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landscape design



OUT OF THE WOODS

Once hidden by mature trees and overgrown plantings, this Mashpee house gets curb appeal as a result of a careful landscape redesign.

LANDSCAPE DESIGN BY MARY L. LEBLANC

TEXT BY DEBORAH J. CARR

COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY BY JULIA CUMES-KARAM

Any home-remodeling project should focus on landscape design as much as architectural detail. When home remodeling and landscape redesign occur simultaneously, it is an opportunity for a homeowner to reconsider the connection between a home's interior and exterior space.

Just as home remodeling is an opportunity for homeowners to add what they always wanted or upgrade what they already have, landscape redesign is also an opportunity for a second chance. It's an opportunity to make a landscape more comfortable, convenient or consistent with a home's architecture; capture a homeowner's evolving or maturing style; assess the patterns of a family's life and evaluate the use of the property.

Left: The most dramatic element of the landscape transformation was the addition of a new driveway. It establishes a framework for new plantings and alters the view of the home from the street.

Below left: Prior to renovation, the home was hidden behind mature trees and overgrown shrubbery.

Below right: Flanked by perennial beds, the native-stone driveway curves gracefully before the front of the house. Daylilies and hydrangeas add summer color to the woody landscape.

A landscape renewal can maximize a home's assets, minimize its liabilities and expand living space. Ultimately, an appealing landscape will be harmonious with the architecture, lifestyle and the surrounding environment.

While random chance, the setting or topography may have determined a home's original landscape design, a remodeling project presents the opportunity for adaptive adjustments or mid-course corrections. Homeowners don't have to tolerate a landscape flaw just because it's there.

Mary LeBlanc, a Cotuit-based landscape designer and master gardener, specializes in residential landscapes, especially in coastal environments, where she enjoys the challenges of conservation-area plantings. LeBlanc acknowledges that in most Cape Cod waterfront construction and remodeling projects, the number one concern is the view. "Everything else takes a back seat," she says.

While some homeowners want to capitalize on an existing view and others want to create a new one, landscape design is not just about aesthetic or visual preferences. There are many

continued on next page





considerations (soil composition, growing season, property size, shading and root competition of existing plantings) and constraints (budget, climate, zoning ordinances, conservation regulations, gas or power lines, septic requirements) that can influence and limit design options.

The installation of certain features, such as fencing, walls, pools and sculpture, may come under the jurisdiction of local building codes or environmental ordinances and require permits or approvals. "People who've never owned a home where there are architectural review and conservation issues are surprised at the requirements," says LeBlanc.

MOTIVATED TO REMODEL

LeBlanc recently worked with a family whose New Seabury home went through an extensive transformation. The family, whose primary residence is in New Hampshire, decided if they were going to summer on the Cape, they wanted waterfront property. Their panoramic views of a river – part of an elaborate network of inland waterways and the surrounding wetlands – influenced their remodeling and landscape redesign decisions, especially their preference for materials that would harmonize

continued on page 56

By relocating linden trees and mature plants from other parts of the yard, designer Mary LeBlanc skillfully hid an intrusive septic-system installation at the lot's corner, just beyond the driveway.



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Plants Used in this landscape



Black-Eyed Susan



Cherry Laurel



Fountain Grass



Daylilies



Hydrangeas

Oakleaf hydrangea

(*Hydrangea quercifolia*): native shrub, grows to 6 feet, white summer blooms, attractive in fall, thrives in average well-drained moist soil in full sun or part shade, hardy to zone 5.

Nikko Blue hydrangea

(*Hydrangea macrophylla "Nikko Blue"*): shrub, grows to 5 feet, thrives in rich well-drained moist soil in shade to part shade, requires acid soil for blue flowers, summer blooms, hardy to zone 5.

Fothergilla

(*Fothergilla gardinii*): shrub, grows to 4 feet, fragrant white blooms in spring, orange/red foliage in fall, likes acid soil, hardy to zone 5.

Otto Luyken Cherry laurel

(*Prunus laurocerasus "Otto Luyken"*): evergreen shrub, grows up to 3 feet, fragrant white spring blooms, grows in average soil, tolerates shade, hardy to zone 6.

Mountain laurel

(*Kalmia latifolia*): native evergreen shrub, grows to 15 feet, white to rose flowers in spring, likes a shady position in moist, peaty, acid soil, hardy to zone 5.

Inkberry

(*Ilex glabra*): native evergreen shrub, grows to 6 feet, pea-size black berries, likes moist acid soil, tolerates wet soil, hardy to zone 5.

Rhododendron

(*Rhododendron hybrids*): evergreen shrub, grows to 10 feet, showy spring blooms, likes well-drained acid soil rich in organic matter, full to partial sun, tolerates shade, hardy to zone 5.

Purple-leaf plum tree

(*Prunus cerasifera*): grows to 25 feet, likes moist well-drained soil and full sun, flowers in spring, attractive purple foliage, hardy to zone 5.

Fountain grass

(*Pennisetum alopecuroides*): ornamental grass, grows to 3 feet, thrives in fertile well-drained moist soil, full sun to light shade, hardy to zone 5.

Autumn Joy sedum

(*Sedum "Autumn Joy"*): durable perennial, grows to 2 feet, pink blooms Sept.-Nov., attracts butterflies, succulent foliage, thrives in well-drained soil in full sun, hardy to zone 3.

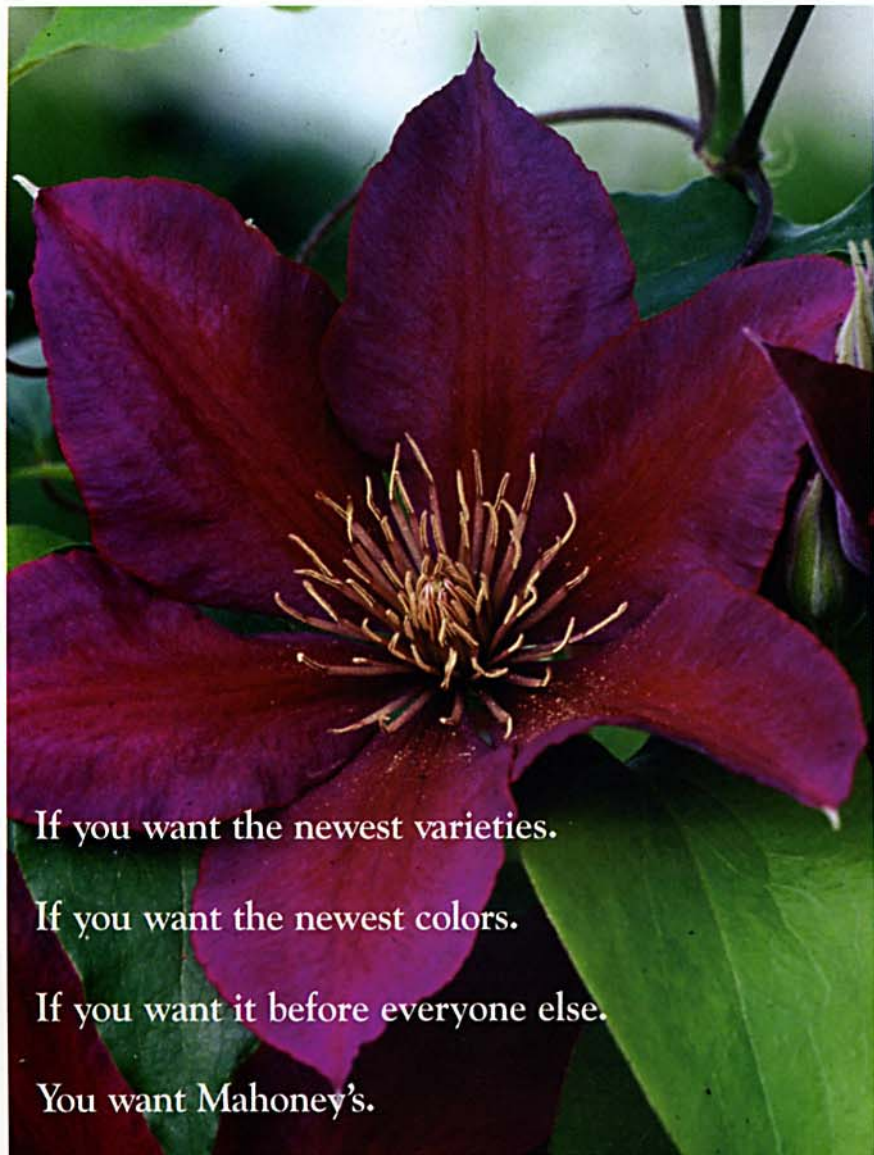
Daylily

(*Heemerocallis*): vigorous perennial, grows to 3 feet, flowers in summer, enjoys fertile moisture-retaining soil, full sun or part shade, hardy to zone 4.

Black-eyed Susan

(*Rudbeckia "goldsturm"*): durable perennial that spreads, flowers summer to autumn, attracts butterflies, thrives in fertile well-drained soil in sun or part shade, hardy to zone 3.





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Project Overview

Budget: \$45,000

- Retain simple, low-maintenance landscape
- Reduce heavy, overgrown planting while preserving favorite trees and shrubs
- Add color and visual interest while retaining naturalistic setting
- Redirect foot traffic from side entrance to under-used front entrance by creating a pathway to the front door
- Replace existing short driveway with circular driveway
- Re-landscape lot corner where new septic system was installed

with the natural character of the site.

Since they were committed to remodeling rather than the currently ubiquitous tear-down, it was an opportunity to consider the existing structure of their 3,500-square-foot home in relation to the surrounding landscape. As the project evolved, it was clear their priorities focused on capturing the mood and feeling of their waterfront property.

The project began simply enough, when the homeowners decided it was time for an extra bedroom. With two married children and three grandchildren, they decided to remodel the 20-year-old home, which they purchased nine years ago and where they have spent the last nine summers.

INTERIOR RE-DO LEADS TO LANDSCAPE REDESIGN

A home's interior provides clues about how residents relate to their exterior spaces. Throughout the remodeling project, the family's affection for their 15,000-square-foot waterfront lot influenced choices for the interior spaces and their decision to engage

continued on page 58

Right: Bricks from the original walkway were used to create this appealing new serpentine path.



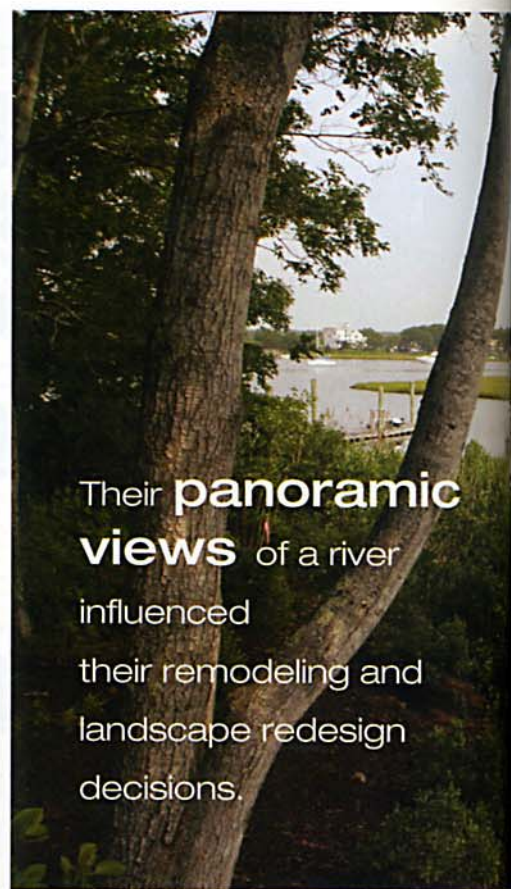
Before

LeBlanc orchestrated the use of **color, texture and measured repetition** of new plantings to add **drama**, but retained the landscape's **harmonious simplicity**.

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Their **panoramic views** of a river influenced their remodeling and landscape redesign decisions.

in a landscape renewal project that complemented the remodeling and remained respectful of the environment.

Although additional sleeping space, bathrooms and enlarged closet/storage space were priorities, the family really “wanted more glass” to capitalize on their magnificent water views and the protected wetlands, which can be seen from virtually every room in the house. The new glass installations, which were an essential part of the remodeling project, would improve and frame the enchanting views, but also add to their interest in a landscape renewal.

The family loved the relaxed, natural landscape surrounding their home prior to the remodeling, but there were issues they wanted corrected as part of the transformation project. They wanted to retain the comfort of a low-maintenance landscape, which was consistent with the protected wetlands their property overlooked. However, they also wanted to reduce some of the heavy, overgrown

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plantings while preserving some of their favorite trees and shrubs. They also wanted to add color and visual interest to the landscape.

“The area was very green before,” says LeBlanc, who cautions that terminology can be problematic in discussions of low-maintenance landscapes. “Individual perspectives of informal or low maintenance can vary dramatically. There’s no such thing as no-maintenance landscape and no such thing as a new low-maintenance landscape. All new landscapes need care and coddling to get established.”

The dream of low maintenance may be a false hope, but a homeowner doesn’t have to rely on temperamental plantings for color, texture, harmony or impact.

Another priority for the family that influenced interior and exterior decisions was the desire to modernize the front entryway. Remodeling plans included the elimination of some dated architectural

continued on page 60

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features and the reconfiguration of the interior staircase. In keeping with the interest to redesign the front entry, they wanted to eliminate overgrown plantings that blocked access to the front door and redirect foot traffic from the side entrance to the underutilized front entrance.

As they considered their family's needs, the homeowners realized the project would be about more than an additional bedroom. When they asked themselves what improvements could "make life better," they knew they wanted additional space, but also wanted existing space reconfigured and updated.

The homeowners feel as if the remodeling was a complete metamorphosis, since choices they made for their interior space had inevitable consequences on their exterior space. By the time the project was completed, every room had been touched in some way, and the landscape went through a dramatic transformation.

THE TRANSFORMATION

The most dramatic element of the home's transformation was the addition of a new driveway. To comply with the homeowners' interest in redirecting guests to the main entrance, LeBlanc replaced the short, straight driveway that led to the side entrance with a graceful circular driveway and also installed a new walkway. A parking area for family cars was established to the side of the house. LeBlanc reused the red bricks from the original walkway for the appealing new path, which is an added inducement for visitors to use the front entrance.

The new native stone driveway became a defining element in the landscape design. It established a framework for new plantings and altered the view of the home from the street. By reorienting the driveway and footpaths to the remodeled front entrance, LeBlanc redirected foot traffic, thereby changing a visitor's first impression of the home's remodeled interior space.

In the new gardens adjacent to the cobble-lined, crushed stone driveway and path, LeBlanc orchestrated the use of color, texture and measured repetition of new plantings to add drama, but retained the landscape's harmonious simplicity. She chose plantings (hydrangeas, fothergilla, fountain grass, cherry laurel and multi-seasonal

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workhouse perennials with distinctive leaves, such as sedum "Autumn Joy") that hold the overall plan together and will mature gracefully. Through the manipulation of mass, form and space, she created visual interest, while capturing rather than offending or competing with the area's naturalism. The new driveway creates a visual unity and makes the home more visible from the street. The landscape redesign solved the functional problem of traffic diversion, while responding to the owner's aesthetic and functional preferences. The remodeling also included the installation of a new septic system, which precipitated reconfiguring a corner of the property where plantings had provided an effective privacy buffer. LeBlanc knew one of her challenges would be to put the corner back together after the septic system installation and reduce the property's exposure to the street. Since the family wanted to save many of their favorite trees and shrubs, LeBlanc used the redesign of the corner to relocate important plantings from the front of the house.

Three majestic linden trees and several mature rhododendrons were replanted in the corner area along with mountain laurel, a purple-leaf plum tree, masses of daylilies, black-eyed Susans, inkberry, Nikko Blue hydrangeas and the very shade-tolerant native oakleaf hydrangeas. The new plantings, along with the relocated trees and shrubs, which were the most stable elements in the old landscape, will provide shade, beauty, screening, shelter and continuity.

LeBlanc's landscape design is a dialogue among the elements that define the property's framework: the conservation areas, the newly installed hardscaping features (driveway, paths) and the decorative softscaping features (extensive plantings.) By integrating the architecture of the house with the landscape, and the landscape to the surrounding environment, the remodeled house appears appropriate and graceful in its setting. ❖

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