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2009 Palladio Awards

PLUS 19 BUYING GUIDES

Exterior Spaces – Gardens & Landscapes

Winner: James Doyle Design Associates, LLC



Project: Old Mill Farm, Greenwich, CT

Landscape Designer: James Doyle Design Associates, LLC, Greenwich, CT; James Doyle, principal

Growth Patterns

In its 80-plus years, Old Mill Farm, a 75-acre estate in Greenwich, CT, has gone from early prosperity and accolade to years of neglect and decline to, most recently, an award-winning rebirth. Its centerpiece, an Elizabethan-inspired Tudor mansion, was designed in the mid-1920s by Charles Lewis Bowman for the financier George Lewis Ohrstrom; Bowman's design was widely featured in architectural publications and was recognized with a medal from the Greenwich Board of Trade. But with the Wall Street crash, Ohrstrom's fortunes, and Old Mill Farm, took a turn for the worse.

After sitting vacant for a number of years, the estate was purchased in 1999. The new owners failed to adequately maintain the property; by the time it was purchased by the current owners in 1994, the original grounds had been reduced to a few neglected gardens and poorly maintained hardscaping. That year, the clients hired Greenwich-based James Doyle Design Associates (JDDA) to re-imagine the landscaping while respecting the history of the property. And after a decade of planning and execution, the gardens and landscaping of Old Mill Farm have been recognized with a 2009 Palladio Award.

Principal James Doyle began by seeking out information on the history of the estate. "We hired an architectural historian and were able to find all the architectural drawings of the house, but couldn't find any information on the gardens," says Doyle. "So we had to interpret what we thought was correct. We agreed that the landscape would have to be appropriate to the English-style home, so the gardens were to be formal and English in style."

Old Mill Farm's plan adheres to JDDA's design philosophy; in all of its projects, the firm strives to complement the respective house by expressing a strong architectural sensibility – both in the layout and the plant choices. At Old Mill Farm, the 15 acres surrounding the house can be broken down into distinct areas: the entry courtyard on the north side; the enclosed red-brick garden abutting the entry courtyard to the east; the chess garden and double herbaceous border flanking the east side (slightly further east, a newly planted orchard and garden temple complete the eastern grounds); the pool area and perennial gardens on the south side; and the Texas maze and kitchen garden to the south and west. These scaled-down, formal areas give way to progressively more naturalistic areas moving away from the house.



After years of planning and execution, the grounds of Old Mill Farm in Greenwich, CT, have been reinvented by Greenwich-based James Doyle Design Associates. The boxwood parterre features red-brick pathways and perennial borders; a grille in the garden wall allows views of the water fountain in the entry court. *—JDDA*



The Elizabethan-inspired Tudor mansion designed by architect Charles Lewis Rowman is complemented by a topiary garden; appropriately, some of the plants are as old as the house itself.

In the entry courtyard, the driveway circles a water feature flanked by six fastigate beech trees. To the west of the driveway is a topiary garden; although the topiaries are the same age as the house, they are new to the property. "What had been planted on the property was neglected, decrepit or had overgrown its use," says Doyle, "so we were really starting with a clean palette. We wanted the entry courtyard to be simple and complementary to the architecture, so the water feature and the beech trees frame the entrance of the house."

To the left of the main entry, a walkway leads east through a wrought iron gate to an intimate boxwood parterre dissected by red brick pathways. The parterre borders, which surround the parterre, sit in shade and feature shade-tolerant plants. In a subtle gesture that ties the garden back to the entry courtyard, a grille in the wall allows a view of the water fountain.

East of the red-brick garden, a rose garden lines a south-facing wall. Just to the south of the rose garden, and down a few steps, double herbaceous borders line a broad grass walk leading to a standstill; this area is enclosed by beech hedging. To the north, a limestone rotunda can be glimpsed amid antique apple trees. To the south, the chess garden is surrounded by an aerial hornbeam hedge. "The hedge acts as an enclosure," says Doyle, "and it also frames the axis that we set the orchard up on." The



An intimate walkway leads through a wrought-iron gate, connecting the front of the house with the boxwood parterre.

orchard beyond the chess garden features 32 trees — including apples, pears, peaches, plums, cherries and apricots — in a grid pattern. "The axis continues all the way down to a one-acre pond, which is fed from the original old mill, hence the name," says Doyle. "This is the second oldest grist mill in Connecticut."



The chess garden is enclosed by dense aerial hedging; the orchard can be seen in the distance.



A birdhouse stands amid formal perennial gardens and the now-clad wrought-iron arches that lead to the swimming pool.



Seen from the rear terrace, the swimming pool is enclosed with a wall and wrought-iron fencing. Beyond the pool, London plane trees under-planted with boxwood provide shade from the summer sun. Photo: Chris Mack

At the back of the house, redesigned patios, which provide additional entertaining spaces, overlook formal planting beds. Beyond the gardens is the swimming pool, which was built by the previous owners in the 1960s. One of JDGA's main goals was to create a connection between the pool and the house. "The pool sat out in an open lawn," says Doyle, "so one of the very first things we did was tie the pool back in with the house by designing wrought-iron arches and the formal perennial gardens with a birdhouse as a focal point." The patios also allow views beyond the swimming pool to a long, open lawn that leads to a more natural landscape, the kitchen garden, the estate's tennis court and the tennis maze.

The evergreen maze, like many of the gardens, is surrounded by a framework of beech hedging – a practice that JDGA utilized to create intimate spaces. Other structural plantings include yew, boxwood, hornbeam and pollarded London plane trees in the pool area. (Pollarding is a practice whereby a tree is pruned to the main stem and perhaps a few shortened branches, encouraging vigorous, leafy growth.)

JDGA sourced all of the plant material throughout, which was a considerable challenge because the plants utilized are, according to Doyle, undervalued and under-grown in the U.S. He also says achieving the correct scale and proportion was paramount. "I think it's just something that we understand really well, because of the exposure we've had to wonderful houses and gardens that we've seen in England and throughout Europe," he says. "It's really important to us that we complement the architecture and the correct choice of plant material is important to that being successful."

After 14 years, Old Mill Farm's reinvigoration is now complete. Following such a lengthy project, Doyle is proud, he says, that his respect for "sense of place" has been recognized with a Palladio Award. —Bill Holloway



The formal kitchen and cut-flower garden is carefully laid out with narrow beds in a pattern that allows for easy maintenance and harvesting.



Beyond the formal gardens surrounding the house, the landscape becomes more naturalistic; the lawn leads to a pond in the distance and includes an orchard of 12 trees.

WEB ONLY: For a list of suppliers for this project, go to www.period-homes.com/extra/DoyleSuppliers.htm for additional photographs, go to www.period-homes.com/extra/July09Doyle.htm