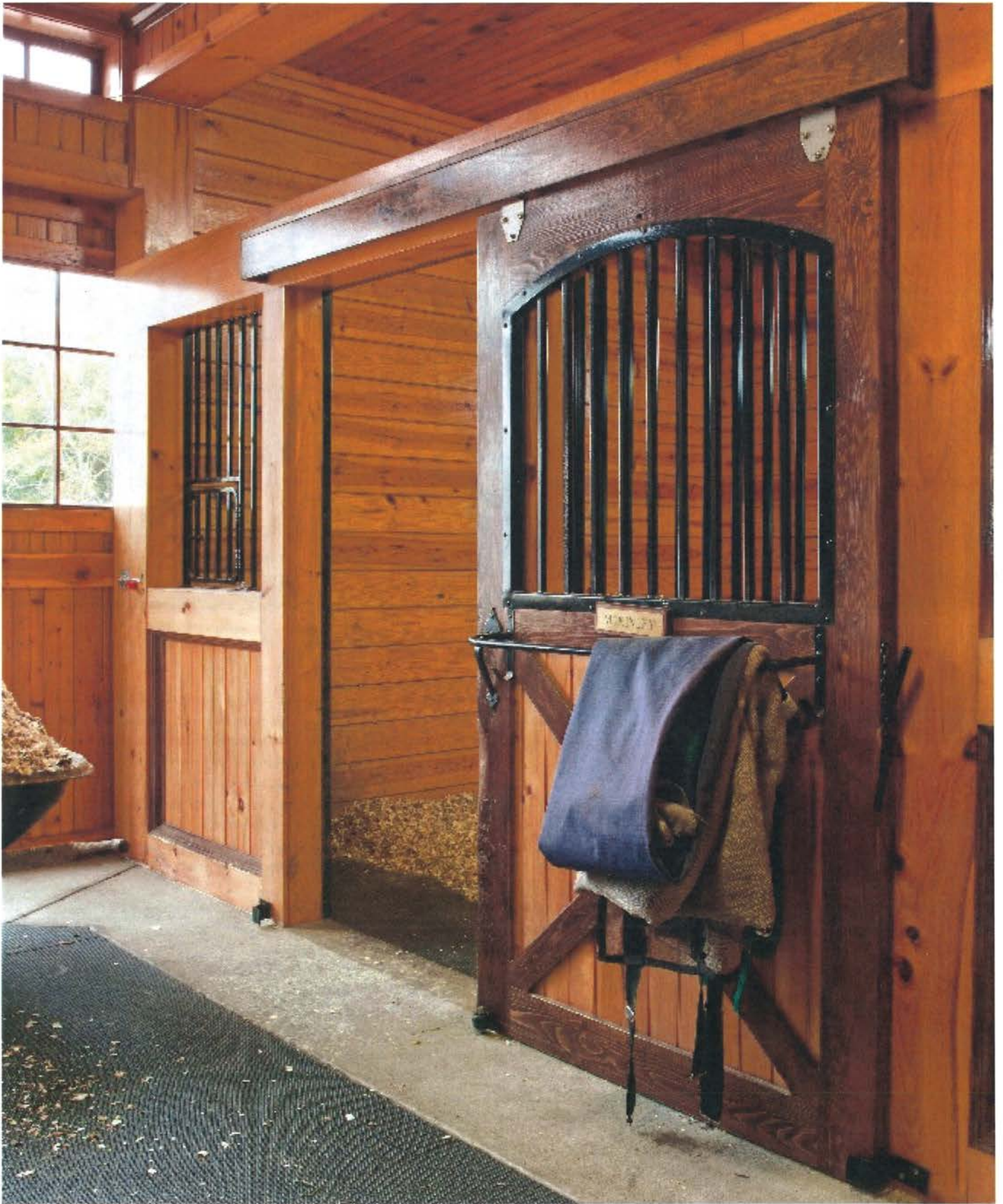
What kind of planting palette was used to enhance the front of the house?

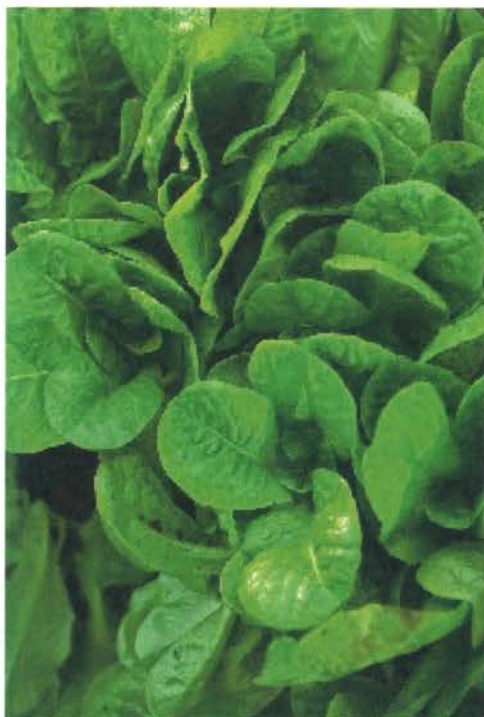
We didn't want it to be fussy, so it's a fairly simple palette with a lot of hydrangea and broadleaf evergreens. One of the major features is the homeowner's vegetable garden. She's a scientist, and she loves to apply her background to gardening. She wanted the vegetable garden near the house, so you can get to it from the balcony off

Originally located in the backyard, a large 'Weeping Laceleaf' Japanese maple found a new home in the driveway oval in front of the house opposite. Looking up from the back paddocks, the flight of grass steps is flanked on either side by large embankments of ornamental grasses and perennials.









Romaine lettuce flourishes in the vegetable garden; riding gear is neatly stored in the stables; and 'Dorothy Wycoff' Japanese andromeda catches the eye. *opposite:* Horses on the property reside in stalls built by King Construction.

her master bedroom and from the rear terrace. We planted blueberry bushes around it, which are prolific (she loves blueberries out of there), and then there's a four-quadrant vegetable garden with a birdbath in the middle.

Describe the theme of the landscape in the rear of the house.

There's a lot of hydrangea once again, so it's not a formal-looking landscape by any means, but in the equestrian setting, I think that's appropriate. We also had to be careful to use plants that weren't toxic. The horses don't come up near the house, but with all the other plantings around the property, we were very careful not to use anything that would be toxic if the horses got to them and nibbled on them.

In the back, a stone staircase leads to several entertaining spaces off the back of the house. What was your plan here?

The stone staircase is a big, arcing curve that centers off the main box of the house, and we used a diamond-patterned bluestone set on an angle to create a little visual interest. The vegetable garden goes off on a 45-degree angle to the left, and the pool goes off on a 45-degree angle to the right. It creates this embracing arrangement with the patio in the middle. The house has a wraparound porch on

the first-floor level, and if you come down the flight of stairs, you enter a large gathering area, the patio that could be used for a cocktail party. Off to the right, you go through a little stone wall into a lower terrace that surrounds the pool. A large pergola backs up to a ten-foot-high stone wall that separates the pool area from the garage parking. We wanted to create a very private separation between the parking area and the pool yet still give it an attractive presence. The pergola is a backdrop to the pool and also separates the functional parts of the house from the entertaining parts.

Beyond the entertaining spaces, a flight of grass steps leads down to the rest of the property. How did you arrange all of the different elements?

The large, stone-edged grass steps lead down to the center of the four paddocks in the back. There's a very strong central axis, and in the center of the four paddocks is a cross axis. On the one end of the cross axis are run-in sheds, where the horses go to get out of the rain, and directly opposite that, all the way down, are the stables, with a beautiful arched entrance. This large cross axis is a classical design element used to organize landscape features on long views and axial arrangements, and that was how I organized the backyard.

The embankment leading down to the rear paddocks is full of Pennisetum 'Hameln' ornamental grass, maiden grass, 'Morning Light', 'Stella D'oro' daylilies, 'Sea Green' juniper and 'Pee Gee' hydrangea.



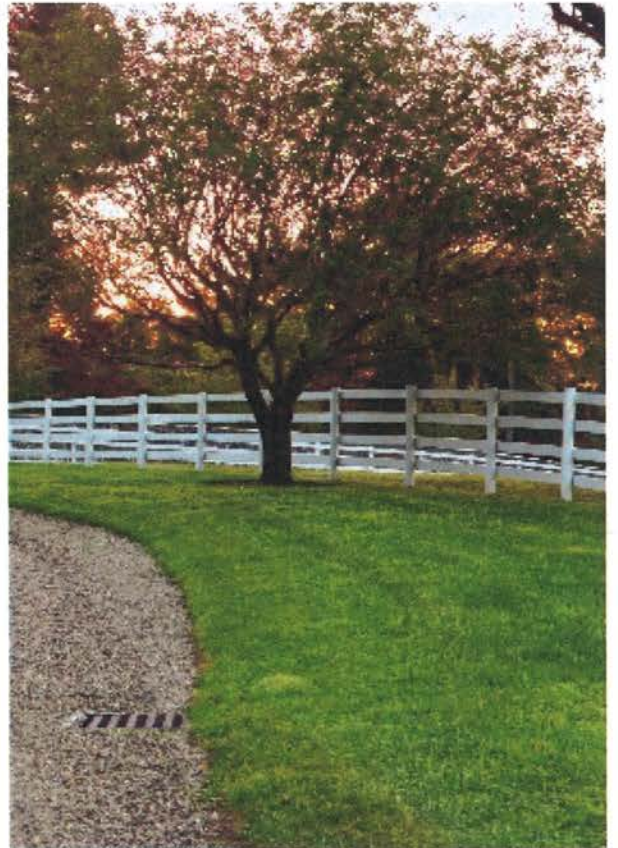
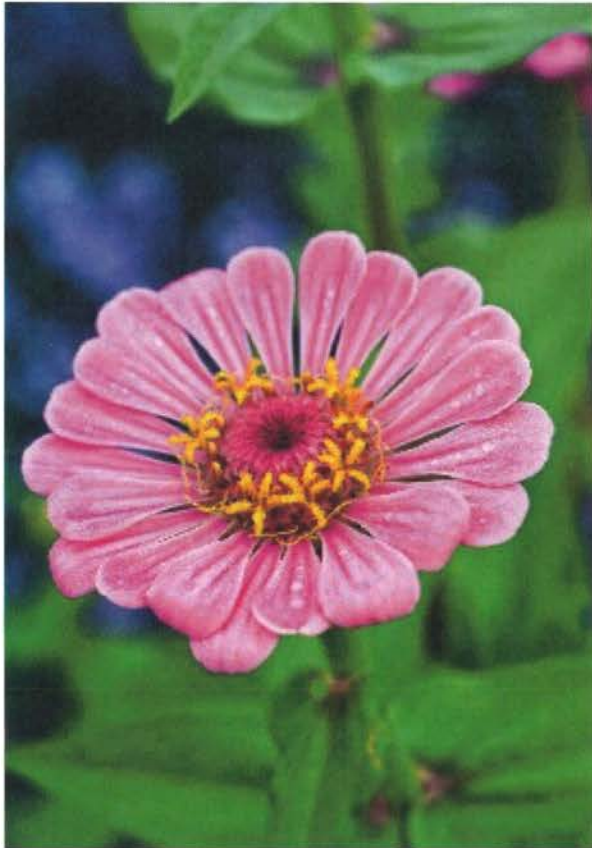
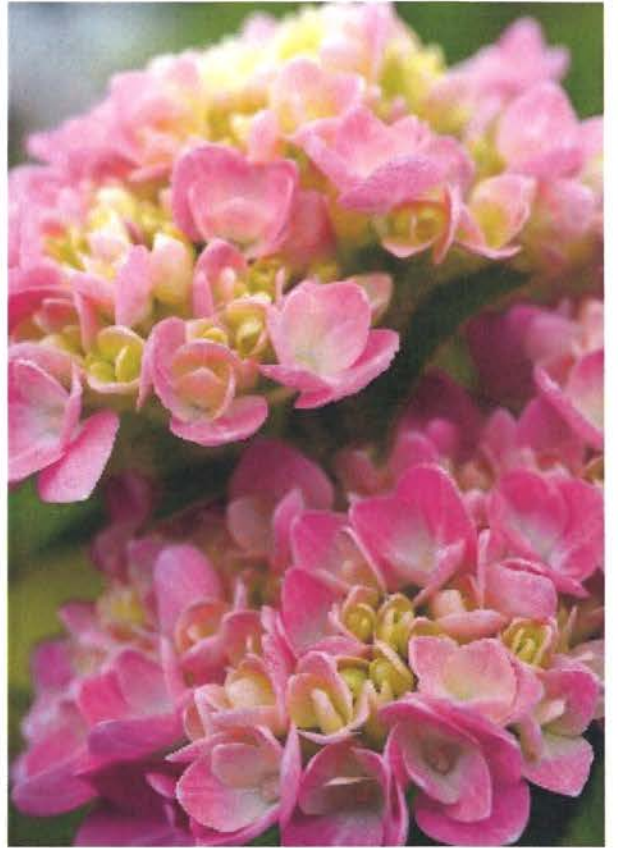


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Softened with ivy, climbing hydrangea and climbing roses, a stone wall paired with a pergola is an elegant backdrop to the pool. opposite: 'Endless Summer' hydrangeas, heirloom variety zinnia and McIntosh apple trees also feature in the landscape.





"I take a lot of pride in the whole
COMPOSITION."

—JOHN CONTE



left: The vegetable garden can be accessed from the rear terrace as well as the balcony off the master bedroom, right: An heirloom seed cucumber, opposite: Conte sited the stable behind a large stand of trees to help the property retain its residential look and feel.



How many horses does this property support?

I think about four to six horses. It could support more, but I think the homeowner made an agreement with the town that this is a private facility with the number of horses purposely kept to a minimum.

How did you plan for the fact that this residence would also function as a horse farm?

We needed to have the road network service horse trailers. The homeowner's horses are picked up in huge trucks, and we set it up so there's a loading dock for the horses. The homeowner also has her own trailer. It all had to be arranged to function as a working stable, so big tractor-trailers can come all the way around to the back, load the horses and loop back around and out. A lot of parking and driveway area for large vehicles to maneuver had to be worked in without making the property look commercialized. We used gravel driveways with gravel storage underneath for water, so the whole driveway was designed to be a permeable system so rain runoff wouldn't be created.

Overall, how long did this project take?

It was about a two-year process. A year to design and plan, and a year for the construction phase.

Did you work closely with the homeowner?

She was very involved. We had weekly meetings during the project, and she had a lot of good ideas. For example, I wanted to do an allée of sugar maple trees down the driveway, and it was her idea to use the apple trees instead. I was going to transplant the apple trees and

make a little orchard somewhere, but she said, "Instead of buying new maple trees, why don't we use the apple trees?" I thought it was a great idea, and it turned out wonderfully. It was definitely a collaboration with her.

What was your favorite part of this project?

I take a lot of pride in the whole composition, and it was wonderful to take the site from a completely blank canvas. It was so much to lay out in terms of buildings, circulations, paths and drives, but I think what I'm most pleased with is that it maintains its residential presence. You pull in the front driveway, and it's fitting of a residential neighborhood. It's larger and has an equestrian element to it, but it still manages to feel like a private home.

RESOURCES

Landscape architect: Conte & Conte, LLC Landscape Architects, Greenwich; 203-869-1400; conteancontec.com

Landscape construction: Fairfield House & Garden Company, Greenwich; 203-661-8900; fairfieldhouseandgarden.com

Stable construction: King Construction Co., LLC, New Holland, Pa.; 1-888-354-4740; kingbarns.com

Residence architect: Paul Stephan Marchese Architects, Greenwich; 203-869-2759; paulmarcheseearchitects.com

Residence builder: Murphy Brothers Contracting, Mamaroneck, NY; 203-629-1291; murphybrothers.com