

PREMIERE ISSUE

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Serene Surroundings

BY JIM KEMPER
PHOTOS BY JESSIE WALKER, STYLIST: AURELIA JOYCE PACE

Weekdays, Linda Brown is a professional interior designer. Weekends she spends in her own backyard. And the eye for design that has helped her decorate so many homes is now at work creating beautiful outdoor living spaces in her garden.

When Linda and Jerry Brown bought their Barrington home eight years ago, Linda, an avid "hands on" gardener, immediately began planning her new garden. And she has never stopped since. "You do a garden in stages", Linda believes, "rather than trying to do everything at once". And so her garden has gradually evolved into what appears to be a series of outdoor rooms — the raised terrace, the herb garden, the lower garden, the perennial garden — one seeming to flow naturally into another. Decorated with antique

OLD BRICK PATIO,
Stone bench and birdbath in the
lower garden.



FERNS & TREES,

(top) with a touch of color from an Impatiens basket. Clematis (above),
Astilbe (right)



ANTIQUE WROUGHT IRON GATE

to the herb garden, sundial in the background.

art, these "rooms" are connected by a meandering path that promises new discoveries beyond every bend.

The Browns' first project on buying the house was a new addition and a raised terrace to overlook the garden. "I wanted an old English look", Linda said, "as if I had been gardening here for years." And so, Jim Dowden of Dowden & Associates designed a terrace of common pink brick that makes a natural transition between house and garden. On one side of the terrace, a wrought iron fence bolstered by brick pillars, offers privacy and a place for clematis to twine; on the other, a built-in bench provides an overlook; and in the center, an antique iron gate opens to the lower gardens.

Pete Bodarz of Milieu Design did the terrace plantings. At the sunny west end, clumps of maidenhair grass make a graceful screen, and planted on the slope below are beds of Stella d'Oro daylilies, Chinese astilbe and bergenia, backed by several dwarf foothergilla, all grouped around a handsome serviceberry. In the spring, hundreds of Darwin tulips brighten the scene, and while many gardeners treat tulips almost as annuals in our clay soil, Linda says hers have been coming up for years. She attributes this to constant soil amendment with mushroom compost.



A QUIET STROLL in the perennial garden leads through an archway designed by Jerry Brown.

At the fenced east end of the terrace, mounted on one of the pillars, is a bronze statue that Linda calls her "Polish/French angel". Clematis vines cling to it, and growing beneath are purple spikes of biennial foxglove. Tricky at first, the foxglove has now established itself and "reseeds like crazy", providing Linda with a regular supply of giveaways for friends. Colorful, massed borders of Shasta daisies and Moonshine yarrow, and a clump of river birch, underplanted with liriopse, complete the plantings on the terrace slope.

Opening onto the terrace, and hardly big enough to be called a room, is the "Pu

THE SPECKLED horns of biennial foxglove.





STELLA D'ORO (left), Linda's
punch veranda (above) full of
her antique treasures.

punch veranda", which translates, in Swedish, to "a place to sit and drink". Before the addition, it was a doorway to the house. Now, with the door bricked in, it forms a protected niche, big enough to hold some of Linda's flea-market treasures, but small enough so only one can sit comfortably. This is her favorite spot to drink her early morning coffee and contemplate her garden.

A few steps down from the terrace and



PHLOX BLOOM

in the sunny perennial
garden.





OSTRICH FERNS at the edge of the lower garden.

you're in the lower garden. Here, shaded by several Norway maples, is an old brick patio, now in a state of disrepair. But rather than replace the missing bricks, Linda has filled the space with Irish moss and barren ground strawberry. A birdbath surrounded by shade annuals, and an old stone bench complete the picture, an ideal spot to look back upon the house and terrace.

To the left is the herb garden. Its focal point is an antique sundial, centered in a bed of herbs — lavender, catmint, oregano, sage and thyme — and a glorious

ON THE TERRACE,
looking towards the
perennial garden.

cluster of Fairy roses. To the right, the path leads to the perennial garden, entered through a wrought iron arch designed by Linda's husband Jerry. Here, masses of peonies, phlox, buddleia, monarda, coneflower, and artemisia bloom lavishly in one of the garden's sunniest patches.

For Linda's garden is essentially a shady one, and every year she has the tree branches trimmed to let the sunlight in. For the yarrow, daisies, sedum and roses, such judicious pruning is a "must". But Linda also takes full advantage of the shade, as her lush plantings of astilbe, hostas, sweet woodruff, ostrich fern, wild ginger, lady's mantle and pulmonaria Mrs. Moon attest to. She has screened her garden, too with shade-loving trees and shrubs: hemlocks and young white pines, clethra, viburnums, red-twig dogwood, and PJM azaleas.

What makes Linda's garden grow so beautifully? In addition to amending the soil with compost, constant dead-heading, and mulching her beds over the winter with leaves, she is a great believer in moving plants about until, in her words "I get it right". Finding the spot where they look the best is her goal, and to this end, her designer's eye for composition, artfully mixing colors and textures, has served her well. The result is a garden that looks so natural, one might almost think it grew that way. But as any good gardener knows, it takes a Linda Brown to make it happen. ■

For statues see *People & Places* starting on page 59.

