



Clockwise from above: Marjorie Schneider's garden has 10 distinct areas, including this 100-foot-long allée lined with conical hemlocks, a wall of arborvitae and two rows of miniature fountains. The beak and feet of the swan in the main fountain, sculpted by Tusey, are plated with gold. Sculptures, statuary and strict prunings create a formal feel. The quatrefoil pool, near a poolhouse complete with showers, is intended to look like a traditional reflecting pond.

## Paradise Found

She went looking for antiques and found a hobby she loved.

**MARJORIE SCHNEIDER CAN** walk from one end of her 10-acre property in Berwyn to the other and rattle off the name, both common and scientific, of every shrub, flower and tree she passes along the way. She'll even throw in the specimen's origin, its growth and its flowering habits. Quite impressive for a woman who had no knowledge of gardening before buying the property back in 1987. "I never in my wildest imagination thought I'd have

a garden like this," says Schneider. "I knew nothing about landscaping, not even the names of plants. I had a lot to learn, but once you're touched by it, you're touched."

Schneider's formal garden has 10 distinct areas, as well as many desirable trees, shrubs and unique specimen plants. A 100-foot-long allée defines the formal setting. Both sides are lined with a row of conical hemlocks that

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN LEWIS



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stand before a wall of 8-foot, perfectly pruned arborvitae. Miniature fountains also run along both sides, setting the stage for the main fountain at the end. The fountain, which depicts a boy on a swan with a gold leaf beak and feet, is set in a circular pool of water and signed by the sculptor, Tusey. Next to the formal area is a 5-acre meadow filled with various types of trees.

Schneider's interior designer, Bill Shutter of Shutter & Stern Interior Design in Merion, developed a landscape plan. "Marjorie had no specific requests," says Shutter. "She's a more formal type of person, so she didn't want an English casual garden. That formality is reflected in her interior as well." Shutter also drew the design for the quatrefoil pool (meant to resemble a reflecting pond) and a pool house complete with showers, changing rooms and a wet bar.

Schneider's previous landscaper was the property's past owner. Though he operated a nursery on the property, Schneider bonded with him because they shared an appreciation of antiques. After the own-

er fell ill, the property was neglected. Upon his passing, Schneider visited to look at his antiques collection. She ended up buying the house.

"I always wanted a house with a large property," she says. "This was the perfect opportunity. When you move into a situation, however, you want it to be yours." She called in a gardening consultant. "I'll never forget him asking me, 'Mrs. Schneider, are you sure you can undertake this? It's a big proposition,'" she says. Both the exterior and interior had to be redone. Says Shutter, "I knew if anyone could bring this property back to the right condition, Marjorie could. She has more energy than anyone I know."

Schneider enrolled in a three-year course at the Barnes Arboretum to learn about what was growing around her. Most graduates of the course go on to work in a state park or nursery. Schneider was of the ambitious handful that went there to learn about their own properties. Her studies started with basics like biology and botany. "They had you start from the bottom so you can understand the growth habits of trees," says Schnei-

der. After classes, she would go home to spend hours studying and labeling trees and shrubs. "I was putting in 14-hour days five days a week."

Schneider was able to use many of the existing trees, flowers and shrubs, such as several plum yews, which are unavailable for sale now. When Schneider started her endeavor, she was so grateful to a man who helped that she sold 15 of the yews to him for \$25. She didn't know that she could have gotten \$2,500 apiece. Plum yews are desirable because they grow large, remain evergreen, resist disease and "They're the only yews I know of that won't be eaten by deer," says Schneider.

The animals pose as a major problem. "The deer used to chew up the place when I first got here," says Schneider. "This year has been a particularly difficult year because the deer population is rapidly increasing. They've eaten up anything and everything." A 10-foot-high plastic fence surrounds the property. (Deer can jump an 8-foot fence.)

Schneider takes a hands-on approach to her garden. The meadow was one area of



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contention. "The meadow was so overgrown when I moved in, you couldn't see the trees underneath all the vines," says Schneider. She had difficulty finding someone to tackle the project with her. "One guy wanted to demolish everything and replant. That would have been the easy thing to do, like they do with everything else today—bulldoze it and start over." She wasn't looking for the quick fix, though. She wanted to find out what was under the growth. She couldn't know if the trees would survive or not unless she looked. "We were able to successfully bring that area back to where it was originally," says Schneider. She called on instructors from the Barnes for consultation on what trees could and should be moved and when. "In one day we dug up 60 crenatas and replanted them in two days" says Schneider. "We had the option of either moving them right then or waiting until the next year. There are periods of time that you can't move trees."

Schneider also transplanted a number of holly and pine trees to the front of the property to provide a buffer from busy Route 252. Schneider also moved the property's entrance off 252 to a less-congested side street for safety. "The problem was what we would do with the area so that people would know that it was no longer open, but I also wanted to add continuity to the property," she says. Moving more shrubbery and trees was the answer. "They look like they've been here forever."

There are always bursts of color in Schneider's garden.

"At any given time you have some flowering going on, so I enjoy the garden all year long," she says. "No matter what God is doing with the weather, plants and trees have their own mind."

In her peony garden, Schneider grows flowers in traditional colors like white and pink, but the highlight is the peony trees. "These trees are very rare and hard to come by," says Schneider. The trees grow to almost 4 feet high, with lots of branching and flowering.

The intimate lily garden was renamed the gold garden because of the spectacular hue that bursts from the *stella d'oro* lilies that surround the gold-flowering hypericum. The color also shines in two rare golden azaleas. Among other, more com-

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monly colored azaleas is the weigela, which, around the same time as its neighbors, blooms in a trumpet-like flower. Its deep rose color provides a beautiful background for the azaleas, and it protects them from the sun.

Schneider's garden also includes unusual rhododendrons, various hollies, orange queen and red king Japanese threadleaf maples, and blooming stewartia trees. The witchhazel blooms yellow in the fall, parrotia persica blooms red in early March, and hybrid magnolias bloom purple. Her inventory of trees includes red twig dogwood, tripetala magnolias, weeping white pine, variegated cedar, Japanese umbrella pine, corkscrew willow and four dawn metasequoias—redwood trees that grow up to 70 feet tall. Apple, cherry, peach and plum trees keep the household in fresh fruit all summer.

Gardening has not been an inexpensive endeavor. Schneider has kept a full-time crew working for several years. "I opened up my shop [Marjorie Schneider Antiquary in Ardmore] to support my bad habit of gardening," Schneider says, laughing. "There's no end to the work. There's always something to do."

But the joy the garden has brought to Schneider and her family far outweighs the effort. One of her most treasured books was written by her grandson, "My Favorite Place," which describes a beautiful place where he can run, hide, discover and be happy—his grandmother's garden. "The large lawn has hosted several weddings, graduations and parties over the years," says Schneider. "The happy memories that we have with this property is what it's all about."

As Schneider sits in her living room surrounded by examples of her first passion—antiques—she gazes out upon the beautiful allée.

"Gardening is the same as collecting antiques," she says. "Once you get bitten by the bug, you get to love it. I wasn't always a collector. I learned by going to auctions. I had to learn about gardening. Both hobbies require patience. You have to give of yourself."

It's like raising children," she says. "Along the way you appreciate it because there's always something to look forward to. I would persuade anyone to try gardening. It's a very fine hobby." ♦

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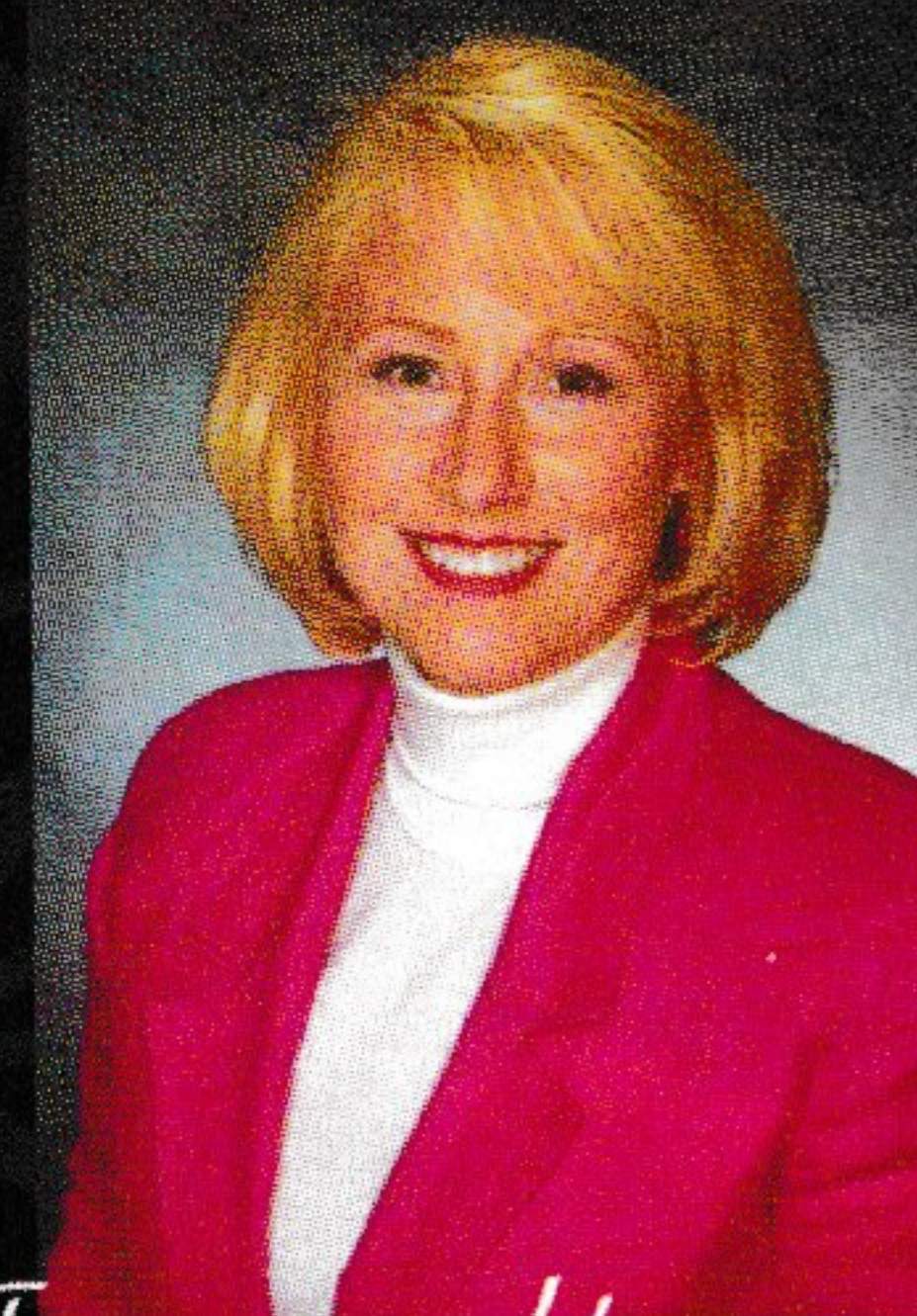


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