

# *The Artist's Garden at Hyannis Port*

As if Monet himself painted it into existence, this hillside garden in Hyannis Port will take your breath away

By Allyson Plessner  
Photography by Dan Cutrona



There is perhaps no one more suited to understand the natural beauty of a garden than an artist. Indeed some of Claude Monet's most devoted works of art are his own gardens at his home in Giverny, France for which he named his famed 1900 painting "The Artist's Garden at Giverny." Creating a world of vibrant colors and whimsical masonry, it's as if Monet took a paintbrush to the landscape of his beloved home. As with any talented visionary, Monet's gardens are a physical representation of his artistic spirit, of the pathways of his soul—likely lined with flowers.

In Hyannis Port sits a newly planted hillside garden that deftly captures the same type of artistry that Monet and many other iconoclasts have tapped into—so much so that the Home Builders and Remodelers Association of Cape Cod awarded the project a Gold BRICC Award in 2018 for Excellence in



Garden Design. A romantic escape from the outside distractions of everyday life, it has all the quaintness of an English-style cottage garden, but with a modern, Cape Cod twist. Set against a sprawling view of the Cape's iconic coastline, this watercolor brought to life is contrasted by a stone framework in warm, sandy tones that emulates the shoreline. Within that composition are flowers that blend together into a hazy swirl of color, as if the soft sea breeze washing over the space is the delicate hand of a painter.

"We successfully communicated this more modern cottage throughout the project," says landscape architect Bernice Wahler, who drew inspiration from the creativity of Gertrude Jekyll, an artist in her own right who was on the forefront of the movement for cottage gardens, often embracing a more graceful, charming style of gardening over formality and structure. "But I think even more importantly, the overall feeling is one of familiarity and a comfortable space where the homeowners can enjoy their summertime in outdoor spaces. It still maintains that casual relationship with the outside, which is why people come to the Cape." Working with an almost 20-foot grade transition on the property, the project required a fair amount of construction in the way of walls and terraces while still pulling together a cohesive relationship between the indoor and outdoor space. "One thing that was important to me right away," says Wahler, "was creating an experience in the front yard so that the client is able to share with arriving guests her love





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of gardening right away, and that's the real inspiration behind the terrace planting beds in the front." The team for this project included Wahler and Jaxtimer Landscaping, LLC, who, together, took the significant grade change as a challenge and leveraged it as an opportunity, allowing the terraced levels to continue into the backyard. "The project was extensive and touched every corner of the site. Its timing and elements for the landscape required a choreographed dance with the builders to allow for all people to be on site, especially with another job going on next door," says J.J. Friel, Landscape Construction Manager for Jaxtimer. "It was a large game of musical chairs every day."

That need for choreography carried into the initial design process as well, as Wahler composed every aspect of the project. Nothing captures the vision of this garden better than the stunning renderings that the team created, outlining the detailed architecture of the project while still capturing the lively spirit of the homeowners


and their love for gardening. "It's one of the things I'm most proud of," says Wahler of the renderings. "Because of all the masonry we had to use to deal with the grade change, we risked losing the spirit of the project, so we really tried to convey through the initial renderings the romance of a garden." The finished landscape—a cohesive blend of structure and charm, of elegant flowers and detailed architecture—is a true representation of the successful communication between the team and the clients. With delicate brushstrokes of perennials and shrubs dripping over the framework of sandy-colored stone verandas and walls, it's as if Wahler has truly composed her own painted masterpiece.

"Working with the homeowner, Susan Chapman, was great," says Friel. "She had a very distinct vision for the project and was able to communicate that with us easily." "I immediately got a sense that she was a gardener," adds Wahler. "Despite the technical aspects of the project, the designs could only be successful if they appealed to that particular

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aspect of this project.” Chapman’s love for gardening was truly a driving force behind much of the design. The planting beds are designed so that Chapman can experiment with her love for gardening and exercise her own artistic talents right in her own yard, and the gravel walkways and intricate stonework provide a strong framework for the more transitional elements of the space. In the spirit of respecting the history and romance of the property, the team was able to save a large oak tree and beautiful rhododendron that add incredible personality and sentimentality to the space. “I love the blending of existing and the new—the Grand Ole Oak tree meets the English cottage garden,” says Friel.

The incredible landscape that this team created is the reward for that detailed planning and empathetic understanding of the type of emotion that a beautiful work of art such as a garden can elicit. After all, emotion is the one thing that every artist strives to capture. Above all,

this is a space created for a couple who loves gardening and who loves Cape Cod. “There’s an emotional aspect to reconstruction that you don’t get with new construction,” explains Wahler. “These spaces are a part of the client’s lives, a part of their history, and it’s important to understand their stories and experiences with that particular place.”

“The homeowners took me out to their terrace at the beginning of the project. They called it the Tuscan terrace, and they just smiled at each other as they talked about it,” Wahler recalls. Certainly a smile is the reaction that the Chapmans will share every morning as they sit on the terrace and enjoy their new view, and perhaps “The Artist’s Garden at Hyannis Port” will one day exist on the walls of a great museum, hung for all to enjoy the spectacular artistry of this hillside oasis.

*Allyson Plessner is the digital editor for Cape Cod Life Publications.*



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