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Southern *Gentility*

A SERIES OF
GARDEN ROOMS
AT A LOVELY HOME
IN CHARLESTON'S
HISTORIC DISTRICT
CONJURES THE
CHARM OF THE
OLD SOUTH







Front parterre Behind the historic home's colonial-style fence is a small boxwood parterre.

Carriageway An old mooring post is a focal point here, set against the backdrop of a towering camphor tree.

Exterior Lovingly restored, the 1743 Georgian is one of the earlier homes in historic Charleston.

Homeowners Ben and Cindy Lenhardt.

Preceding pages The formal parterre is planted with boxwood, ivy, and dwarf mondo grass. Nestled amid bluestones is a delightful nosegay of 'Bronze Beauty' ajuga.

Debutante' camellias. 'Lady Banks' roses. 'Little Gem' magnolias. Even the flowers collected in the garden at Ben and Cindy Lenhardt's exquisitely restored 1743 home in Charleston's historic district are the essence of Southern gentility.

Ben—a retired businessman who has been an avid digger in the dirt since he planted his first marigold seeds at age 10—is chairman of the national Garden Conservancy. The organization is to gardens what the National Trust for Historic Preservation is to buildings, preserving exceptional ones and allowing the public rare glimpses of fine private gardens through its popular Open Days program. Waving off compliments about his own handiwork, Ben rhapsodizes about gardens as living art: "It's the most difficult art

form because it changes. It takes an appreciation of balance, color, and different kinds of plant materials with strong architectural components—all of which must be coordinated with the changing seasons to create a symphony of color, beauty, and tranquility."

Climbing white roses bloom on the home's colonial-style fence, behind which is a small boxwood parterre with crushed oyster-shell paths. Against a backdrop of a ligustrum tree pruned to show its beautiful Oriental branching structure are planted dwarf white Indian hawthorn and pink camellias in pleasing contrast.

From here, visitors to the garden go down one step to a carriageway and on to rear garden rooms. Nearby is a small space with a dazzling whitebud tree, which many visitors have never seen before. A garden opening directs the eye to a focal point, an old



In the period "Charleston garden," a Lutyens-style bench is flanked by graceful urns. Enclosed with brick-and-stucco walls, the garden is a tranquil place to entertain.

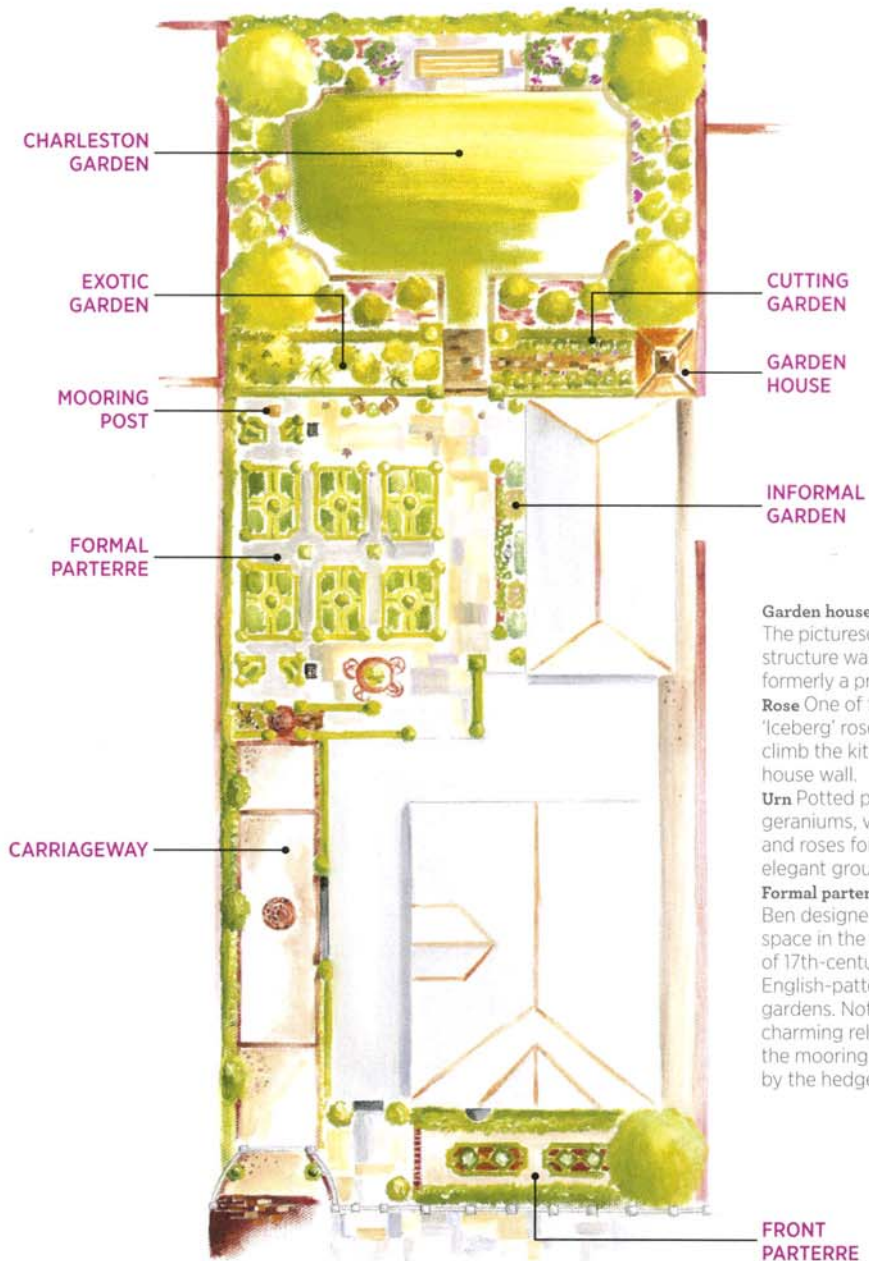
stone mooring post. Rowboats were once tied to the post, which was discovered while digging in the garden when the Lenhardts restored the home. "We learned the house was at the edge of a creek [which no longer exists] that led to the Cooper River, where a man-of-war ship might be waiting," Ben explains.

Ben's garden design was influenced by Loutrel Briggs, a landscape architect who in the 1930s began designing gardens for Charlestonians and northerners wintering in Charleston. "To make them appear bigger and create more interest, he used different levels," Ben notes.

The post anchors the top of the ahh-producing variegated green 17th-century parterre next to the brick kitchen house, covered in climbing white roses. Only white blooms can be glimpsed from this area. The effect, Ben says, makes the garden glow in moonlight. In keeping with English tradition that influenced early Charleston,

the parterre can be seen from the home's upper windows. Juxtaposed against its formality is an informal kitchen house garden with silver germander, sage, and dainty flowering serissa. An espaliered magnolia climbs the walls; potato vine (with blossoms less prosaic than its name) hugs its corner.

From here, two steps lead up to a level where surprises await—a cutting garden and an exotic garden with ginger lilies and rice paper plants. The cutting garden is planted with boxwood and southern yew hedges; it leads to the garden house, formerly a privy. Finally, like a flare of trumpets heralding arrival, entry posts and finials on a hedge wall announce a period "Charleston garden." Here the Lenhardts love to entertain on a carpet of St. Augustine grass amid white, purple, blue, and pink flowers. The garden is on the Garden Conservancy Open Days program May 25, coinciding with Charleston's Spoleto Festival (gardenconservancy.org). ■



Garden house

The picturesque structure was formerly a privy.

Rose One of the 'Iceberg' roses that climb the kitchen house wall.

Urn Potted petunias, geraniums, violas, and roses form an elegant grouping.

Formal parterre Ben designed the space in the manner of 17th-century English-patterned gardens. Note a charming relic, the mooring post, by the hedge.

