



GARDEN CONSERVANCY

Page Dickey's Duck Hill Garden in North Salem. Dickey has since sold the property, but it is featured in a new book that celebrates the 25th anniversary of the Garden Conservancy's Open Days tours. Dickey is a co-founder of the program.

Page Dickey is back in the garden

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When garden writer Page Dickey opened her private garden, Duck Hill in North Salem, and coaxed 110 others to do the same for the Garden Conservancy's first Open Days event — which allows visitors access to some of the finest private gardens across the country — little did she know that 20 years later she would be editing "Outstanding American Gardens" (Stewart, Tabori & Chang), a lavish volume showcasing many favorites among the 3,000 participating gardens.

The book celebrates the garden preservation group's 25th anniversary and its Open Days program.

"The whole idea of sharing a garden is magical," says Dickey.

Dickey and her friend Pepe Maynard co-founded the Open Days Program as a way to raise money for the Garrison-based Garden Conservancy and showcase some of the best private gardens in our area. It proved hugely successful and gardens across the country are part of the program.

Right from the start, Dickey's garden was a mainstay. What's wonderful about it is the way Dickey combined formal and classical elements of garden design — using tightly clipped hedges and shrubs and symmetrical sight lines and axes — with the blowsy and slightly wild informality of an English perennial garden.

"Being a gardener myself and working very hard on my garden to make it

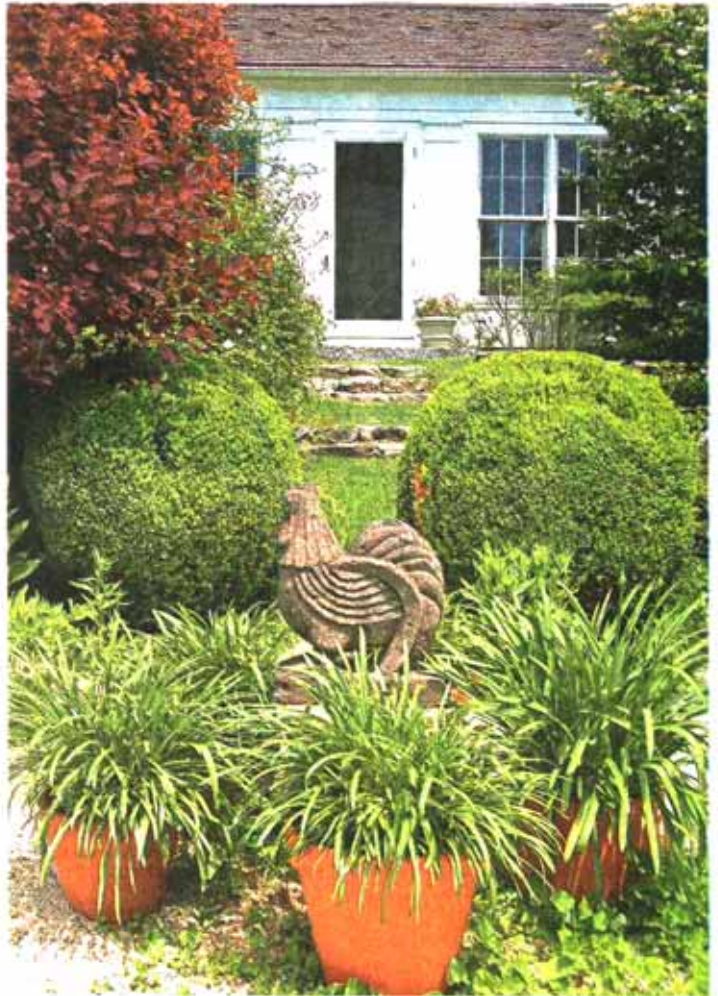
beautiful, there's something thrilling about sharing it — especially with like-minded people," says Dickey, who sold Duck Hill last year, but her wonderful garden is featured among the collection and includes design elements adopted from her own tours of notable American gardens.

"I've been a visitor for many, many years, and there is rarely a garden where you don't learn something," says Dickey. "By going around and seeing other gardens, it broadens your knowledge and vision."

In "Outstanding American Gardens," Dickey showcases 50 diverse gardens, including eight of the conservancy's own preservation gardens. The coffee-table book is filled with spectacular photographs by Marion Brenner that let arm-chair gardeners experience their magnificence.

"That's the beauty of American gardens — that there's so much diversity," she says.

Diversity indeed. The gardens profiled in the book range in style from traditional — like the historic Charleston, S.C., garden of Chicagoans Cindy and Ben Lenhardt to contemporary desert ones like Ellen and John Stiteler's colorful courtyard gardens in Phoenix; and vary in size from landscape architect Joseph Marek's jewel box garden in Santa Monica, Calif., to sweeping estate gardens including three Chicago-area greats: Camp Rosemary in Lake Forest, John and Neville Bryan's Crab Tree Farm in Lake Bluff,



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and Peggy and Jack Crowe's walled garden in Lake Forest.

Besides diversity, Dickey says American gardens embrace a "spirit of originality" that's not hampered by tradition and rules. Their creators find inspiration from others' gardens, their native surroundings and their own imaginations.

At Hollister House in Washington, Conn., creator George Schoellkopf borrowed a hedge-rooms concept from his tours of England's famed Sissinghurst gardens. He surrounds his 1760 farmhouse with varying rectangular spaces and exuberantly fills them with colorful American plants.

Dickey says some ideas are born from natural disasters. When Hurricane Sandy brought down 50 trees on Ed and Vivian

Merrin's seven-acre garden in Cortlandt Manor, she says Ed admired the beautiful roots of one of the big oak trees and said, "Let's make lemonade out of lemons." Thus, the stumpy of artfully arranged tree stumps was born.

Dickey says another distinctive trait of American gardens is their creators' increasing consciousness for native landscapes.

"Americans are embracing plants that do well in their specific habitats rather than plants that take an enormous amount of coddling," says Dickey.

Check out the Garden Conservancy's 2016 Open Days schedule at <http://bit.ly/23ruxrg>.

With additional reporting by The Journal News