



Idyllic Waterfront Garden

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Looking out from the pool house over the silver-blue shimmer of the water, its cool length drawing the eye along a stretched sight line to a sculptural Ginkgo (Maidenhair) tree centered perfectly in the middle of three doorways that shape the view, you could easily think, this is how to compose tranquility. You might even call to mind the perspectives and architectural arches of the metaphysical paintings of 20th-century artist Giorgio de Chirico. There is much to think about, looking over this expansive property in Easton, Maryland, much breadth to take in, and that is because everything just seems to happen in front of your eyes. As if it was all that easy. As with most places this idyllic, however, a lot of work, creative problem solving, and fortuitous timing went into creating the idyll.

It is difficult to think of obstacles when swaying in the hammock stretched between two mature trees or to envision design dilemmas while ambling along the line that a tributary off the Miles River makes around the property, but obstacles and dilemmas, collaboration and fresh ideas—and a time-sensitive need to solve them—turned this property from a

challenge into a triumph.

By the time Jay Graham of Graham Landscape Architects came into the picture, many of the elements of the project were already in place. The house, an elegant and stately colonial revival, was built in the first half of last century. The homeowners were working with a landscape architect who had designed the entry side of the home's grounds. Many trees had matured on the property, and substantial portions of the waterside gardens were well established.

However, the homeowners were unhappy with the location of the pool and wanted it to better relate to the house. In addition, it was early autumn, and the house was scheduled to be a stop on a local garden tour the following May. In short, time was of the essence, and a problem with a major element of the home's gardens was unresolved. The homeowners called in Jay Graham for a second opinion and, as sometimes happens when necessity is the mother of invention and a new ingredient is added late to a mix, ended up with a bit of serendipity. "Everyone was looking to link the pool and the house through the use of architectural connections such as arcades," Graham says. "The plan we came up with was to re-site the pool and make the connection with a walkway and a layered, intricate landscape." Graham's plan utilized landscaping and architecture, and the combination of elements was the answer for which everyone had been searching. As is always the case with property issues, the key was location. Graham chose to work off the home's five part Palladian structure and to extend the structure by situating the pool on a shared axis with the house. Instead of walking out of the back of the house onto a pool veranda, you walk out to a vista. Turn right and at the end of a red brick walkway that runs parallel to the house sits the pool house, which Graham designed to complement the home's traditional architecture. Its doorways and symmetrical porthole windows make formal—that is, give form to—the expansive view and provide an open pavilion on top of a changing room. The pool itself, framed and accentuated by a herringbone-patterned red brick patio, sits perpendicular to the house and points out toward the river that forms the property edge. Because the house and pool sit on a land ledge that drops three feet just beyond the pool, Graham's design capitalizes on a sort of anamorphosis, an optical illusion, which because of the drop in land level, makes objects in the distance appear closer than they actually are. In this case, the distance between the river and the pool appears less than it is, so water leads to water, and the pool seems almost to empty into the river.



There is beautiful math and architecture to Graham's design and to the gardens, but the ultimate effect has more to do with casual beauty than anything else. As Graham says, "We wanted to make a promontory that gives some drama when you're in the area, but also something that would sort of disappear, so you're not always looking at an obtrusive pool."

In addition to the dramatic statement the entire pool and other outdoor areas make, Graham tapped into some of the preexisting drama of the site. He worked his design around many of the property's older trees (including the Ginkgo, large pines, and an Abelia) and enhanced them with a new generation of trees meant to eventually replace the older ones. Graham selected varieties such as beech trees with an eye toward the future. "We opted for trees that would be majestic in old age," Graham says, choosing ones that would grow into the elegance of the overall property. As it happens (serendipity again?), some of the older trees were felled in a storm not long after the project was completed, but the impact of their loss was minimized by the newer specimens.

High on the homeowners' wish list were less formality and more summer color. Graham built on existing plantings to give the garden the feeling of having been around as long as the house. He added shrubs to provide structure. Additional boxwoods were planted to supplement existing ones; one of Graham's favorite species, Bottlebrush ('Little John'), was used to form shrub clusters; and various perennials were introduced to expand the color palette. Varieties such as Russian Sage, with its silver-green leaves and protruding lavender tops, team with Echinacea (coneflowers) and daylilies to provide sculptural accents and long-blooming color. Crape myrtle trees line a walkway to the river, and urns and large pots sprouting palm fronds and overflowing with brightly colored annuals punctuate the various outdoor spaces. Graham again used the 3-foot break in the grade of the property to his advantage. Rather than something to design around, Graham proposed a terraced garden which employs the grade break to simultaneously call out and soften the drop off and make an implicit distinction between the more highly designed and planted garden areas on top of the grade and the expansive lawn that leads to the river. In the end, the newly situated pool and redesigned gardens were ready in time for the spring garden tour, but there are larger and longer-lasting triumphs here, such as a seamless new whole that blends into and extends out from its



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