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# DESIGN

NEW ENGLAND

## OUTDOOR HAVENS

*City, country, and seaside open-air retreats*





AT THE FRONT entrance to the house is the Checkerboard Garden, so named for its pattern of pavers. A monumental stone Victorian portecochere (FACING PAGE), originally designed to shelter passengers entering with their horse-drawn carriages, frames the side entrance and surrounding gardens.





A photograph of a garden courtyard. In the foreground, a gravel path leads towards a stone archway. The archway is constructed from rough-hewn stone blocks. Above the arch, a large, vibrant pink rose bush hangs down, its leaves and flowers partially obscuring the top of the arch. To the right of the arch, a small, light-colored statue of a figure stands on the gravel. The background shows a lush garden with various plants, including a white trellis structure. The overall scene is bright and sunny, with sunlight filtering through the leaves.

# *a lot from a little*

A LANDSCAPE DESIGNER AND HIS CLIENT  
BRING THE ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE TO A  
NEGLECTED URBAN CORNER

WRITTEN BY CAROL STOCKER • PHOTOGRAPHED BY KINDRA CLINEFF





***L*IKE AN URBAN SECRET, A NEW GARDEN BLOOMS BEHIND  
AN 8-FOOT-HIGH PRIVET HEDGE AT A BUSY  
INTERSECTION NEAR THE LONGWOOD MEDICAL AREA  
IN BROOKLINE, MASSACHUSETTS.**

The three-year project by Jim Douthit and his 20-year-old design firm, A Blade of Grass in Wayland, Massachusetts, is a trompe l'oeil triumph that creates the illusion of a formal English country estate garden on a small corner lot that is more urban than suburban. That the ring of land surrounding the large house nowhere exceeds 40 feet in width makes the garden's sense of spaciousness something of a design miracle. The Association of Professional Landscape Designers (APLD) thought so in 2013 when it presented the garden a gold award for excellence.

The owners, Heather Falcone and Steve Cherny, moved to their landmark Queen Anne Revival mansion from Brooklyn, New York, where maximizing tight spaces to make the city feel like the coun-

try is a high art form. When the house was built in 1885, no interior decorative detail had been spared, but the lot was an afterthought that had never been properly landscaped.

Douthit's transformation started with securing the property's boundaries by rejuvenating the existing privet hedge, the only origi-

**AN 8-FOOT-HIGH privet hedge separates the sunken garden (ABOVE) from the busy street. Flowers in the perennial border lining the lawn include allium 'Globemaster' and an edging of mauve catmint 'Six Hills Giant.' Behind the house, a small glass greenhouse (FACING PAGE, TOP LEFT) was assembled from old windows collected by owner Heather Falcone, who, with daughter Lila, 5 (FACING PAGE, TOP RIGHT), sits in the garden just outside the kitchen (FACING PAGE, BOTTOM), where annuals and vegetables grow in parterres.**









**A RECYCLED METAL gate (TOP)** from the 1920s helps define the entry from the outside world. It is flanked by privet hedges. Homeowner Falcone's love of roses is apparent throughout the gardens (ABOVE).

nal planting he kept. "We saved a lot of money not putting up a wall," he says. Where more height was needed to screen a neighboring house, Douthit added a stretch of 'Green Giant' arborvitae. "It grows two feet a year," he says. "Everyone's planting them now."

His solution to the narrow perimeter was to encircle the house with a series of seven "garden rooms," each opening onto the next to create a kind of journey. They were inspired by memories of English garden tours Heather Falcone had taken long ago with her beloved grandmother Iris, a devoted gardener who had come to the United States as a GI bride from Britain after World War II. A bed of irises is planted in her honor near the gazebo.

Each outdoor room is stuffed with flowers spilling out from short, formal evergreen parterres of boxwood and privet. The result is a lush wonderland of form and color that makes the garden feel much larger.

In one outdoor space, the Checkerboard Garden, Douthit alternated pavers and grass to create squares large enough to walk on. The geometric pattern plays off a large stone staircase leading to the front door. A circular flower bed surrounded by low boxwood softens the edge around the massive steps.

Beyond the Checkerboard Garden is a magnificent sunken garden





that leads to a gazebo. Though still formal, here an edging of flowering blue catmint replaces the boxwood for a more naturalized look. In spring, its mauve flowers are echoed by tall, round allium ‘Globe-master,’ and in fall, dozens of giant dahlias line the greensward. One, called Swan’s Glory, from Swan Island Dahlias in Oregon, is 9 feet tall and reaches to the mansion’s stone balcony.

The garden, which also won an APLD award in the plant material category, is liberally accented with popular varieties of woody plants, including narrow-growing columnar apple trees (perfect for urban lots), stewartia, and tons of Endless Summer hydrangeas and low-maintenance Knock Out roses. Two of Douthit’s superperformers are *Hydrangea paniculata* ‘Quick Fire,’ a long-blooming workhorse that blooms all summer with white flowers that very gradually turn russet/pink, and viburnum ‘Summer Snowflake,’ an upright, smaller doublefile viburnum that yields random blossoms all season long.

Heather Falcone, for whom the garden is a passion, led in its ongoing creation. She and Douthit have been on the same page except, perhaps, regarding evergreens. While she loves flowers, flowers, flowers, he lobbied successfully to include evergreens to provide structure in both winter and summer.



**IN THE ESPALIER garden (TOP),** Endless Summer hydrangeas mingle with giant delphiniums, roses and evergreens, which provide year-round structure. Clematis (ABOVE) climbs the gate that frames the Checkerboard Garden.





The garden took two years to construct, says Falcone, followed by a year of tweaking. And while a crew under A Blade of Grass managing partner Heather Jones provides maintenance twice monthly, Falcone spends many hours working in the garden sometimes assisted by her 5-year-old daughter, Lila. Their favorite plants are roses, including fragrant *rosa* ‘Colorific’ and climbing roses such as ‘Gertrude Jekyll,’ ‘Fourth of July,’ and ‘Blaze,’ which clamber up the garden’s many structures and the mansion’s stone facade.

Always experimenting with new flowers, Falcone says, “It’s moving day in my garden every day.” Last summer she was crushing on annuals, especially zinnias and lantanas, many of which are planted in the parterres of her Kitchen Garden next to her bright yellow patio furniture.

She’s also an antiques collector who frequents the massive annual Brimfield Antique and Collectibles Show in Brimfield, Massachusetts, for the statuary and metal gates that accent her garden. A decorative little Victorian-style greenhouse is made of old doors with stained-glass panes she picked up “off the street in Brooklyn” and brought to Brookline.

Finding the balance between such a massive structure and its relatively small lot was a challenge noted even when the two-story house was completed 130 years ago. Then, in an article about the mansion, the *Brookline Chronicle* newspaper wrote “the limited grounds are a decided disadvantage,” adding that the first-floor surfacing material of “Roxbury Stone and red granite” was its most important architectural feature. The house was built by J.P. Webber, who was born in Ripley, Maine, where he opened his own general store at the tender age of 17, and later moved to Bangor, Maine, where he made a fortune in the logging business. Webber had no compunction about flaunting his self-made prosperity with this house. (Yet, a decade later, he moved to an even grander manse on Beacon Street in Boston.)

When Heather Falcone bought the house with her family more than a century later, she ripped out the random shrubs, caught her breath, then set out to find an artistic landscape designer. Ultimately, she, Douthit, and his team at A Blade of Grass together created garden rooms with both the delicacy and substance to perfectly complement the muscular stone house. ■

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FALCONE NAMED THE Iris Garden outside the pergola (FACING PAGE) for her grandmother, a devoted gardener who came to the United States after World War II. Falcone and Lila, framed by the porte-cochere (ABOVE), tend to a topiary in the Kitchen Garden. A topiary is trimmed into a ball shape (RIGHT, TOP) that comes naturally to the alliums in the background. Lila and her brother, Sam, 13 (RIGHT), tend to flowering plants. A bright yellow-and-white chaise longue (BELOW) by the front entry porch is a perfect place to grab a nap.

