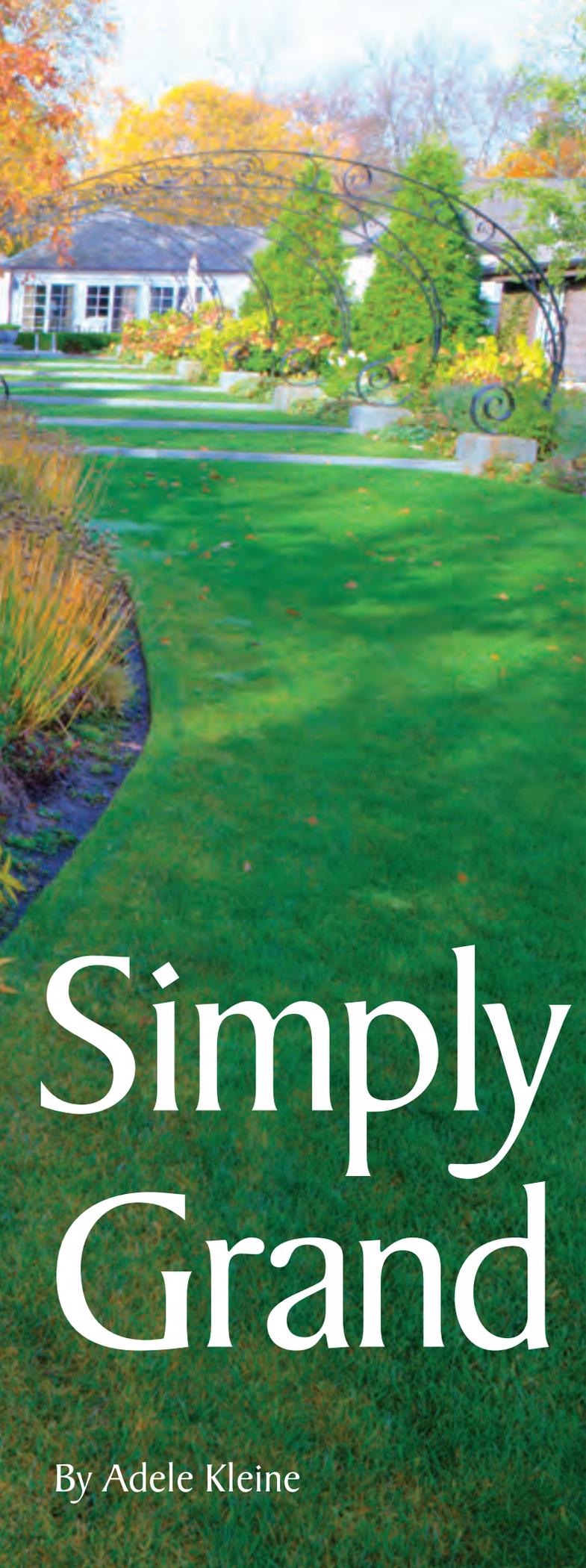




The Werner garden is an innovative mix of contrasting styles, artfully juxtaposed. Here, a curving naturalistic border stands in striking contrast to an impeccably clipped lawn whose dominant feature is a “canopy” of custom-designed iron arches. The drama increases when the border erupts with a kaleidoscope of colorful leaves each autumn.



Simply Grand

By Adele Kleine

With a strong visual concept and a penchant for strong simple lines, Brian Culliton and Tony Quinn transformed a vast lawn with buckthorn and stagnant water into a stunner of a garden.

On a winding street in Lake Forest, landscape architects Tony Quinn and Brian Culliton have created a 3-acre tour de force, a feat requiring sensibility and skill, applied with a knowing eye to the possibilities. The directive from the owners was a simple challenge: “We want you to ‘wow’ us.”

With that kind of *carte blanche*, their firm, Culliton and Quinn Landscape Architecture Workshop of Chicago, laid out a course of action and set to work.

During the process, they noticed and began photographing several brick homes in the area that were painted white. After seeing the photos, the owners immediately called in the painters and had their home changed from its original common orange brick to distressed white with black accents. This had the effect of making the home more like a pavilion, a lot less prominent and more subtle as it nestled into the garden with the white providing a contrasting backdrop to the green hues and color accents of the different garden spaces.

The pair developed a master plan for the rear 2 acres, working to integrate the distinctive horseshoe-shaped house that wrapped around an existing pool into the large surrounding space. The final design concept married the pool and the opposite side yard into what Quinn calls “reflecting landscapes of stone, water and boxwood.” While the garden features several striking visual elements — a ginkgo allée, a “canopy” garden, a formal rose and perennial garden, a prairie-inspired meadow border — a unique feature of the design is the water feature that was added near the house. As Quinn describes it, “This consists of a 100-foot fountain that mingles with a series of reflecting pools, flows down a series of bluestone slab steps and finally terminates into a lower pool.” Along the way, the bluestone walkway angles over the water, providing visitors with the exciting illusion of walking on water.

The view from the walkway takes in the nearby clipped boxwood blocks framing a large planting of pink and yellow hybrid tea roses that have been edged with thyme, favorites of the owners. The roses bloom repeatedly from June until frost and add a rich contrast to the deepening greens and russets of autumn. A perennial cutting garden, bountiful with flowering pinks, monarda, salvia and daisies, thrives alongside the residence.

The eye gradually shifts to the 108-foot-long allée of seven matching pairs of ginkgo trees, anchored in a rectilinear base of pea gravel. The edges of the allée are lined by masses of tall nepeta and nine oversized terra-cotta urns planted with varying seasonal mixes. “In spring to early summer the nepeta in the ginkgo allée and the blue scaevola in the urns glow a brilliant



Above: The 108-foot-long allée formed by seven pairs of matching ginkgo trees interspersed with giant urns retains its interest year-round. In early summer catmint lines the allée with clouds of lavender-blue and pots of scaevola—sometimes blue, sometimes white. Right: Seed pods are left standing throughout the winter to provide structure, contrasting textures and food for birds.

blue — almost surreal,” says Culliton. Simple and dramatic,

The owners suggested an arbor. Instead, Culliton and Quinn designed a “canopy garden” in which a series of seven 18-foot-wide iron arches soar over a descending lawn bisected at intervals by bluestone slab steps with a rock-faced finish. The arches were constructed at the Great Lakes Art Studio in Skokie.

Farther from the house the garden evolves into a larger lawn meadow with a modified prairie border. Along one side, the soil was dug out to form a circular stone-rimmed seating area with comfortable outdoor wicker furniture — a nod to Jens Jensen and his council rings.

The landscape architects emphasize how they always focus on a garden’s overall composition before narrowing in on plants. To the site’s few existing trees they introduced approximately 150 different species of trees, shrubs, evergreens and perennials, ever mindful of the need for year-round interest.

To Culliton, the highlight of the garden is late June to early July when “everything seems to be working together.” He acknowledges, however, that “fall is also a spectacular time.





Design Principles

- Functional elegance.
- Use plant material to soften areas.
- Arches emphasize height.
- Allée, a surprise element, adds formality.
- Right plant, right place.
- Repeat forms and colors for unity.
- Sharply delineate lines by massing one kind of plant such as boxwood.



The garden adjacent to the house is intentionally formal and segues into more naturalistic plantings the farther one moves out into the landscape. Top left: A garden of hot pink KnockOut® roses outlined by neatly clipped boxwood. Above left: Purple and lime green are always a winning combination, as seen in this display of salvia, catmint and lady's mantle. Above: Each garden contains complementary elements that intertwine and initiate movement through the property.



Above: Is it a sunken garden or a Jens Jensen council ring? However you interpret it, the circular seating area, located off to one side of the large open lawn, is a comfortable place to read and converse. Right: A bluestone walkway angles over a water feature that leads into a fountain at its end point.

Colors ranging from reds, oranges, yellows and browns emerge from the diverse plant palette and reflect against the rich green colors of the evergreens.”

The garden is also lovely in winter. Says Quinn, “Through the winter we make sure all the perennials and hydrangeas are left alone because the dried parts of these plants add such a beautiful character to the garden with or without snow. We use a great number of evergreens, including boxwood, yew, arborvitae and upright juniper, to create winter structure. The habit of a plant can also bring a winter dynamic. The weeping ‘Louisa’ crabapples look beautiful when covered with snow, further highlighting their character.”

As Tony Quinn walks through the garden, he softly touches a pot of Scottish moss, checking for dryness. When asked about his favorite part of the garden, he responds, “I think it’s the water course.” For Culliton, “It’s the arches.”

What’s next? They plan on redoing the front yard. “No turf grass, just sedges, ornamental grasses and a shade garden under the big elm,” says Culliton.

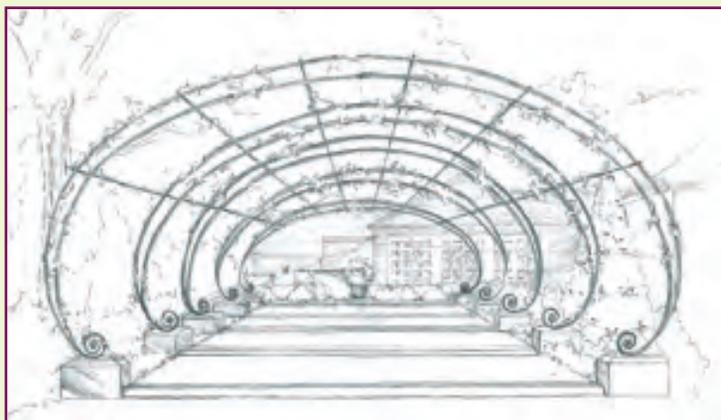
The owners love to be in the garden. They love the beauty of it, appreciate its artistry. After all, the owners wanted to be wowed. And they were. 🍂





From the end of the allée the view expands to encompass the expansive lawn. In autumn, the massed plantings of grasses come into their own and introduce a softness and warmth to the larger landscape.

A Word about the Arches



One of several unique features in the Werner garden is the series of curved 18-foot wide arches that span an area of descending lawn. Brian Culliton describes the creative process that was involved:

“We worked with Richard Byrne of Great Lakes Art Studio in Skokie on the fabrication. The concept for the arches developed from within our office, and we performed a great deal of research on iron during the process. We studied classical iron fences, old Chicago bridges and also El platforms. After coming up with a design, we contracted with the fabricator to prepare a half-section mockup in order to determine a final height. Great Lakes Art Studio works with all sorts of media. Their projects are very art-oriented and nature-inspired. That is why we chose them as the fabricator. I believe it was essential to have an artist create the final pergola pieces.”