
Vertical gardens steal the show

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Eric Roth

The vertical garden by Charles C. Hugo Landscape Design at this summer's Museums of Old York Decorators Show House demonstrates the versatility of the newest in outdoor planting trends.

By Gail Ravgiala

To give credit where due, it was Design New England's associate editor Danielle Ossher who, in the dead of last winter, predicted vertical gardens would be horticulture's next "it" thing. This summer, two major design show installations prove her prescient.

At the 16th Annual Newport Flower Show in Newport, Rhode Island, last June, landscape designer Graham Laird Gardner of the Native Plantsmith in Saunderstown, Rhode Island, stole the stage with his nearly 7-foot-tall living walls, a.k.a. vertical gardens. With the help of his father Randy Gardner, owner of Gardner Woodwrights Custom Homebuilders Ltd. and Tysh Tilt McGrail of Woodscapes Inc., Gardner created an outdoor room framed by woven wood screens lush with native plants — both live and illustrated. You see, this woody scene was enhanced by enlarged copies of the gorgeously precise watercolors of 19th-century botanical artist Edward Lewis Peckham, whose work Gardner discovered in the collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society.

Gardner created a gallery-like setting using the walls for both plantings and the watercolors. Design New England editor-at-large Jill Connors was fascinated, and she wrote about Gardner and Peckham's across-the-centuries collaboration in "Images for (and of) the Garden" for our September/October issue (in home and online Sept 6).

Another outstanding example of vertical gardening enhanced the terrace at 22d Museums of Old York Annual Decorator Show House in York, Maine, during July and August (we gave you a sneak peak earlier this summer). Designed and installed by Chuck Hugo and Maya Travaglia of Charles C. Hugo Landscape Design LLC in South Berwick, Maine, the grid of individual square and rectangular plantings were mounted on the side of the 1794 Emerson House, a white clapboard Georgian Colonial that was the site of the show house.

Hugo and Travaglia are something of vertical gardening pioneers, having designed New England's first living wall of native plants for the outdoor space at Cava Tapas and Wine Bar in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where it has stood the test of time and weather for more than a year.

To the live, green backdrop at the show house, designers Bridget Bleckmann of Penumbra Textile and Renee Carman of Mandeville Canyon Design brought a wallop vivid color with their lively furnishings and accessories . Do try this at home.
