

Limelight hydrangeas bloom over a **low stone wall** on a farm in Millbrook, New York. Design, Janice Parker Landscape Architects

VERANDA
Best of
**OUTDOOR
LIVING**
2020

◆ **BEST IN SHOW** ◆

It's a winner's circle edged in Iceberg roses and purple alliums, olive trees and camellias. For *this celebration of outdoor design*, our judges pored through scores of entries, seeking the landscapes with the strongest ground game. They came up with garden gold. From an emerald jewel in downtown Chicago to a flourishing wildlife sanctuary in Montecito, these are the landscapes par excellence.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DURSTON SAYLOR

THE JUDGES



♦ Bunny Williams ♦

"I always look for a strong design plan, and each of these gardens had a beautiful architecture to it," says the legendary interior designer, who's been tending her own Connecticut garden for nearly 40 years. "Some are very formal, some looser, but they all take your breath away."



♦ Peter Lyden ♦

"It is so important that a garden embrace the natural characteristics of its environment, and I really admire the way these projects did just that," says Lyden, president of the Institute of Classical Architecture & Art (ICAA). Their new Bunny Mellon Curricula aims to help young designers approach exterior spaces in a more holistic manner.

METHODOLOGY

VERANDA editors chose the top 55 entries for blind judging by Williams and Lyden. For information and submission guidelines for the 2021 awards, see veranda.com.



A lush panel of lavender juxtaposes a more riotous mix of iris, phlox, and Russian sage repurposed from the previous landscape.

Freshest Flowering Landscape



Bold mass plantings in ultralinear beds transform a Hamptons property—and shake up conventional flowering plans.

THERE'S NOTHING more traditional than a hydrangea—except when you use it in this form," says New York City-based landscape architect Edmund Hollander, referring to a crisp border of the flowering shrub against a rectilinear ilex hedge. But in this modern-leaning garden, he could have easily been referring to the sweeping sprays of lavender stretching up neatly along gravel pathways. "The forms are much cleaner than you'd expect. It's not a soft arrangement," he adds.

The graphic design is very much an extension of the interior and architectural

aesthetic of the house, which sits on four-and-a-half acres of flat farmland on Long Island's East End. "There isn't a place where the architecture stops and landscape begins," says Hollander, who planned the property around two great squares: one composed of an open lawn, the other a sunken pool area designed in the spirit of Slim Aarons modernity. "We excavated down about two feet, so you have to go downstairs to reach that room," he says. The change in elevation makes a poolhouse just outside the hedge and the bosk of plane trees behind it appear elevated.

A crush of flowering grasses and shrubs brings intensity of color. "There aren't 12 lavender plants—there are 1,200," notes Hollander, who describes the choreography of blooms like acts in a ballet: a dance of alliums under an allée of horse chestnut trees in the spring, hydrangeas and lavender in the summer, roses in the fall. "There's something new blooming not just every season, but even within the course of a summer," says Hollander. "The family comes out every weekend and in the summer, so it's likely that with each visit, they have a new landscape to enjoy."

Long Island, New York
 DESIGN BY HOLLANDER
 DESIGN LANDSCAPE
 ARCHITECTS, WITH
 HAYNES ROBERTS

BUNNY WILLIAMS PORTRAIT, PETER MURDOCK; PETER LYDEN PORTRAIT, BRANDON MITCHELL; GARDEN IMAGES, CHARLES MAVER



The garden design centers on two great squares: a pool area hidden behind ilex hedges and an expansive lawn. In the foreground, Wedding Gown hydrangea



WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

"It's beautiful how they divided up a very flat piece of property and created a lot of interest and color in a clean, architectural way."—BUNNY WILLIAMS



LEFT: The broad canopy of a plane tree casts shade on the lawn. ABOVE LEFT: Purple alliums bloom in square beds beneath horse chestnut trees in an arrangement that forms the rear panel of the garden.

Around a rimless pool, a tailored hedge of Annabelle hydrangeas creates an elegant green-and-white palette. An allée of crepe myrtles soars behind the evergreen walls and poolhouse.



Once cloaked in mud, the **Boston ivy** on the main house and guesthouse (inset) was cleaned up, and “the roots just started sprouting again,” says landscape designer Margie Grace.



A Wildly Beautiful Revival



Less than a year after disaster struck, a mudflow-ravaged garden reemerges as the thriving wildlife habitat it once was, using the very material that decimated it.

BEFORE THE CATASTROPHIC Montecito mudflows of 2018, everything that grew on this two-acre property in Southern California was “magic,” says landscape designer Margie Grace. Roses would bloom in the shade; hydrangeas relished the blazing sun. A grassy, serene pond drew ducks and quail and owls, all against an extraordinary backdrop of towering palms and live oaks belonging to a neighboring estate, like a regal army watching over it.

Then came the mud. “Everything was wiped out...plants, fences, animals. It was biblical,” recalls Grace. “We learned the absolute power of nature.”

In the eight months that followed, another lesson emerged for Grace and the homeowner, designer Penelope Bianchi of McCormick Interiors: The magic hadn’t been swept away with the sludge. If anything, it had strengthened tenfold. As they washed two feet of mud from the guesthouse and



Beyond a border of Wendy’s Wish sage stands an **aged garden urn**, one of several swept across the property, resurrected, and returned to its post.

Montecito, California

DESIGN BY **GRACE
DESIGN ASSOCIATES,**
WITH MCCORMICK
INTERIORS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY HOLLY LEPERE.

Behind the main house, a **Coast live oak** shades a rustic dining terrace.



▶ The **restored pond** borders a 45-acre nature preserve and was critical to the return of wildlife like mallards (above), turtles, and quail. “Even great blue herons stop by from time to time,” says Grace. Look for her new book, *Private Gardens of Santa Barbara*, out this March (Gibbs Smith, 2020).



WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

“This garden is a true embrace of nature.”

—PETER LYDEN

garage and cleaned up whatever they could salvage, they faced mountains of leftover sediment. “We had to do something with it, and I thought, There’s no reason the land has to be dead flat,” says Grace. So she began working it into the restoration plan. At the south side of the house, she repurposed a portion of the muddy sediment into a 28-foot hill planted with sycamores and poppies and another into soil for a 12-foot redbud knoll. Along the property line, a four-foot berm became an organic solution for a washed-away privacy fence.

“Everything I put in the ground grew lightning fast,” recalls Grace, who trained in biology and geology. “I thought the new soil would be full of toxins, but the levels didn’t even register. What was left behind was amazing dirt.”

And the wildlife returned in multiples. “In California, we have trees like sycamores and redwoods that grow in the stream beds. Winter will come and water will whoosh down, and the trees may get buried with three feet of dirt and still live. They grow character instead of giving up. This garden has always had good vibes, and that’s part of it. But you just get out of the way and let nature fix it. Nature doesn’t give up.” ♦