



Greener Gardens

Pierre & Nancy
Lowry Moitrier

By Michael Rhian Driscoll

Pierre and Nancy Lowry Moitrier, the folks who run the Annapolis-based Designs for Greener Gardens may not always do the “smart” thing, but they always strive to do the right thing. As an operational and business principle, it seems to have worked out just fine.

Others would agree. This simple principle led the company to be featured in *American Nurseryman* and *Chesapeake Life* magazines, and on HGTV’s *Landscaper’s Challenge*, at the end of 2007. The program still airs on Sunday mornings through the rest of this year but is no longer in production.

Producer Ellen Bauman-Kennedy explained that the company was one of three Annapolis-area companies researched and invited to submit a proposal for an actual project which was then documented by HGTV. While there was no prize in the traditional sense of the word, Ms. Bauman-Kennedy noted that the national exposure for the company was quite valuable in its own right.

On their web site, www.greenergardens.net, the company defines its mission as being to “provide clients with only the best quality materials and horticultural techniques available today.” Their goal is to create, maintain, and

improve gardens that enhance the individual character of a client’s home or business.

This is accomplished by close attention to detail, a knowledgeable plant selection that seeks to use plants native to the region, a sense of professionalism and a personal work relationship with the customers. Sarah Wangness, who runs Sarah Beth Bed and Breakfast in Annapolis’ Historic District, is one of their many customers who have benefited from the dedication that they bring to the table.

She explained that after moving to the area five years ago, friends told her about Greener Gardens, so she decided to try them out on the B&B, and was so pleased with the results that she hired them to design the gardens for her home in Oxford, MD. The preparation and planning was so clearly laid out, and the work attended to with such efficiency, that Ms. Wangness is eagerly anticipating spring, into order to see how it all comes together. The gardens “are not fully-grown yet but the plans are gorgeous,” she said.

On a personal basis, “they are extremely professional and a delight to work with,” said Ms. Wangness. She was particularly impressed by the way Ms. Moitrier not only examined the grounds outside her properties, but also



went inside to see how things looked from that perspective. “She took so many pictures of the gardens to see how much showed from the windows, and what the shadows were like at various times of the day.”

But what seems to have really sold her on the company was the final presentation, when Ms. Moitrier basically drew up the plans in front her. “The results were like a painting that could be framed,” she said, adding this was something she might go ahead and do.

The founder of the 11-year-old company is Pennsylvania-born Nancy Lowry Moitrier, and she runs the business with her husband Pierre. Pierre is originally from the center of France, near the town of Vichy, an area he describes as rather like Pennsylvania. He calls the region very rural, very green, featuring a number of extinct volcanoes, a little-known fact that helps the area stand out from the rest of the country.

In a sense, Ms. Moitrier has been building the business all her life. Her horticultural education began at an early age in her grandmother’s garden, so it came as no surprise when she graduated from the Pennsylvania State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Horticulture. After graduating, she worked for the National Arboretum, and a number of garden centers including Homestead Gardens in Edgewater.

“I was selling plants and telling people how to grow plants when I didn’t have a garden of my own.” so she began working with people part-time, “just to supplement my income until eventually it blossomed to the point where I could do it full time.”

Then one day, she met her husband, Pierre, when they were both studying in England, “the home of gardens,” as he put it. Considering the way things turned out, their timing couldn’t have been better. Nancy 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.

“It was when I met Pierre,” she said, that her calling “really turned into a business where we both work together.” Over the years, the company has grown from a one-person operation to the two of them, into today’s company that employs about seven people.

Mr. Moitrier explained, “I wasn’t originally a gardening person per se,” instead he was preparing to be an environmentalist, “more on paper than hands on. It was when I met Nancy that I got the [gardening bug] too. We started working together and it became a real passion and that was nine years ago. I’ve learned a lot since then.”

Building the business end so that it can feed their art has been a constant education. Mrs. Moitrier said they have both learned a lot, both from copious amounts of reading on their own, attending workshops, and talking to others in the business.


Thanks to a constant process of preparation, study, and networking, Mr. Moitrier’s expertise covers a broad variety of woody plants, perennials and annuals and their many needs. His

particular talent is creating hardscapes, which means including stone creations of rustic patios, walkways, walls, wood trellis topiary work and other non-plant elements on a landscape. "I'm passionate about stone and creating ambiance. I like making rustic trellises and creating gardens and maintaining them just felt right. It seemed natural" to channel his studies onto this path with Mrs. Moitrier.

It is their artistic passion, combined with strength, discipline and a certain hard-headed practicality that has made the company a success. As Mr. Moitier put it, "We love what we do, and the rest kind of follows. We try to do the best we can, to create the vision that we have, and to do what we have to do to make this possible. We aren't driven by the need to make more money; we are driven by the need to find more 'canvas' on which to create our art. That's what drives us to put one foot in front of the other." As for the business end, "well, if there's something you want to do,

you've got to take care of it.

That is why, the vision thing notwithstanding, the Moitriers say that designing and building gardens is a pretty reality-based business. They recall hours in the hot sun, battling weeds and mosquitoes, finding ways to fill the winter season when things are slower or attempting to reconcile the goal of a job with the budget. "You can only charge so much when you're a gardener," said Mrs. Moitrier. "We work with some really wonderful people who are really passionate about their gardens, but they are only willing to spend so much."

They may not be on the fast track to becoming millionaires, but for the Moitriers the payoff is in more than money. "We enjoy what we do," she said. Besides, "it's really fun 99 percent of the time, because we are creating a garden for people who are happy that we are creating a garden for them. We are beautifying something for them, so people are really happy to see us coming." 



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