

design NJ

NEW JERSEY'S HOME & DESIGN MAGAZINE

June/July 2021



**SWAPPING SPACES
IN MENDHAM**

**JEH JOHNSON &
SUSAN DIMARCO'S
FAIRYTALE LANDSCAPE**

MAKEOVER IN MONTCLAIR





Alfresco Fairytale

A GARDEN WORTHY OF HAPPY-EVER-AFTER GROWS IN MONTCLAIR

WRITTEN BY MARIROSE KRALL | PHOTOS BY CRAIG MIEROP | LANDSCAPE AND POOL DESIGN BY LISA MIEROP, FAPLD



Lisa Mierop describes the landscape layout as "a romantic sequence of small rooms." Those entering the property from the motor court pass through what is believed to be the original 1920s brownstone wall into the "room" that has come to be known as "Jeh's garden." Shrub roses peek over the wall, which is bordered by American boxwoods. Oakleaf hydrangeas 'Snow Queen' are planted in the background.

The slate roof shingles, stucco walls and whimsically shaped wings lend a fairytale aura. The house and patio are bordered by ilex Gem Box® shrubs. Globes of purple allium 'Gladiator' pop up amid the shrubs between two hydrangeas next to the house. A buxus Green Tower® stands tall on the patio, and a nandina domestica sits beneath the patio window.

Lisa Mierop calls the style of Jeh Johnson and Susan DiMarco's Montclair home "fairytale Tudor." Indeed, the 1920s-era residence features a charming blend of stucco and shingles that would seem perfectly at home in a bedtime story. Mierop, of Montclair-based landscape design/build firm Mierop Design, complemented the architecture with garden spaces that are just as enchanting.

Johnson, former Secretary of Homeland Security for the Obama Administration, is an attorney and much-in-demand political analyst. DiMarco is a retired dentist turned volunteer in civic and arts-related

activities. The couple's landscaping choices were influenced by a sojourn in Italy, where they were inspired by continental gardens.

This property is unique in that most of the land available for a yard is located at the side of the house. To ensure privacy on the corner lot, Mierop planted yews to create an evergreen "wall" bordering the property. Hydrangea 'Limelight' shrubs alongside the yews provide a profusion of white blossoms during blooming season. "Susan prefers neutrals and soft colors," Mierop notes. Johnson, however, has a different perspective. "Jeh loves strong color in bold combinations and favors his roses above all." To accommodate that preference, Mierop planted shrub roses in the area of



DiMarco had always wanted a pool, but her husband was resistant. "He didn't want to give up the lawn space," Mierop explains. Johnson conceded, with the caveat that the pool be scaled so it could be considered a water feature. Mierop obliged with a conservatively sized design. "The pool is deliberately small so as to avoid being a winter eyesore while preserving maximum lawn space."

The resulting structure doesn't read like a standard swimming pool,

The hand-tinted pergola was preweathered to look as if it were original to the home. The terrace features container displays of annuals and tropical plants.

"The pool wall is a strong, sculptural feature that creates interest any time of the year," Mierop says. The bowls on the pillars hold assorted sedum and succulents. The large urns on each side of the fountain are filled with hardy banana, croton and yellow Creeping Jenny. Plantings behind the wall include hedges of *Ilex Gem Box*®, *hydrangea Limestone* and *yew Hicksii*.





OPPOSITE TOP | The entry to the driveway is bordered by pennisetum 'Hameln', spiraea 'Gold Mound', rhododendron 'Yaku Prince', buxus 'Dee Runk' and a helleborus hybrid.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM | Apricot Drift® roses spill over the new dry-laid fieldstone wall.

ABOVE | "There are little things to discover in every corner," Mierop says of the Montclair property. In this corner, climbing roses and clematis 'Jackmanii' gracefully ascend a trellis.

but can be used like one. At 8 feet wide and 27 feet long, with a depth of 4½ feet, "it's enough water to take a few strokes and more than enough to cool off," Mierop says. The focal point of the pool area is a classically inspired wall with a lion-head fountain, a reproduction of a Donatello sculpture. The stately piece is more than just a beautiful garden folly; Mierop notes that it also serves the practical purpose of hiding the pool equipment.

Mierop will return to renovate another segment of the landscape, and she's looking forward to it. "They're such great clients. They're both huge garden lovers, and it is always a pleasure to work with them." ■

SOURCES landscape and pool design, Mierop Design in Montclair; pool construction, Seasonal World Pools in Clarksburg; masonry, pool wall and landscaping, Terra Graphics Landscape Services in Montclair; custom carved limestone water basin, International Dimensional Stone in Haskell; pergola designer and builder, Spademan Fabrication in Montclair; double gate, Walpole Outdoors; gas lanterns, Bevolvo Gas & Electric Lights.

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