

DESIGN

Fresh Ideas for Building Beauty



Hillside Haven

MORE THAN JUST PRETTY, THIS RURAL PENNSYLVANIA PROPERTY TEEMS WITH ALL TYPES OF LIFE.

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by PAM RUCH

SUSAN POWER'S HILLSIDE HOME, in a farming community in northwestern Lehigh County, Pennsylvania, sits amid spectacular scenery, looking down on a manmade lake and across a valley to the curving ridge of Blue Mountain. But while the views were grand, she wanted something to look at up close. When she hired landscape designer Donald Pell to work on the property, her instructions for him were simple: "I want this garden to attract lots of insects, butterflies, and birds." Three years later, the beds are humming. Finches and pine siskins perch on blossoms and seedpods. Life is everywhere. "We are out here constantly," Power says with a big smile.

And that, says Pell, is exactly the point. "More than anything, I get satisfaction from knowing that a garden I've composed has become a significant part of someone's life." When he begins the process of designing a landscape with a client, he knows that the person's dominant experience will be of the plants—in this case, more than 6,000 of them. And yet, Pell says, they discuss space and circulation, not plants. "It's all about placemaking," he adds.



This beautiful garden, with *Eryngium yuccifolium* (foreground) planted within bands of native grasses, is only three years old.

Rudbeckias and salvias (below) and alliums (right) are among the plants that attract all types of wildlife, including this variegated fritillary (bottom).



The designer's first challenge was to bring people through the garden to the front door, when the natural inclination was to park and enter through the garage. "I don't want you to just walk by," he says. "I want you to be interrupted. I want you to know you're in nature." From the crunchy gravel parking area, visitors walk to the entrance through rustling grasses and stately rudbeckias. Contrasting textures—round-topped alliums, spiky eryngiums, feathery grasses, and airy, pale-blue clouds of Russian sage—work together to create a drama that transforms as you move through the space.

Raised in the small nursery owned by his mother, and influenced by the iconic works of landscape architects Wolfgang Oehme and James van Sweden, Pell creates spaces that combine a romantic aesthetic with functional mixes of long-lived, nonfinicky plants. This property's shaley, sharply drained soil dictated a palette of tough survivors. The garden is a gaper's delight in every season, beginning in spring with yellow spires of Carolina lupine (*Thermopsis villosa*) and feathery bluestars (*Amsonia*), followed by pale-purple coneflower (*Echinacea pallida*), large coneflower (*Rudbeckia maxima*), rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*), coreopsis, and countless other contributors. In the fall,

the show ends with a crescendo of colorful, swaying grasses, prickly seedpods, and swaths of asters that reflect the sky.

Contributing to the garden's success is the natural irrigation: Water falling on the roof is directed into a network of French drains so it reaches the plants at root level. "Conventional wisdom is to dispose of water," Pell explains. "We try to capture it and get it back into the ground whenever possible."

As for maintenance, this is definitely not a "set and forget" landscape. Pell considers it "a privilege, and smart management, to be able to intervene now and then as this evolving ecosystem changes and grows."

In certain seasons, the beauty of the garden is such that it lures motorists right off the road and up the driveway, and Power is happy to share. The point, after all, is not to view the landscape from a distance but to become immersed in it. Life is teeming here, with multiplicities of connections among plants, animals, and insects—just the sense of place that Power prefers.