

PASSIONATE AMATEUR

Lisa Mierop, Upper Montclair, New Jersey

“Every facet of my garden is a door to infinity; I could obsess about roses the rest of my life.”



Great gardening often requires great courage. Among our entries, we saw plenty of ambitious landscape makeovers, but none quite as brave and successful as Lisa Mierop’s transformation of a drab suburban lot.

Five years ago, the backyard of this 90-year-old house was a jumble of spindly hemlocks and maples, and a scruffy lawn, suffering under the shade cast by surrounding evergreens. Today, the yard is a lush woodland garden with robust hosta and graceful ferns spilling over paths that meander past flowering shrubs. Every precious sunny spot overflows with bright flowers.

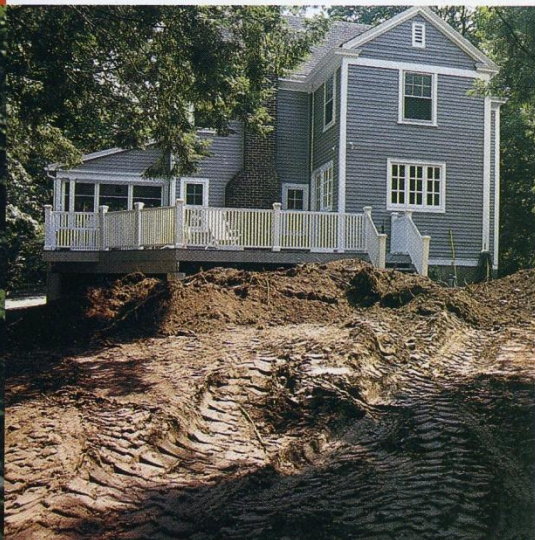
It all started with a kitchen renovation in Lisa and Craig Mierop’s home. When a new window was installed over the sink, the sorry state of the backyard couldn’t be ignored. “So one weekend Craig innocently suggested that I plant a small area beneath our deck,” she says. “It was a turning point in my life.” At that time, Mierop didn’t know an annual from a perennial. But a wonderful, frightening idea took root: She would tear out everything and start over. In preparation, she spent a year reading garden books, studying catalogs, drawing up plans, and making plant lists.

A backhoe made quick work of the yard, leaving her with a lot as barren as a moon crater, and a sinking feeling in her stomach. She felt

A diverse woodland garden, left, flourishes just five years after Mierop stripped “almost every living thing” from her yard, exposing the rocky clay soil, below right.

GRAND PRIZE

FOR REWORKING THE LAND



CON ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROSS MACDONALD

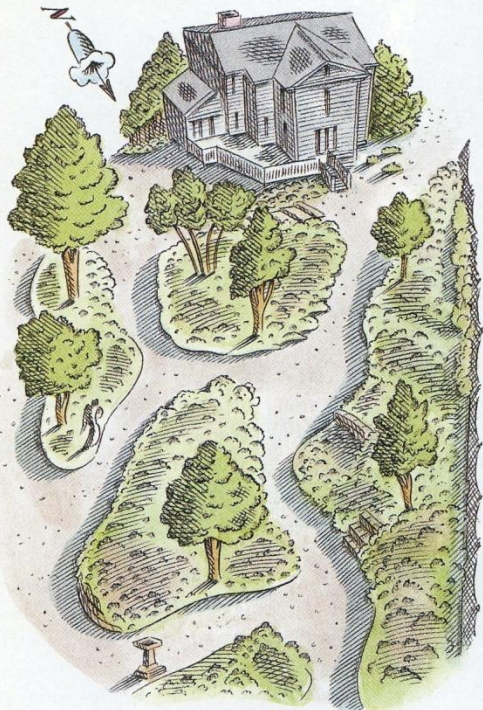


ILLUSTRATION BY ANTHONY SIDWELL

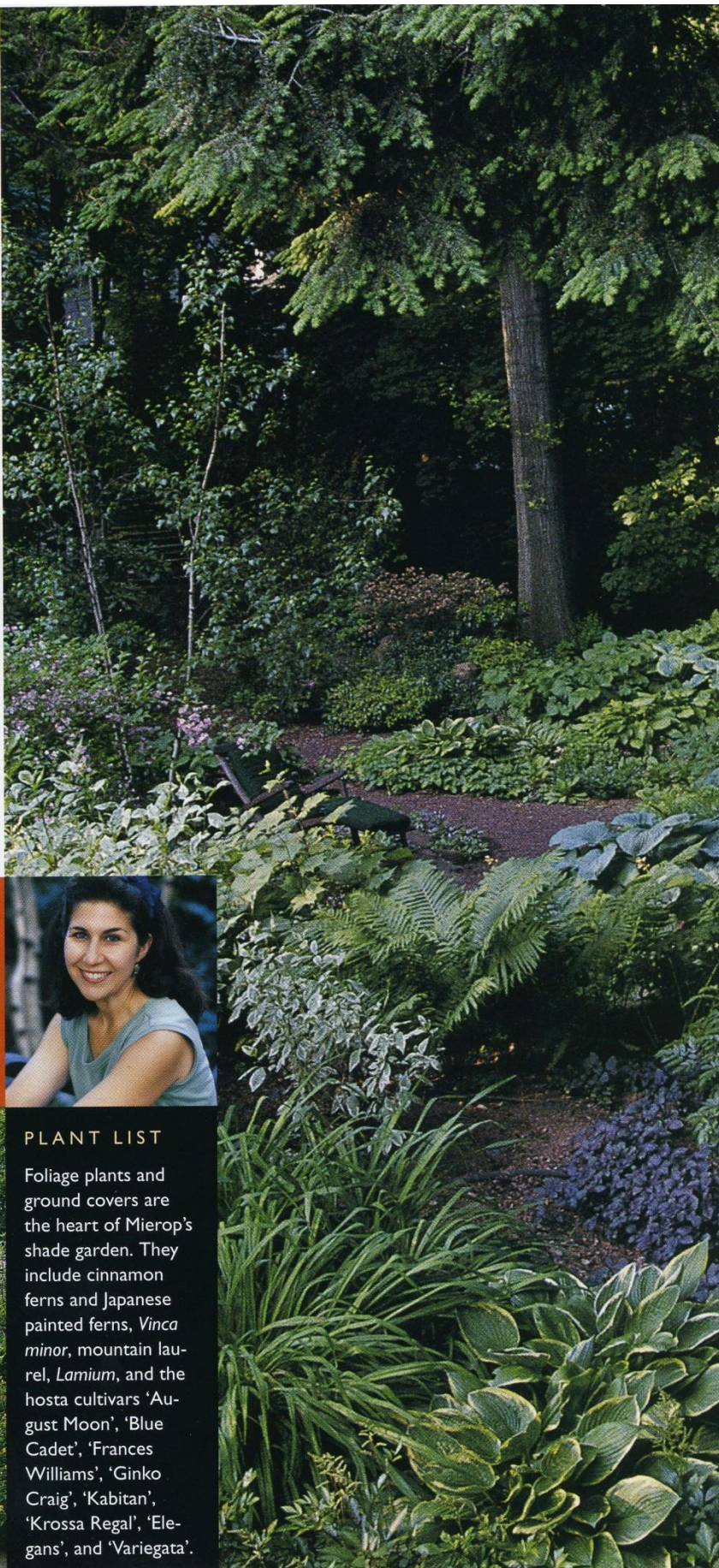
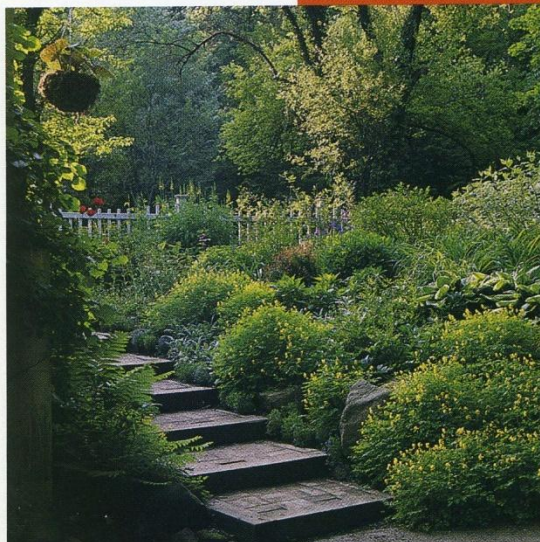
overwhelmed as she realized that every inch had to be replanted. "But, my experience in interior design helped me to visualize spaces and colors," she says. To give the landscape dimension, she had the backhoe sculpt the soil into berms. She added more structure by planting dozens of trees and shrubs. Then, using ideas from other gardens, she planted (and dug up and re-arranged) hundreds of perennials, basing her plan on contrasting colors and textures of flowers and foliage.

The first season, Mierop, right, planted a bed of ferns, hosta, and flowering plants such as *Corydalis lutea*, astilbe, and dicentra behind the house, below.



PLANT LIST

Foliage plants and ground covers are the heart of Mierop's shade garden. They include cinnamon ferns and Japanese painted ferns, *Vinca minor*, mountain laurel, *Lamium*, and the hosta cultivars 'August Moon', 'Blue Cadet', 'Frances Williams', 'Ginko Craig', 'Kabitan', 'Krossa Regal', 'Elegans', and 'Variegata'.





An uneven terrain creates the illusion of space in this small lot. Winding paths were designed to encourage exploration of the landscape and reveal hidden views.