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Variations on a Green

In Ohio, a Passion for Plants Leads to a Parklike Setting for Alfresco Entertaining

Text by John Loring/Photography by Richard Felber

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SOME 17 YEARS AGO IN THE rolling hills of north-eastern Ohio, Max and Cil Draime, with the help of their architect and close friend Tom Schroth, planned a model community overlooking vistas of long-cultivated farmlands in the state where their families had lived for generations.

Given their shared love of gardening, space for an important garden—with all the allées, parterres, water features, sculptures, vistas and follies requisite to great gardens—was a must, so they reserved eight of the 30 parcels of the new community for themselves.

“Our very first garden, when we were young, was about the size of our small living room rug,” Cil Draime remembers. “Despite its severe limitations,



Cil Draime and her late husband, Max, created a garden in Ohio that rambles over 10 acres and encompasses seven ponds and a small lake, as well as 12 areas dedicated to specific themes. They incorporated existing 100-year-old trees into their design. ABOVE: The lakeside gazebo is “a lovely place to lunch,” she says. ABOVE LEFT: A corner of the orchestra garden, where concerts are held.



we decided to see just what we could make of it. We soon ran out of space. Now, with all the love and passion given over the years to our garden, look where it is. We started with eight lots and then decided we needed the adjoining land to give us the 10 acres we had our sights set on developing."

Nearly everything had to be created: the retaining walls, the terracing, the walks, the bridge and the lake. "Before we began designing," she says, "we traveled through Europe with our architect to seek



ABOVE LEFT and ABOVE: The Italian folly is a favorite spot for entertaining. The Draimes visited gardens throughout Europe as they began to plan their grounds. "Sissinghurst was inspiring," she says. "I thought, I *can* do this." LEFT: A purple-leaved 'Newport' plum tree sets off the greens in a bed of perennials, where brown-eyed Susans, liatris and echinacea bloom.



inspiration and gardening ideas—Sissinghurst, Chartwell, Giverny, the gardens of Florence, Rome, southern France.... All of the gardens are very different. We saw and learned so much and met many wonderful people.

"We took a barge trip down the Canal du Midi in France to look at private gardens. We visited Rosemary Verey, the noted garden writer, in the Cotswolds, and we went to Syon Lodge outside London for gar-

den ornaments." They studied picturesque church ruins and garden follies everywhere. "In Tuscany we fell in love with a little Neoclassical folly and decided to design something similar for the lower garden." There was a 17-foot drop next to the chosen spot, so a retaining wall had to be built to accommodate the Italian folly and its terrace, along with the allée of locust trees it faces.

With their landscape architect friend James Gilmore,

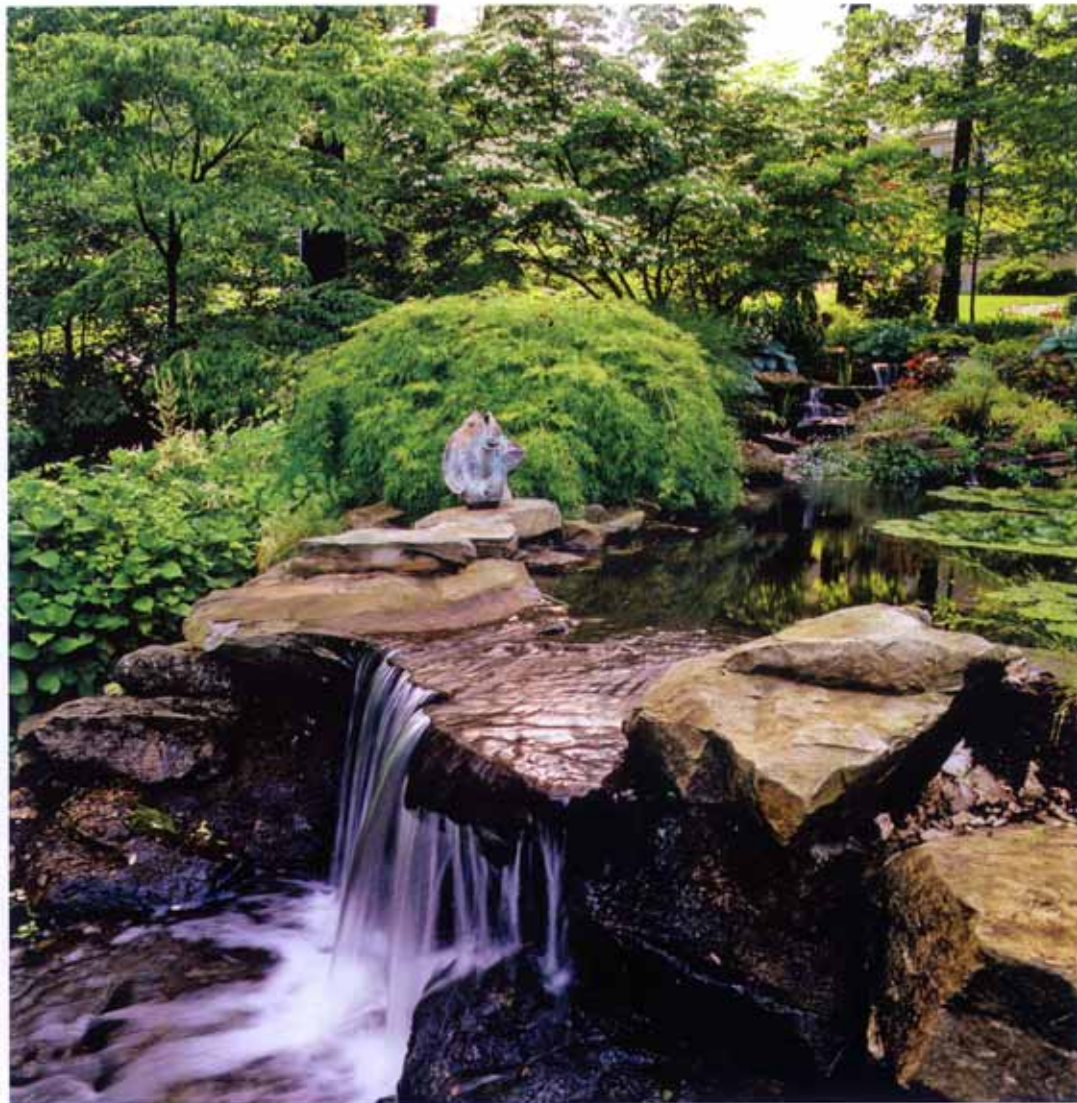
Gardens

the Draimes designed all of the landscaping, preserving as many of the site's old beeches, oaks and dogwoods as possible. An allée of Japanese cherry trees, a collection of exotic evergreens and a trio of plane trees were soon added.

"We built a greenhouse so we could grow our own plants; and, as Max became familiar with all the seed catalogues, he went nuts over them," Cil Draime recalls fondly. "When we got into the heavy gardening, Max loved it so much that he became almost antisocial. There are more than 5,000 plants in the garden that were started in the greenhouse.

"As the gardens took form, they grew beyond a scale that Max and I could handle by ourselves." It was obvious that help was needed, so a full-time supervisor, along with an assistant, was hired.

The gardens continued to grow. A pair of foo dogs inspired the addition of a Japanese garden. A neo-Gothic folly "replaced the playground that our grandchildren had outgrown, because we needed



ABOVE: "Each pond falls softly into the next; we wanted the sound of falling water near the house," Draime explains. "The water lilies are home to huge bullfrogs." J. Gilmore Landscape Design built the water element, and the Draimes lined it with hostas, marsh marigolds, lobelia and other perennials. LEFT: Every tree in the topiary garden is trimmed twice a year.



another place to have lunches and cocktails," she explains.

"Then there's the sculpture that gives the gardens so much of their personality. Max and I always collected 20th-century paintings, and the gardens were perfect for displaying work by Henry Moore, Clement Meadmore, Lynn Chadwick, Fernando Botero...."

Cil Draime and, until his death last year, her husband were longtime supporters of

the Butler Institute of American Art, in nearby Youngstown, and of Ohio's Kent State University. They decided to endow scholarships for eight students from Kent State's horticultural school to work and study at the gardens. They gave the property to Kent State as a botanical and sculpture garden and study center. "It will all be public—but not quite yet," she says. "I'm still out at seven every morning peacefully enjoying it and feeding my pet ducks,



Keebler and Nabisco. The vegetable garden still supplies the household kitchen.

“And we use the gardens for entertaining. I’ll never forget the opening concert—Tony Bennett gave us a wonderful performance—and dinner we gave after the completion of the Italian folly and the placement of one of Henry Moore’s great sculptures at the end of the lowest terrace. We had 400 guests among the locusts. It was magical.”

And that is, of course, what the Draime gardens are about—the magic of nature (with a healthy dose of great art and design thrown in) at its sublime and picturesque best. □



TOP: The neo-Gothic folly, loosely based on 17th-century English models, replaced a play area the couple’s grandchildren had outgrown. It’s the site of large fund-raising events and other parties. Though a staff now works in the gardens, Draime notes, “We planted everything ourselves.” ABOVE: An allée of locusts frames a Henry Moore bronze.