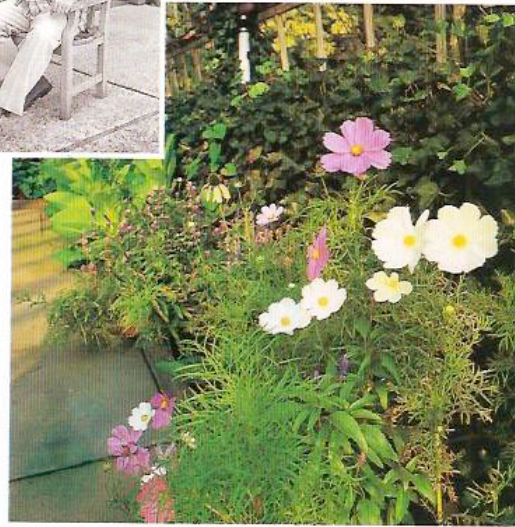
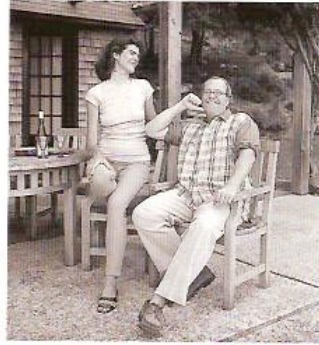


THE GREENHOUSE EFFECT

IN A VERDANT CORNER OF CONNECTICUT, ALEXANDER JULI
AND HIS FAMILY PLAY IN A GARDEN THAT JOYFULLY
COMBINES NEW PLANTINGS AND INHERITED STRUCTURES



The biggest surprise in Alexander and Meagan Julian's garden is the skeletal greenhouse left over from an earlier era. Clematis, roses and hops climb the structure's exposed ribs, which curve over flower beds nestled where benches used to stand. Beds of pink cosmos, scented nicotiana and tiny dianthus have replaced the hardware that once made the greenhouse function, and the squeals of successful frog-chasers—the Julians' two children and their friends—replace the metallic squeaking of vents and the roar of the old hothouse furnace.

Usually abandoned greenhouses are scrapped, explains Alex, "but this stands for our style: mixing old, weathered objects with fresh things to make something entirely new." It's an aesthetic the Julians have applied to a multitude of products, from menswear to linens, rugs and furniture.

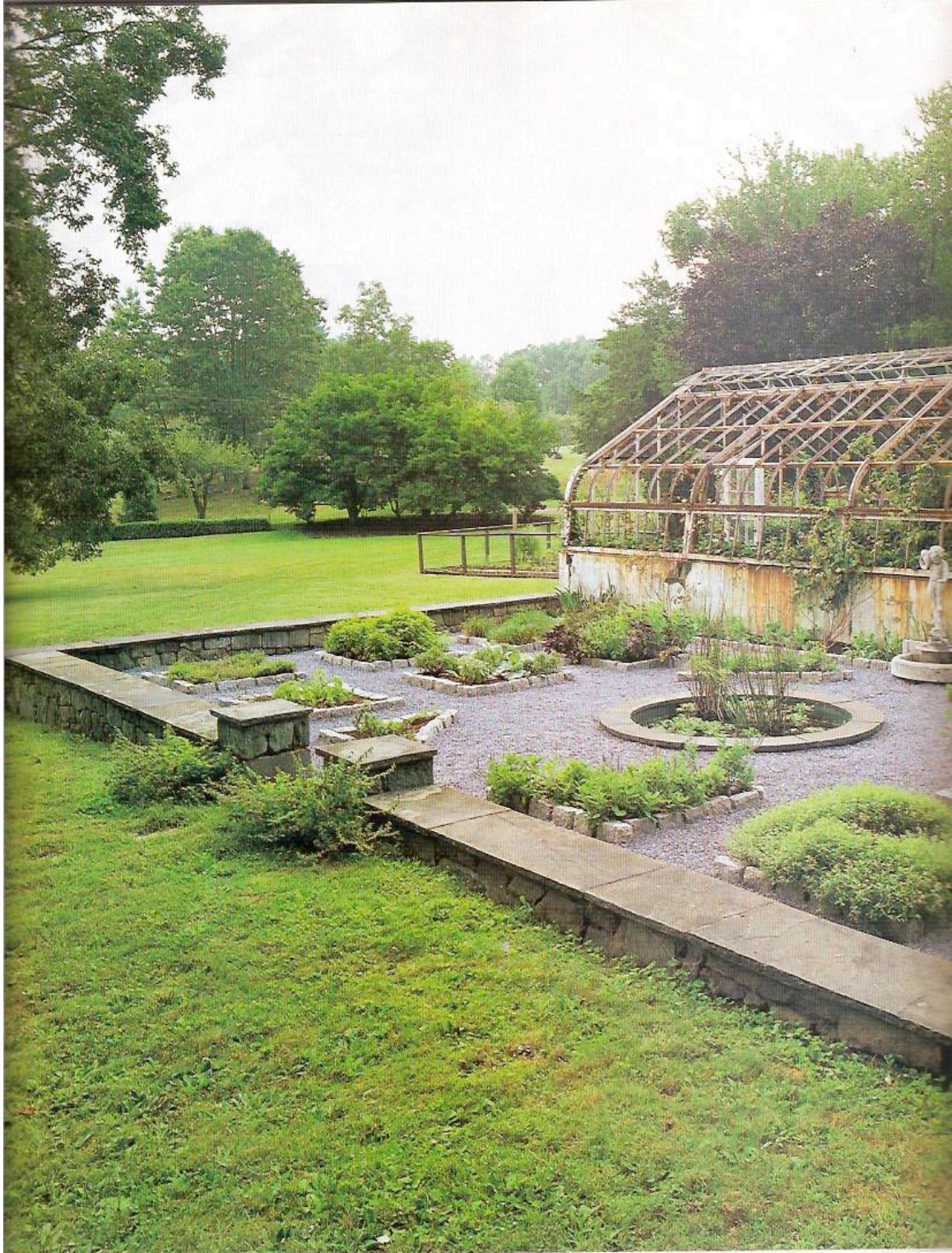
Meagan, who works with her husband as a designer, credits family friend and noted architect John Marsh Davis with the idea of saving the greenhouse. "When the builders were working on the house, they offered to level the greenhouse, which was a heap of jagged metal and broken glass. But John suggested that we tear out the old plumbing and put down a flagstone floor. Now, instead of an eyesore, we have a focal point."

When they moved to Connecticut seven years ago, the couple was ambivalent about leaving

Manhattan. "If I were in women's fashion," says Alex, "I would have to be in New York every day; but men's fashion is different." Both of them love the country. Meagan, who was raised in seaswept Sausalito, California, has an intense appreciation for homegrown pleasures, while Alex grew up on a North Carolina farm. "This," he says, "is the source of our creative energy."

The Julians resuscitated the dilapidated greenhouse that came with their Connecticut property, laying a new flagstone floor. With the plumbing gone, there was plenty of room for planting flower beds "inside."

Photographs by Richard Felber. Written by Katherine Whiteside.





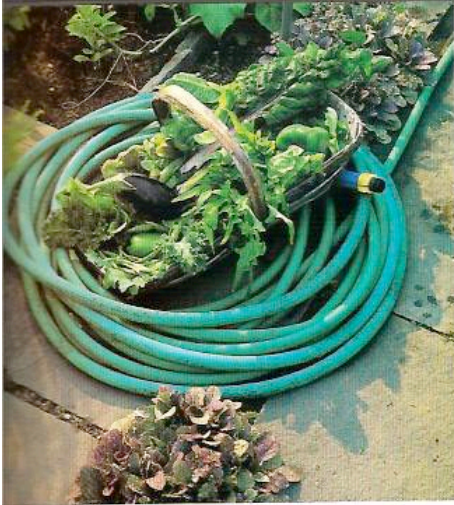
When the city dwellers realized they needed grass underfoot, they bought "a thirty-three acre holler," as Alex calls it, "where we could garden, cook, play, think, work and dry our clothes on the line." Besides the greenhouse, the "holler" also included a tennis court, terraced cutting gardens, two ponds, an orchard, a berry garden and a house so small the Julians had to build a new one.

"It was a mystery why such a tiny house should have such extensive grounds," says Meagan. "One theory is that this was once part of Gene Tierney's estate," says Alex, "and another is that it was a flower farm. Either way, there was certainly a lot of room for growing things." With the help of gardener Katherine Briggs, Meagan created borders inside the greenhouse of snapdragons, cosmos and moonflowers. "But," Alex adds, "Meagan has converted most of the garden space to vegetable and herb beds because she's one of the best cooks I know—and Southerners know food."

Meagan grows at least 30 different herbs in the former rose garden beside the greenhouse. All the herb beds are outlined in cut stone, the overall design laid out in gravel. The beds contain perennial herbs, such as chives, mint and thyme, which remain in their beds year round. Each spring, annual herbs—cilantro and various basil—are started from seed and planted when the weather warms up. Besides these culinary herbs, there are even a few old-fashioned aromatic and medicinal herbs, like rue, nepta and yarrow. In the middle is a small, circular lily pool, planted with water hyacinths and horsetail.

Beside the greenhouse, herbs replaced roses (left). Right, from top: Dwarf sage and golden sage; the tennis court's trellis has a retractable curtain; the circular pool is home to lilies, water hyacinths and horsetail.





Meagan Julian loves tending her vast vegetable garden. “The cold frames are heated,” she says, “so we can choose from about fourteen different lettuces for salads in all but the darkest of Decembers and Januaries. In spring, we start seeds in the old orchid shed, which is where I winter the lemon trees. In summer, we entertain a lot, and I grow almost all our food.”

One garden is devoted primarily to tomatoes, but shares the space with a variety of greens and pumpkins. “The Rouge Vif d’Etampes pumpkins are really beautiful,” Meagan enthuses. “My children’s friends can’t believe that they can just come in here and pick, but I love it when they do. I freeze and can what we can’t eat in season, but I’d rather give it away when it’s fresh. I like to send people home with vegetable baskets.”

Another area that has been redesigned, in this case to better accommodate active kids, is the old tennis court. The cyclone fence was replaced with a John Davis–designed vine trellis with a drapery (à la Alex) that can be pulled shut to catch wayward tennis balls. When no game is in progress, the drapes are pulled back to open up the view. The old shuffleboard court was converted to “lawn art,” with Alexander Julian signature stripes.

Meagan admits that there is still lots to do—including pruning the old orchard back to life—but she obviously enjoys the process. “Too many people worry about finishing a place,” she says, “but the work itself is a pleasure too. It’s all a part of the feast that is our life here.” **mh**

See Resources, last pages.

The vegetable garden (right) yields many a souvenir gift basket (left, top). The old shuffleboard court was converted into lawn art (left, center). Sunflowers (left, bottom) suit the garden’s exuberant spirit.

