

A GARDEN STATE OF MIND

You can adapt whatever piece of land you have so that the plot thickens—with flowers, shrubs, vegetables, and even butterflies.

by ALISON BLANK

WE ASKED TWO TOP NEW JERSEY GARDEN and landscape designers, Lisa Mierop of Mierop Design and Chris Cipriano of Cipriano Landscape Design, what's new this year. The overarching answer: think green. It's a theme that speaks to the universal desire to live healthy and happy lives and the growing recognition that we need to do so in an environmentally responsible way.

Lisa Mierop has been thinking green-scapes since the day in 1992 when, as an inexperienced gardener, she took a shovel to her own Montclair yard. After months of toil, she achieved an extraordinary transformation. Her dusty, sloping yard had become a sun-dappled glen of layered plantings. It won her a prestigious award and provided the impetus to study garden and landscape design at the New York Botanical Garden. Today, with sixteen years of hands-on experience, her Montclair company designs and builds projects of all sizes. Her signature style: natural, romantic, unfussy.

In 1989, Chris Cipriano was a man with a hedge trimmer in his hand operating a one-man landscape business. Now his Ramsey-based company employs about 30 people on projects ranging from \$100,000 to millions of dollars. The growth reflects both the quality and complexity of the

company's work.

Both designers have benefited from the fact that people are spending more time outdoors, and they want to use their outdoor spaces to play, cook, swim, entertain, and, not least, contemplate nature. Their tips:

Use fewer chemicals and more natural alternatives. Decreasing use of toxic chemical products is smart for our water supply, for wildlife, and for the rest of the environment. Look for organic fertilizers and natural pest-control products. Purchase worm castings and soak them in water for a natural fertilizer. Buy a composter or set up your own composting area to recycle yard and kitchen waste.

Choose hardy plants and shrubs, like cherry laurels and hollies, which are less subject to insect attack and blight, and therefore require fewer chemicals.

Conserve water and energy—including your own. Ask the nursery which plants can survive less frequent watering in the conditions that prevail in your garden. If you use an irrigation system, change the settings after it rains and adjust them by the season.

Think low maintenance. For example, don't plant privet hedges, which require frequent pruning, or hybrid tea roses, which need constant vigilance against pests and disease and last only part of the season. David Austin roses, on the other hand, are known for their disease resistance, and they bloom repeatedly during the season. Grasses, smoke bush, and sparkleberry look different in each season and require little upkeep.

Preserve and enhance what you inherit. Keeping mature trees makes good sense. They provide shade and aid soil retention. Mature trees, especially hardwoods, offer graciousness and scale that often cannot be replaced at any price. Incorporate them into designs instead of removing them.

Whether you inherit a sloping terrain, a babbling brook, or a rocky cliff, Lisa Mierop believes that you should work with the features of your property rather than trying to flatten them out or make them more uniform or conventional. Not only will you save

(Continued on page 100)



CHRIS CIPRIANO



LISA MIEROP

PISTIL PACKIN': Top row: a hummingbird, a children's garden, nasturtiums. Middle row: a fire pit, a David Austin rose, a birdbath. Bottom row: composting, ornamental grasses, a smoke bush.

(Continued from page 69)

“are hot because of the availability of more and more green products for our environment. These natural colors reinforce the idea of using sustainable materials. Colors such as khaki, sand, and browns, with neutral floors, wood sisal, and bamboo are very popular right now.”

“With all the focus on our environment,” adds Caruso, “it is only fitting that greens and blues are very much in vogue. Shades of fern, and clear-glass blues mixed with rich chocolate browns and wood tones, keep us aware of our planet even inside our homes.”

There are as many schools of thought on color as there are colors. Some designers will tell you to use color only as an accent in the form of art, flowers and plants, or accessories. Others say that a profusion of color—usually a painted wall—adds drama and warmth. A general rule is that warm colors appear to move toward the viewer, while cool colors appear to recede. Painting a wall red or yellow will make the walls feel closer and the room seem smaller, while a cool tone, such as blue, will help make a room appear larger.

Many other factors come into play, including the style and architecture of a house. Rooms that receive a lot of daylight can handle dark colors, but if a room doesn't have adequate light, a dark color may make it seem cave-like.

Nature-inspired hues like fern, sage, and aqua make us feel more in tune with the outside world. The Rohm and Haas Paint Quality Institute (paintquality.com) has suggested that green is becoming the latest “neutral.”

“When helping a client select colors, I start by asking questions about the environments and atmospheres that give them positive feelings,” says designer Christine Stout of Designed Metamorphosis in Red Bank. “That could mean anything from where they like to vacation to any surroundings that make them feel peaceful. Next, I take a look at their current home accessories and their wardrobe. Usually I can find one or two colors that prevail to form a pattern.”

“I am excited by the growth I see in consumer color confidence,” says Caruso. “People seem willing to take chances with color.”

Jeff Acker, president of Acker Bryant Design in Long Branch, also takes an upbeat view. “I believe all colors are exciting right now,” he says. “I have clients that are still

comfortable with a palette of neutrals and earth tones, but they will use color in accessories to make a room pop. To define a space, it's striking to paint one wall in a strong accent color or paint the ceiling a different color."

Gena Ansell-Lande who lives in Middletown, is an editor at Prime Woman magazine.

RESOURCES

ROHM AND HAAS PAINT QUALITY INSTITUTE Philadelphia-based Rohm and Haas manufactures specialty chemicals for laundry detergents, house paints, industrial coatings, food packaging, cellular phones, and many other products. It launched the PQI (paintquality.com) in 1989 to provide unbiased information on paints and coatings.

BENJAMIN MOORE 2008 COLOR TRENDS REPORT Montvale-based paint maker Benjamin Moore has long been a style leader. Doty Horn, director of color and design, says, "All the things that remind us of home—shelter, comfort, and personal expression—are at the core of our 2008 Color Trends Report." The company's 21 new hues for 2008 divide into three categories—Modern Tranquility, Organic Comforts, Pure Opulents—and are compatible with one another. Color experts such as Horn forecast that the most popular new hues will be Peacock Feathers, Split Pea, and Gypsy Pink. The Benjamin Moore 2008 Color Trends Report is available at their retail stores.

POTTERY BARN STYLE HOUSE An industry leader in spotting trends and making decorating decisions user-friendly, Pottery Barn (potterybarn.com) has teamed up with Benjamin Moore to introduce an energetic palette of 28 colors, a departure from the earth tones Pottery Barn has been known for in recent years. In the online Style House (and in stores), the colors are coordinated with each other and with linens, towels, and other products Pottery Barn sells.

THE INTER-SOCIETY COLOR COUNCIL Founded in 1931, the ISCC (iscc.org) is a non-profit coalition of societies and creative individuals (artists, designers, educators, industrial colorists, and scientists) interested in exchanging ideas about the effects and uses of color in scientific and artistic applications.