

# [Garden]



BILL HOGAN/TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS PHOTOS 2010

The swimming pool's water jets add visual whimsy but they're practical too: The spouting sounds help to block traffic noise from a nearby highway.



Water features create riveting exclamation points throughout this 3-acre property in Lake Forest.

## Liquid assets

Soothing and still or splashing around, water is the element that gives life to this Lake Forest garden

**By Barbara Mahany**  
TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS

You can get to the water garden in all sorts of ways.

You might meander through the ginkgo allee, where the crunch of pea gravel under your soles plays against the rising crescendo of hard-splashing water. Or you could cut through the rose garden, where bumblebees put in a hard day's buzz. Perhaps you would parade through the open-air canopy of seven hand-forged steel arcs, then sweep by the meadow, a drift of prairie grasses and perennials that would make an impressionist painter drool.

Maybe you'd take a quick turn down toward the council ring, where giant-size armchairs invite you to never leave.

Or, most enchanting, you might turn the knob on the smooth-sawn cedar door in the old white-brick garden wall, not expecting at all what's just beyond the moss-carpeted bluestone and the hand-turned pots spilling with mounds of more Scotch moss, so many mossy pincushions.

There, amid a vast canvas of bluestone and boxwood by the hundreds (457 "Green Velvet" boxwood, to be precise), is water in nearly every imaginable playfulness: water spilling, water rushing, water so still it barely shimmers, water playing peekaboo





Hand-forged steel arcs create a dramatic open-air canopy.

as it glides from reflecting pool to reflecting pool and, most curious of all, water that seems to hold afloat whole crab apple islands.

However you get to this watery oasis, your brain tells your body you've just hit a soul-soothing someplace. It's as if someone triggered the bliss button deep inside your head.

And that's just what the homeowner, a Lake Forest hog trader, ordered back in autumn 2004: "I want you to wow me," he challenged landscape architects Brian Culliton and Tony Quinn, of the eponymous Culliton Quinn Landscape Architecture Workshop, based in Chicago's Humboldt Park.

It took three tries on the water garden, but they wowed, all right. "I stand here, and it blows my mind," says the owner, who adds that "one lap" of the garden is all it takes to melt away the worries of the day.

The nearly 3-acre garden, on a winding lane that hugs a members-only North Shore country club, was first

and foremost laid out in rooms. But a driving element in the design, says Culliton, was "how you get from one room to the next."

Strolling beneath the 11-foot-tall arches that will eventually be entwined with climbing white roses, the 39-year-old Culliton expands the thought: "Like in a house, you can have a great corridor or you can go from room to room. The key is not to create dead ends. You want to be able to roam. In this garden you can roam. You never have to go back to where you just came from."

In this garden, too, you ascend and descend. You are drawn down into a cove, "an escape," Culliton calls it, where you are nestled. Not far away, you slowly climb bluestone slabs embedded in a gentle slope of the south lawn; with every rise or fall, the vista shifts. It's no accident, this study in elevation change. Changes in grade,

Culliton says, introduce "the third dimension. It's that element of surprise. Just by grade-changing I can manipulate the feel."

And so it was with the water garden, where it's all about the journey of the water that spills, at the start, from a cantilevered stone tongue jutting from a 3-foot-high bluestone wall, then lazily zigs and zags through a 100-foot-long labyrinth of pools and peekaboos, finally cascading into a lower-level basin where, at last, it gushes up triumphantly.

If the gushing column in the water garden is the final exclamation, it is water that punctuates the garden throughout, from a trio of spigots gurgling into an aged lead trough beside the pool house, to another 10 fountains spouting across the black-walled swimming pool. The secret

here? The house is but a stone's throw from traffic-laden Skokie Highway, and this shooshing water serves to drown out the day-and-night drone of all those cars and trucks and motor-cycles.

"Water is our connecting element here, from beginning to end," says Culliton, who points to Japanese and English inspirations in the water garden. Matter of fact, it never ends. Thanks to tucked-away engineering wonders (and heaters that keep it around 50 degrees), the water flows all winter. Even on the coldest February day.

All this was carved from a lot that, seven years ago, was a tangled mass of buckthorn, with plenty of swamp and a dilapidated greenhouse to boot. "All I ever asked for was to be able to stand in the kitchen and see out the back, and I got this. I am so blessed," says the hog trader's wife. "I never leave. I never leave my house."

You needn't wonder what it is that keeps her so very grounded.

Or would that be, afloat?

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# Containers that work all year long

By William Hageman  
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A problem with planting in containers is that plants that look vibrant in May can look like compost fodder a few months later. In their book, "Continuous Container Gardens: Swap in the Plants of the Season to Create Fresh Designs Year-Round" (Storey), garden designers Roanne Robbins and Sara Begg Town-



BILL HOGAN/TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS PHOTO

send explain how to keep containers fresh year-round by bringing in new plants. Crop rotation, as it were.

"Things can go from the garden into the container or from the container into the garden," says Robbins, who lives in Rhode Island. "It's either living art or a test ground for things in the yard."

Robbins offered some thoughts on the how-to's and advantages of a seasonal makeover for your container garden.

**Q** If people want to try this, where do they begin?

**A** Start with your staple plants. I start with just a plant I absolutely love because it can stay in a container a whole year, or two, three or four. Choose a plant that has the most change from season to season, just to make it interesting. Or pick a plant with a really nice structure, like a topiary or a green plant that's just really pleasing.

**Q** How about the container?

**A** Depending on the size of the plant and the root ball, that sort of dictates the type of vessel you plant in. Not all vessels overwinter well. Certain materials, such as composite resin, fiberglass,

cast concrete, they can overwinter well. Whereas terra cotta, glazed pottery don't. If you picked a birch tree and you wanted to keep it in that for two or three years, you'd want to make sure you have a vessel that will withstand the elements.

**Q** Talking about swapping out, it's not a case of just ripping plants out and tossing them. They can go in a garden, become houseplants, whatever, right?

**A** Sometimes I have a client talk about doing a bigger garden. So I say, let's test palettes, plants in the container, first. I get to go back to their house a few times during the year and see how that first planting is doing. Also, the homeowner gets to know the palette ... and see how it meshes with existing plants in their palette. It's a nice thumbnail way to get to know plants better.

Even if you find one plant you love and it's expensive, you put it in your vessel, you're interacting with it probably more than if it was in the garden. Walking to your door every day you'll learn more about how that plant changes and what type of light and water and stress it can tolerate. So when you move it to the garden you can really find the right spot that will make it happy.

**Q** What are some plants to consider?

**A** Birch trees are really nice. We've had great luck with highbush blueberry; it's so tolerant and has such a drastic change from season to season. We used an oakleaf hydrangea, which was really nice. Any of the topiaries, like the boxwood kind of staple: Here's a shape. Here's a green form that doesn't change over time. The dogwoods — yellow-twig and red-twig dogwoods work really well. And you can always use ornamental grasses. They look great in the container and have really beautiful winter interest collecting frost.

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## Time to take a garden walk



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Garden walk season has arrived.

Go to [chicago.tribune.com/gardenwalks](http://chicago.tribune.com/gardenwalks) to find one — or a dozen — that will suit you.

If your garden club or organization is holding a garden walk this year, we would be happy to add it to the list. Email the information to [sunday@tribune.com](mailto:sunday@tribune.com).