

# LEESBURG

LIFESTYLE™

## *Our Homes Issue*

HOME + DESIGN

*"WELCOME TO SERENITY"*

MARCH 2023  
CITYLIFESTYLE.COM

# From the Ancient to the Mundane

FOUND ART FROM FRANCE  
ADDS MAGIC TO YOUR GARDEN

ARTICLE BY MELINDA GIPSON  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREENER GARDENS

Born in the Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes region of France - a southeast central region covered by the Massif Central mountain range - Pierre Moitrier grew up scabbling around a nearby ruined castle hewn from the mountain's volcanic rock. "My name is Pierre, which of course means stone in French," he quips. In college, he met and fell in love with a young American named Nancy Lowry, who was studying English gardens, in England, naturally. Together, they've forged a decades-long marriage and corresponding love affair with plants, gardens and rustic antiques that has led to some highly unique and utterly transporting garden creations.

We discovered their company Designs for Greener Gardens ([greenergardensantiques.net](http://greenergardensantiques.net)) in a back hall at MANTS, the Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show in Baltimore, in mid-January when an unusual-looking stone watering trough caught our eye. Call it the proverbial needle in a haystack - the hand-hewn texture and centuries-old



Garden 'Folly'



*“We work in creating  
gardens with a soul.”*

*— Nancy Lowry-Moitrier*

patina of this piece just beckoned from literally 300,000 square feet of exhibit space with more than 900 vendors.

As a parenthesis, our exposure to MANTS was the result of a kind invitation by Julie Borneman, owner of Watermark Woods, a native plant nursery in Hamilton that we wrote about in our last issue. Ironically, Nancy Lowry’s own father Jack was instrumental in kick-starting the nursery trade show a half-century ago. As Pierre puts it, “She comes from a long line of plant addicts.” Together it all makes for one of those creative meet-ups that tech entrepreneur Tony Hsieh used to call a “collision.”

But, to get to the point of our story, what makes all this interesting is that, after 35 years of designing, developing and installing beautiful gardens, a couple of years ago, the Moitriers began importing garden antiques from France. Not all were initially intended as garden enhancements, of course. Most were at one time, a few hundred years ago before cast iron took hold, hand-carved water troughs for livestock.

Yet, the combination of hand-tooling, the variety of stone from basalt to granite, and the collection of lichen and moss from centuries of use lends them an air of old-world antiquity. Add to these intricate wrought iron railings, hand-carved fireplace mantels, fired clay architectural elements, and Pierre’s own hand-made benches and bowers made of twisted eastern red cedar limbs and you’ve laid a real feast for the eyes.

As Greener Garden’s website proclaims, “The patina of time imbued in each one of our hand-picked garden antiques will create a unique ambiance and bring life to any refined garden setting.”

As to how the pair got into troughs, Nancy explained, “We work in creating gardens with a soul. We’ve been doing that together for 23 years. We were always challenged to try to create the illusion of age in our gardens. By adding objects to a garden, you always add a layer of interest,” but infusing true antiquity was hard.

Then Pierre remembered his upbringing in the countryside of Montgilbert and how farmers made good use of their native rock. Every year the couple would return to France and explore the region, and often drove by a local architectural salvage

CONTINUED >

yard filled with objects transported from nearby renovations and demolitions. It took years to connect with the owner, but their efforts were rewarded with a unique and lasting partnership – one Nancy claims to have been forged with “a lot of croissants and coffee drinking.”

“We’d go to the place where the salvage guys are working with your dozen croissants and after some discussion one of the French guys would say, ‘I’ve got some coffee,’ and eventually they’d pluck a table and a chair from a display and you’d share your croissants in the middle of all these items with other strangers looking to acquire them and share stories about this or that demolition project. Never wine, though. It’s a morning sport.”

One such story involved a farmer who had determined to demolish a 14th Century chapel on his farm to build a barn for his tractors. The chapel meant nothing to him so he was going to use the stones to create the footings for the structure to house his farm equipment, and then pour concrete on top. While the story can sound appalling to art and antiquity lovers, Pierre says, “At least there’s someone to salvage the old stones who can get them to somewhere they’re appreciated.” *(Note that Greener Gardens doesn’t import religious artifacts. Such antiquities aren’t allowed to be exported.)*

As for the “getting there,” what likely made the enterprise take-off was the fact that Pierre’s brother works for DSL, the international shipping company, based in St-Yorre, France and can manage all the packing and crating. As we spoke in late January, the Moitriers were expecting a 15-ton shipment, due to arrive in February.



*A Garden: Full of Living Things*

*“The patina of time imbued in each one of our handpicked garden antiques will create a unique ambiance and bring life to any refined garden setting.”*

It all requires very careful packing because even though the troughs are stone, they are hollow and so can break more easily than a stone slab. Shipping alone can run \$20,000, after which all the objects need to be transported to the showroom in Annapolis where they're sold. "It's paid for with passion," Pierre says. "If we weren't doing it at least 50/50 for the joy of sharing these objects we wouldn't do it."

Pierre has developed his own ability to turn troughs into water features and other items into garden vignettes that take the couples' gardens to a whole other level. A true Lowry-Moitrier garden integrates both living and dead materials like stone and woven eastern red cedar to make structures to support or elevate the plant life. The plants themselves are a mixture of unusual, native and common plants.

Says Nancy, "We are not fighting nature. We are going *with* nature, which allows us to have gardens that are successful, that grow well, and that doesn't require a lot



Stone Pond

The Lowry-Moitiers: Gardeners, Curators of Found Art



of pesticides. They are not landscapes, they are genuine gardens teeming with life and are continually evolving. There are foxes and birds and butterflies and insects and microbes, there's decomposition and cultivation – it's a cycle."

She adds, "It's really important that create gardens that are not only functional but that also provide peace and tranquility from the busy-ness of life. Our gardens are meant to replenish the soul."

*You can peruse their inventory of unique garden elements online at [greenergardensantiques.net](http://greenergardensantiques.net), visit their showroom at 1120 Bay Ridge Road, Annapolis, MD 21403, or drop Pierre a line to find out what's in their latest shipment at [pierre@greenergardens.net](mailto:pierre@greenergardens.net). Their garden design services may be reached at [greenergardens.net](http://greenergardens.net).*