

ENGLISH SENSIBILITIES

BY DANIEL G. JACOBS, MANAGING EDITOR

With miniature donkeys watching their every move, the crew of Hoffman Landscapes gave cohesion to a colorful property.

IT WAS AN odd jumble of styles. The property included a sprawling old farmhouse, a tobacco barn, an old rodeo arena — complete with bleachers and lights — and several outbuildings dotting five acres. Remodeling had given the place a Greek revival influence, but the current owner wanted the landscaping to match her native English sensibility.

The task of pulling that together fell to Brian Cossari, ASLA, a landscape architect with Hoffman Landscapes, Wilton, CT.

The setting

“They had the idea of creating this elegant atmosphere in a farm environment,” Cossari says. “It was to match the rustic character of the property, but still bring some of the English influence to it — without using (English) boxwood. Imagine that, an English garden without boxwood. She hated the smell of it.”

The company did use arbovitae and inkberry shrubs, along with more than 20 other species of plants

and trees (see list, page 96). Cossari had crews install a number of statues and urns, which workers change out seasonally. The arbovitae were used to provide a privacy screen between the pool and one of the nearby buildings. Colorful perennials and ornamental grasses were used to hide a boulder retaining wall and reflect the client’s love for English gardens.

The live materials were pretty standard, Cossari says. With such a unique setting, there was no need to go for an exotic look.

“The evening light there is just amazing as it reflects off those barns,” he says. “The (tobacco) barn was a focal point, for sure. The idea is that it would be an entertaining area for large parties, which these people would often do. Weekenders would stay at

the house, and they'd party for days on end, literally. That was the center point of the swimming pool. You could step down into this barn for a casual, yet elegant party."

The barn posed a challenge for the designer. Down an often icy, steep slope

from the home during Connecticut winters, Cossari had to figure out how to create access from the home without completely leveling the ground. Adding to the challenge: At the time the design was done, the family was caring for a number of miniature donkeys.

"Every day, a couple times a day, the homeowner had to access the barn to tend to the miniature donkeys that were in there," Cossari says. "The way the site was graded — all winter long, it was a sheet of ice. The solution needed to grant the client access without necessarily paving a road between the two buildings."

Cossari designed a serpentine path for the client to take, integrating it into the symmetry of the design. He then addressed drainage with some surface drains and proper pitch.

A swimming solution

The focal point of the project was a pool that Hoffman Landscapes decided to place beside the barn.

"We wanted it to feel like it was pretty well anchored," Cossari says. "We picked a median point of the hillside to put the swimming pool, and then worked around that."

Changing the grade, though, created a new challenge.

"We needed to come up with a way to level the area to accommodate the swimming pool, but still keep access to the barn," Cossari says. "There was a hay door up on the second story of the barn, and they still needed to get the tractor to it."

Hoffman crews had to install retaining walls both on the uphill and downhill sides.

"One was more rustic and camouflaged with plant material," Cossari



Opposite. A pergola over the dining table at one end of the pool will eventually become a cool shady spot as Japanese wisteria vines create a green roof.

Top. The large tobacco barn provided the perfect backdrop for a new pool. Eventually, the family plans to install slide doors in the barn, in which it will host parties.

Bottom. Dry stacked and battered stone walls fit naturally with the farm in the background.



AWARD WINNER



Clockwise from top left. Between the pool and the guest cottage, the tall arborvitae hedge provides a privacy screen while the colorful perennials and ornamental grasses gently hide the boulder retaining wall and reflect the client's love for English gardens.

Garden nooks bursting with color and texture provide cut flowers for the lady of the house.

Stone walls and granite slab steps were set in place prior to the excavation for the pool.

THE PLANTINGS

| Quantity | Common Name | Size |
|----------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 8 | American Boxwood | 30 in. - 36 in. ht. |
| 30 | American Boxwood | 18 in. - 24 in. ht. |
| 10 | Tickseed | 1 gal. |
| 9 | Purple Cone Flower | 1 gal. |
| 4 | Limelight Hydrangea | 18 in. - 24 in. ht. |
| 6 | Inkberry | 24 in - 30 in. |
| 12 | Big Blue Liriope | 1 gal. |
| 14 | Catmint | 1 gal. |
| 6 | Dwarf Fountain Grass | 2 gal. |
| 6 | Russian Sage | 2 gal. |
| 6 | Moss Phlox | 1 gal. |
| 6 | Japanese Andromeda | 30 in. - 36 in. ht. |
| 6 | Fairy Rose | 2 gal. |
| 12 | Rudbeckia Var. | 1 gal. |
| 6 | Stonecrop Var. | 1 gal. |
| 11 | Emerald Arborvitae | 7 ft. - 8 ft. ht. |
| 25 | Creeping Thyme | 3.5 qt. |
| 6 | Koreanspice Viburnum | 36 in. - 42 in. ht. |
| 2 | Japanese Wisteria | 2 in diameter |
| 2 | Butterfly Bush | 5 gal. |
| 3 | Flowering Crabapple | 3 in diameter |
| 6 | Rudbeckia Var. | 1 gal. |
| 1 | Humus soil | 1 cu. yd. |

says. “The other one was used to stand out, keeping in mind future phases of the property.”

The crews also installed several 12-ft.-wide granite slabs leading down to the pool. The granite and fieldstone used for the retaining walls are native to the region.

Cossari says he was challenged by some of the existing sites on the property. There was an old rodeo arena the family didn't necessarily want to get rid of, but they didn't want to stare at it, either.

“We put in the pergola structure, then we enclosed the dining terrace underneath it with a hedge,” Cossari says. “Initially, it was intended to be a clipped beech hedge, but at the time of the project, we couldn't find the right beech trees to make it happen. We went with privet.”

In all, the project cost about \$200,000, Cossari says. The work earned the company a Grand designation from PLANET's 2008 Environmental Improvement Awards. **LM**