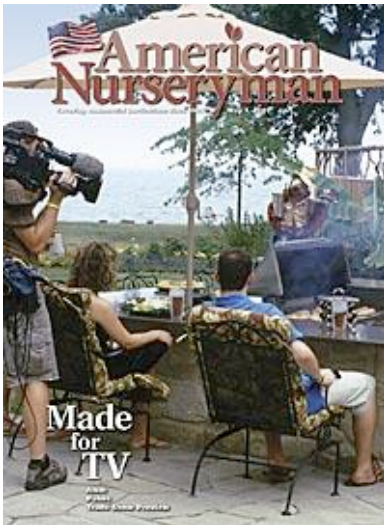


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Article Details

A Garden Gone Hollywood



A Maryland-based garden design company wins the opportunity to redesign a difficult Chesapeake Bay yard for HGTV's "Landscape Designers in the Making."

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Designs for Greener Gardens Inc. in Annapolis, MD, isn't your average landscaping company. First, husband-and-wife owners Pierre Moitrier and Nancy Lowry Moitrier refer to themselves as gardeners instead of landscapers.

For them, there is a distinct difference.

"We really do gardening," says Nancy. "Pierre always says, 'We design gardens with a soul.' When we create a garden with a soul or create an ambiance, we give all the best we have. It's a work of art for us."

The company's uniqueness is a product of the melding of the owners' backgrounds. The couple met in England.

Nancy, who earned a degree in horticulture, was traveling abroad to learn how to incorporate more organic elements into the landscape. Pierre had just finished his studies in countryside management and landscaping and had a good understanding of what Nancy was trying to learn. A match was made on a personal and business level.

Pierre joined Nancy's company 10 years ago. "He was really the first official employee, and with him, it really kind of blossomed into more of a business," Nancy explains. While not a large company, it grew steadily to a staff of seven in 2006. The duo prided themselves on working closely with customers and building a rapport, whether it was designing a new garden or performing maintenance on a large estate.

The HGTV experience. Nancy and Pierre believe it's the relationships they build with their clients that is the reason they won the "Landscape Designers in the Making" on Home & Garden Television (HGTV).

It all started in the dead of winter in early 2006. An employee took an interest in an e-mail stating that the show, "Landscape Designers in the Making," was looking for local contractors to apply for the chance to be on it. Because it was the slow season and they all had a little extra time on their hands, Nancy and Pierre gave her the go-ahead

to enter the contest. “Pierre and I thought they’d never pick us,” Nancy recalls, “and they picked us!”

The show’s premise is that HGTV selects a challenging landscape, and three designers from three separate companies present their designs. The homeowners, who set the budget and pay for the entire project, then select from among the competing presentations.

“You meet with the client and talk about their needs. Then you come back with a design a couple of months later,” Nancy explains. “And you’re featured on TV already. Hollywood comes, and you show the design to [the clients] on camera. Then the homeowner has two or three weeks to choose the design they prefer.”



The television crew captures the homeowner grilling up a storm in his new, luxurious outdoor barbecue area. Seating is available on either side of the kitchen area.

The competition all came from larger companies, Pierre notes. “[One] had like 400 employees, and the other had 20 or 30 employees. There were at the time – we’re a little bigger now – seven of us,” he says. “Nancy does really good designs. [The homeowners] really liked the design; it was very creative.”

“That was the thing [the homeowners] said,” Nancy adds. “I really listened to what they wanted.”



Nancy Lowry Moitrier’s plan for the garden won over the homeowners and garnered Designs for Greener Gardens Inc. national exposure through HGTV’s “Landscapers’ Challenge.” [\(Download a pdf of this site plan here.\)](#)

Design desires. What the homeowners wanted was a complete change. And with good reason. Their house, which they had recently moved into, was located on Chesapeake Bay and had a terrific view of the water. Unfortunately

for them, the yard wasn't much to look at.

The entire lot wasn't large, measuring only 50 by 150 feet, including the houseprint, which was only 21 by 57 feet, and the garage, 20 by 25 feet. The back yard didn't offer much in terms of beauty.

"The space was really bad," Pierre says. "They had 10 inches of pea gravel everywhere." In fact, the homeowners surmised the previous owners likely had been flooded by Hurricane Isabel and had used the gravel in hopes of preventing future water infiltration.

The only other feature in the back was a 40-cubic-yard pond. "It was dangerous, it was unnecessary, and it was in the critical zone of the Chesapeake Bay," Nancy explains. "When you're that close to the Chesapeake Bay, the bay is your water feature."

In addition to wanting the pea gravel gone, the clients had asked that their yard include a large outdoor kitchen and entertaining area. "They really liked to entertain. They entertained a couple of days a week," Nancy says of the couple. "They wanted it to be warm and comfy for six to eight people, but accommodate 150 people for their annual Cinco de Mayo party."



What was once a sea of pea gravel is now a raised terrace from which the homeowners can admire their view of Chesapeake Bay.

Additional homeowner desires for the yard included space for an outdoor hot tub, ability to view the bay and a

tropical flair to the garden.

While some designers may relish the thought of the possibilities presented with such an open area, it's not always easy, Nancy points out. "In a way, it was more difficult to work with because a lot of times you have a large tree or a feature that almost dictates where certain elements of a garden have to go because they won't go anywhere else. But because of the shape of their property – there was a big detached garage at the entryway – and the way the house sat and the houses so close on either side, it was a challenging blank slate," the designer explains.

Landscapers' challenge. The entire project presented a challenge, not the least of which was timing. While Designs for Greener Gardens applied for the show in the slow season, the design process took place in spring, the homeowners selected them at the end of May, and they broke ground the second week of June – in the heart of the busy season.

"We care for gardens in Annapolis – large estates, and some of them we've worked for more than 10 years," Pierre says. "We still had to fulfill those obligations. It ended up that I took on the TV project, and the other part of the team did all the work [in Annapolis]. We were only like three people during that huge project. It was a strain, but we are so proud of it."

Just breaking ground proved another challenge. Nancy's design called for all the pea gravel to be moved to the back of the house to create a raised patio, as well as for the pond to be drained and filled in. This meant hiring a skid-steer for the day, which Pierre had to coordinate with the filming crew.

The fateful day was Monday, June 22. It hadn't rained much all spring, but, the day before, it poured buckets, Pierre recalls. It still was raining on Monday, and the Bobcat driver and filming crew both said they could adjust to the weather. The problem was draining the pond. "We couldn't fill in the pond because it kept raining. It couldn't drain," Pierre says.

"We ended up filling it in all by hand," he recalls. "I had to confirm my costs and everything. We couldn't afford to pay another \$500 for 10 minutes of work. I just couldn't stomach it."

"That's why they call it 'Landscapers' Challenge,'" Nancy adds.

As the summer wore on, so did the heat. "In July, we experienced extraordinarily hot and horrible temperatures, and Pierre had to go on," Nancy says. "There they were, building the gardens in these obscene temperatures. ...

We tried hard and started earlier and earlier, but they ended up staying just as long as they ordinarily did because it had to be done on time."

Permitting for the kitchen also posed some challenges. "At first they wanted to put in a sink, and being so close to the bay meant the permitting process was horrendous," Nancy says. Due to the time crunch – they had to be finished by Sept. 1 for the television program – they had to change the plans. They ditched the sink and called the area an outdoor barbecue, which made it much easier to get the project through permitting.

The last big challenge was designing a new front porch. The homeowners had re-sided their house and discovered the porch was rotted. They asked Nancy to give them something new. "That was pretty exciting to add a touch of our style to their front porch," she adds.

Garden walk. The budget for the entire project was \$40,000, and the Moitriers did a good job of staying on

course and providing the homeowners with all they wanted. “Well, first of all, I broke it down into different garden groups,” says Nancy. “So with the way the house and detached garage were oriented, I was able to make this beautiful entryway garden. It was initially all flat and pea gravel with a couple of raised beds. We pushed all that pea gravel to the right and changed the topography here to ... reinstate the original drainage.”



A bluestone walkway, new front porch, natural cedar fence and generously sized crape myrtles welcome visitors to a tropical getaway on Chesapeake Bay.



Large steppingstones lead visitors through the natural cedar arbor handmade by Pierre Moitrier.

Pierre built a walkway with a slight grade to help with drainage issues, and he added some little berms to help

define the space, she adds. Three large ‘Sioux’ crape myrtles (*Lagerstroemia* x ‘Sioux’) that reached about 15 feet high offered a lovely canopy to the entrance garden and enhanced the look of the new stone front porch.



Friends gather in the tropical hideaway just beyond a cedar arbor created by the designers. The trellis work on the privacy fence in the background complements the arbor and decorative fence in the front yard.

The crape myrtles were a bit of a family affair. Nancy called on her parents, Jack and Jean Lowry, owners of Lowry & Co. in Phoenix, MD, a well-known plant broker, for some help in finding the right specimens. “I sent my dad a needs list, and I said, ‘Dad, this is the budget we have. Please get us any size you think we can handle, knowing we couldn’t get a skid-steer, and we had to plant by hand because of access,’” Nancy recalls. “They were huge. They were giant. The root balls were 2 1/2 feet tall and wide. It was kind of a funny moment. But once they were all in the ground, it really made a world of difference in the look of the project.”

A beautiful cedar arbor that Pierre built by hand defines the entry into the terrace area, Nancy explains. Three big steppingstones lead visitors into that next garden space.

What was once a sea of pea gravel became a beautiful, raised terrace giving the homeowners the view of Chesapeake Bay they desired. The patio was topped with bluestone pulled from the old pond area, which also was used in the front walkway (although additional bluestone had to be purchased to finish the project). “I’m an avid recycler,” Nancy says. “It comes down to not buying more than you need and utilizing what the client has. ... [Homeowners] really like that. They don’t feel like you’re trying to resell them something that is unnecessary.”

The outdoor barbecue/entertaining area has everything but the kitchen sink. Granite countertops, a handy

refrigerator and generous seating make for a luxurious outdoor eating space. The homeowners also were given a stainless steel outdoor grill, which helped keep costs down.

“The outdoor kitchen was really interesting because it has two levels you can sit at,” explains Pierre. “One side you sit on the terrace at a table-chair height. The other side you sit at barstool-chair height, and that really brings you a view of the bay.”

The other key entertaining area is the expanse of turf. “[The homeowner] really liked lawn,” Pierre adds.



The ability to entertain a large number of guests or host a few friends for dinner was very important to the homeowners, and they say the Moitriers gave them their dream space.

Throughout the gardens is a variety of bright, colorful plantings that evoke the image of an island paradise. “They really wanted [the space] to look tropical-like, but it needed to look like it was in the right place,” Pierre explains.

Nancy carefully selected the perfect plants. “I’m very passionate about the plants. It’s really important when I’m designing to match the plant material to the site for cultural conditions and to make it harmonious with the contrast of textures and sequence of bloom.”

One of the plants key to creating this tropical atmosphere was hardy banana (*Musa basjoo*). Three of these were incorporated into the landscape. “It dies down in wintertime, but it comes back bigger and stronger each year,” Nancy explains.

When it came to many of the other plant selections, Nancy concentrated on natives. “It was important for permitting, and it was important to me as a steward of the land to use natives that would grow and create this tropical feel,” she says. She used switch grass (*Panicum virgatum* ‘Cloud Nine’), crape myrtles, bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*), yellowwood (*Cladastris kentukea*) and a variety of perennials, including tickseed (*Coreopsis*) and catmint (*Nepeta x faassenii*). She also incorporated native roses and swamp hisbiscus (*Hibiscus coccineus*). “There are a lot of brilliant colors,” she says.

The hot tub was installed right where the homeowners wanted it – near the garage – which offered some privacy and was convenient to the house.

A board-on-board cedar privacy fence runs along one side of the house. What makes it unique are the special touches Pierre added with some natural cedar trellis work at the fence top, which complements the cedar arbor

he built, as well as the decorative, natural cedar fence along the home's entranceway.

"The homeowners were really pleased with what we did for them. We took care of them," Pierre says. "They keep raving about the experience, and we still have a good relationship. We just became friends."

In fact, the homeowners are setting the stage for a party with the Moitriers when the HGTV program airs, which is slated for sometime between April and October. "They can't tell us any sooner in advance than a couple of weeks," Pierre says. "It could be any day now. It's pretty exciting. We're going to invite all of our clients and [the homeowners'] friends. It should be a fun celebration."



The homeowners made their feelings about their new garden known with a simple sign reading "Welcome to paradise – where it's always happy hour."

The whole experience has been pretty exhilarating, the gardening duo says. It's been both ironic and fun to be a part of bringing one of their designs to Hollywood when they don't even watch much television, the Moitriers say.

One thing for sure, however, is that they will be tuned into HGTV to see how this garden grew on national television.

Sarah Landicho is a contributing writer of American Nurseryman.

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