

# TRADITIONAL HOME

March 2004

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DESIGN EXCLUSIVE  
the BEST OF SEATTLE

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3 lovely gardens, 2 top designers  
45 can't-miss shops & restaurants  
27 of the freshest, finest foods

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# March

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A family and a beloved home are not easily parted, especially by the Brookses, whose generous Connecticut house grew and changed right along with their needs. ►

Cover photograph: John Granen

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# a garden on the snoqualmie

The Snoqualmie River and the distant Cascade Mountains are echoed in the water features, stonework, and extensive plant collection that make up this lush, formal walled garden.

Plantswoman Jan Condit's verdant garden has been designed to marry her house to the surrounding riverside landscape.

BY ETHNE CLARKE PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN GRANEN



# It's all about blurring

THE BOUNDARIES IN JAN CONDIT'S NORTH BEND HOME AND GARDEN IN THE FOOTHILLS OF WASHINGTON'S CASCADE RANGE. THE THREE-STORY STONE HOUSE NESTLES DEEP INTO ITS RIVERSIDE SITE,

with limestone walls stretching out into the landscape to embrace the garden area, defining the spaces for climbers, perennials, roses, native plants, and "transitionals"—those plants that are somewhere between wild and cultivated.

Most impressive, however, is the way in which the essence of the nearby Snoqualmie River has been captured by the water features that animate the garden. These include an elegant water rill that sparkles through the heart of the garden and a reflecting pool that captures an image of the sky to spread it like a carpet at your feet. At times, it's difficult to discern where the natural landscape ends and the garden begins.

The house is like a big box with a couple of arms that reach out along the east and south sides, explains Jan. "And I'm in love with growing things up those stone walls!" But when architect Robert Edson Swain recommended a pergola along the west side of the garden, Jan had her doubts. "I didn't want the garden to be stuffy or uptight, and I thought the classically styled pillars might have that effect." She needn't have worried, for by the time the walls and pergola were draped in roses, clematis, and numerous other climbing plants, the soft cascade of greenery and blossoms took the edge off any vestige of "uptightness."

The unifying design thread of water enhances the serenity of the site. Below a covered loggia that connects the second floor of the house to the east wall of the garden, there is a reflecting pool, a tranquil sheet of water that extends into the surrounding woodland garden area, creating a silvery vista that blends with the distant view of the shimmering Snoqualmie. At right angles to this pool and running through the center of the walled garden is a formal channel of water, or rill, a type

**Right:** The Snoqualmie River, seen from within the garden, is part of the "borrowed" landscape in Jan Condit's garden. **Left:** The garden in front of the house as viewed from Jan's elevated loggia. **Below:** *Astrantia major* 'Rubra.'



The reflecting pool below the elevated loggia ties the formal garden to the woodland and reaches out toward the river, which can be glimpsed between the trees.





**Clockwise from above:** A bird's-eye view from the upper-floor balconies of the house reveals the formal layout of the garden and the lush informal planting of the flower beds. Damask, Alba, and numerous other sorts of old-fashioned roses, with their soft colors and sweet scent, are an integral part of the garden scheme. Lavender-blue hydrangeas are among the many flowering shrubs used to supplement perennial plantings. Walls support climbers and trailing plants like this lax-growing weigela, 'Red Prince.'



of water feature that has its origins in the gardens of ancient Persia. Rills have appeared in Western gardens since the Middle Ages; some of the most famous are found in Spain, in the Moorish gardens of the Alhambra and the Generalife. But Jan was inspired by the refined rill gardens she had seen in England, particularly those designed in the late 1800s by Sir Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll.

Water for the rill emanates from a small stream in the woodland garden, flows over a waterfall constructed from boulders found on the site, and then spills into the rill. From there it continues its filmy trail through the walled garden until it reaches the slab steps that descend to the broad terrace laid along the garden in front of the house. At this point, the water vanishes beneath the steps to reemerge in twin water pools bordering the front of the terrace, and then runs over a weir and into the pond garden. The construction of such an elaborate feature was no small feat of engineering: Reflecting pools must be absolutely level to achieve their mirror-like effect, and the water should flow through the rill, not as a torrent but gently, to enhance the peaceful repose of the surroundings.

"When the house was complete, there were slivers of stone left over, which were saved to make the base of the rill," says Jan, explaining one more unifying feature between house and garden. "The color and texture of the stone is wonderfully varied, and its unevenness gives the water a soft burble."

Jan reckons that her love of plants is inherited from her father, who for many years worked as a plant hybridizer for Burpee seeds. "My earliest garden task was pollinating petunias," remembers Jan. Most of her horticultural education, however, has been acquired while visiting gardens all over Europe and the United States, and from talking with other gardeners—particularly English gardeners, who are always happy to share their successes and failures with anyone willing to listen.

While living in California, Jan developed a passion for heritage roses and a lasting friendship with rosarian Gregg Lowery. After Jan moved to Washington, he helped her design her garden beds, which were edged in the same Oklahoma limestone used to build the house and the garden walls. Together they selected and planted a collection of sweetly scented old-fashioned roses in soft tints of ivory to deep burgundy. There ➤



**Clockwise from left:** Embossed copper panels decorate a side entrance gate set into the wall in the southeastern corner of the garden. The panel motif is of the native columbine, *Aquilegia vulgaris*. A pure white cultivar of the native columbine is typical of the pale-colored flowers that predominate in the garden. Upright Siberian irises contrast with snowball viburnum blooms.

are no hot colors in the walled garden: Jan insists on calm, quiet hues to reinforce the sense of a cloistered retreat.

Seasonality has a place in the plant selection, too, and trees and shrubs have been chosen for the "off-season" ornamental value of their bark, berries, or foliage. Winter-flowering shrubs, like witch hazel (*Hamamelis mollis*), bring scent and flower color to the late-season garden. Container-grown lime and lemon trees also fill the garden with scent, and in winter are housed in a conservatory.

In the gentle climate of the Pacific Northwest, plants can quickly overwhelm even the most tightly designed landscape. Ask Jan her regimen, and it mostly boils down to having a ruthless approach: "I banish anything that doesn't work." So there are no daylilies—"they're thugs"—and colors are kept to the cool and calm shades of the spectrum. As she explains, "I like a well-kept garden but not a manicured country club look."

Knowing Jan's early garden training, it is easy to grasp the degree of plantsmanship evident in her garden. Working with local horticulturist Rick Kyper, she began by collecting unusual species and cultivars of favorite plants. "I didn't want to just cover the soil. And Rick, a truly well-educated, talented plantsman, helped me to find the choice specimens." Kyper also worked with Jan to divide the garden into zones, beginning with the most select cultivars planted closest to the house, then moving into the transitional zone where the plants are somewhat less highly evolved from the native species, into the woodland where the native flora predominates. "This sort of arrangement—into zones of cultivation—helps you understand just how much influence we've had in creating new plants through processes of selection and hybridization," notes Jan. Spoken like a true plantaholic! ■

For more information, see sources on page 162.