

# CTC & G

Connecticut Cottages and Gardens

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Designed Light Garden a year ago, the owner's desire of a garden that would be a natural fit for the home is reflected in the garden's design. The garden is a project by Cray Design Group, Inc. in the Backcountry, Virginia.

AN IMPRESSIONISTIC  
SETTING IS A NATURAL FIT  
FOR A STORIED  
BACKCOUNTRY HOME

# Tonal Topology

BY SUSAN TAMULEVICH  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY NEIL LANDINO JR.



**A Mighty Presence** An ancient oak (top) anchors the entrance courtyard surrounded with two rows of boxwood hedges. **Bluestone Diamonds** (left) A bluestone diamond roof was installed in the gravel terrace at the back of the house, as well as at the dining terrace (bottom right). See Resources.

**I**T WAS A DAPPLED AND MISTY DAW when Jones Doyle first arrived at the site of a new project—an imposing, Georgian-style landmark home set on a hill at the edge of a wood. “Totally craggy,” says Doyle, a principal of Doyle-Hickman Design Associates, “it became clear to me right off what the design should be. From day one, I referred to this project as atmospheric.”

Atmospheric, too, describes the work of the American Impressionist painter John Henry Twachtman, whose spirit informs the property. Having studied in Europe, Twachtman settled in this part of Connecticut with several of his artist friends—(J. Alden Weir among them) at the end of the 19th century. But it was Twachtman’s sons, J. Alden and Quenton, who designed the Old World residence in 1928 and had it built from stone quarried on site. In all, the Twachtman brothers designed about 600 estates rather stately homes in and around Greenwich—this one was for Florence Rockefeller Sloan. The house styles vary but all art sensitively used—fitting easily into their natural surroundings. The fluid harmony between sites and dwellings recall the genteel sensibility found in their father’s paintings.

By 2011, when Doyle entered the picture, the house and landscape were about 80 years old and exuded a palpable aura of age. “Our job was to preserve and restore the history of the place, but go at it with a lighter hand,” says Doyle, who worked on the property with Cheryl Brown, a senior landscape architect at DHDA. The house is surrounded by some very old trees. “The ancient legacy oak in the front courtyard may even predate the house,” says Brown.







**Genie Harmsen** (left) is a way to define the study ground. Arise Circle played with green limestone, planting low regularized rounded balls beside beds of ethereal *Pachystima* ferns and blue stone *Smilax* *Stone* *Stone* to lead a more formal feeling to the path. Blackstone steps are separated with grass strips. An underground irrigation system keeps the narrow strips green. See *Manicure*.

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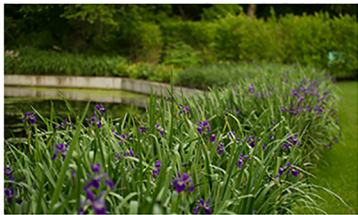
Together, Doyle and Brown developed a symbiotic landscape of soul, muted harmonies. "We structured the landscape in an organic, natural way," Brown explains. "The pathways were completely redone, and we inserted broad flights of steps to connect the terraces. The only thing 'grand' here is the stairway we added at the back of the house." The stairs' steps are made of Barram Buck, a locally found granite.

The house overlooks a man-made pond, which is shared with other neighbors. Restoring the pond was a major element of this project. To return it to good health, the pond had to be dredged. Then, the rich dredged matter was reseeded, blended and returned as excellent organic soil to build up the

terraces. The team also added a spa beside a swimming pool, which was built by previous owners. The terrace was redone in bluestone with a diamond mold the runs throughout the masonry.

Irregular rounded burls of borswood create a soft carpet from the house down the hillside to the woodland's edge; if you squint your eyes, they suggest broad broken brush strokes. Venca, too, is used as a ground cover. Its dark glossy leaves sparkle beneath the uneven light beneath the trees.

"We came in as part of a team, working alongside the architects, as the house underwent its transition to a new life," says Doyle. "While fresh and new, this landscape still retains many memories." ■



**Fernal Foundation (above)** The perennial *Parthenoc polyneura*, or Giant Flaxcufflower, dresses the beds between two garden terraces. In the distance, a bowwood carpet reflects dapples of light.

**Shopping Spree (above, top to bottom)** Self-install plantings create an understated environment alongside a Richardson Alton bench. Its "Garden Derby" is part of the wetlands buffer beside the pond. A spa was added next to the existing swimming pool, which is nestled into a rock ledge. Lapping Landscaping & Masonry performed the stone work. See Resources.