

MAINE GARDENER

Site treats visitors to a glimpse of an authentic coastal garden

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Courtesy Museums of Old York

The garden at the Decorator Show House is designed to look like what a coastal Maine garden would look like in the 1920s.

When a garden goes well with a house and the house fits in with its surroundings, all is right with the landscape.

I dropped in to see the Decorator Show House in York earlier this month and was struck, for starters, by the beauty of McIntire Farm standing in front of a long sweep of the tidal York River at 270 Cider Hill Road.

The house was built in the 1940s, but was made to look like a Colonial Revival house built on the site in 1922. That house was destroyed by fire, as was another house that was built on the site in the 1870s.

The Museums of Old York have created the Decorator Show House to support its nine historic properties and programs, and the McIntire Farm has some history of its own.

The farm is next door to the McIntire Garrison, built in 1707 and the oldest surviving building in Maine, according to Marianne Bauman, who conducted my tour of the house. The property of about 500 acres has been in the McIntire family for more than 300 years.

But this being a gardening column, I should really discuss the gardens. Two gardens were created for the Show House: the Dooyard Garden and the Barn Patio.



Courtesy Museums of Old York

The rear of the Designer Show House in York offers a panoramic view of the York River.

The Dooyard Garden was created by Charles Hugo Landscape and Design of South Berwick, and is designed to look like a coastal Maine garden from the 1920s.

"This garden is done in a transitional style," said Maya Travaglia, who worked on the garden with Hugo, as we walked through the plants. "As a Colonial Revival, the house has vertical lines, and part of the garden is created to go with that, but it also has softer areas with color and texture."

Visitors enter the garden through an arbor, which includes stained-glass panels created by Travaglia. Once they enter, they are invited to stay for a while and enjoy the colors and fragrances in the garden.

The formal parts of the garden include emerald green cedars and small boxwood hedges, as well as roses that would have been popular in the 1920s.

A less formal part of the garden is the green and white garden featuring viburnums, lamium and other native and woodland plantings surrounding a small fountain.

That section of the garden ties in with the salt marsh behind the house.

Travaglia said creating the gardens posed a major challenge.

The wet weather from late May through early July would have been bad enough, but the soil in the area where the garden was to be located was mostly clay. The crews added a lot of compost and other soil amendments, but it still made planting tough.

"If we'd known how bad it was, we probably would have taken it all out and brought in topsoil," she said.

One thing I liked about the garden was that in addition to the traditional shrubs and perennials, it included herbs and vegetables such as squash, which Travaglia likes for the shape of the leaves and the fact that it spreads like a ground cover throughout the gardens.

With the other garden at the McIntire Farm, it might be a slight stretch to call it a garden. But it is still very well done. The most outstanding thing about the house is the view of the York River marsh.

Stoney Brook Landscaping of York created an intricate circular stone patio with just a few perennials and some rolled-out sod. But placed as it is with a clear view of the marsh, it would be an ideal spot for reading or outdoor dining, whether morning, noon or evening.

It is such an idyllic setting.

NON-GARDEN ATTRACTIONS

The Decorator Show House is, by definition, about more than the gardens, and the house includes 19 other areas decorated by mostly local companies that competed to participate.

I know virtually nothing about interior design, but that doesn't prevent me from having favorites. The rooms I liked best were the ones that played off the marsh with their colors and textures.

They were the living room by Duquette and Company of York, the dining room by Accent & Design Inc., the master bedroom by NY Interiors of San Francisco, and the New England seacoast, kitchen and pantry by H.D. Hodge Interiors.

I also loved the family room by V. Jorgensen Design of Wells for the way it incorporated the original wood floors and walls into a place where I would enjoy spending a lot of time, and Jay Goldsmith's almost textural platinum/palladium photographs in the stairway.

But people with more expertise and elegance can describe these and other interiors more fully.

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