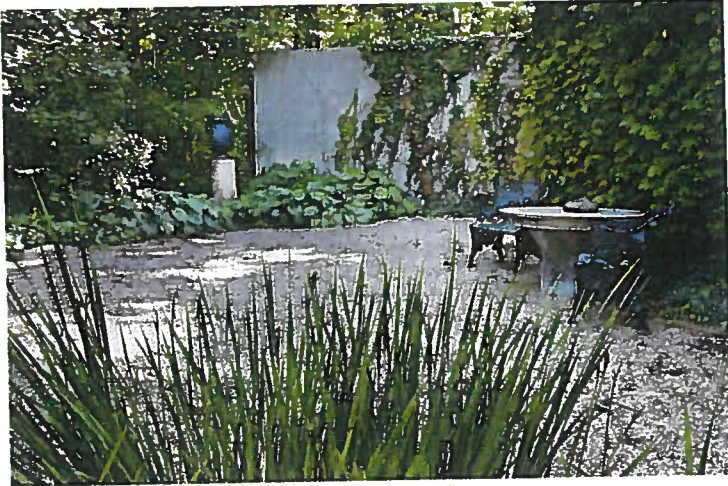


TAILINGS

Germantown



When David Whitcomb and Robert Montgomery moved to this wooded hilltop in 1986, the splendid views that give such resonance to the garden were not apparent. Whitcomb, a gifted interior designer and gardener who died in 2001, understood the site's possibilities and chose to build the house and make the garden among the trees on the top of the long ridge. They named the property Tailings, which refers to mining residue, since it was on the site of a former iron mine operated in the 1880s by the Livingston family. As they worked on the land and began making axial cuts through the woods, a magnificent 360-degree view appeared, from the Berkshires to the Hudson River and the entire Catskill range beyond.

Whitcomb selectively culled trees, carefully shaping the views, while retaining a sense of privacy for the house, which consists of four linked pavilions of differing architectural styles gathered together in a series of follies. Glass-roofed walkways link Palladian, Greek Revival, contemporary, and postmodern wings. Cement and rusticated concrete block, used principally in the connecting walkways and entranceway, are covered with ivy, evoking an industrial ruin; the pavilions, although alluding to historical periods, look fresh and new. The question of what is old and



what is new extends to the gardens, where architectural remnants have been placed throughout the landscape. Often, the answer is both. At the top of the long driveway leading to the house are six wooden columns that used to mark a vegetable garden (now a lawn): two are nineteenth-century antiques, and the other four are copies.

The landscape, with its piercing views cut through the natural woodland, complements the architecture. Woodland paths connect a series of gardens and plantings; for the most part, the plantings create a restful environment with an emphasis on green. The choice of soft colors, such as the pale pinks of Japanese anemone or the gentle blues of Siberian iris, catmint, and Russian sage, works well with the naturalistic tone. Woodland plants, chosen for their foliage, are grouped in large numbers to best effect. Pots of blue agapanthus, the only container plantings, add an elegant touch in the summer.

The garden tempers and humanizes the glass and concrete block exterior of the house, and, at the same time, curving concrete walls shape the adjacent exterior spaces. Ivy, and occasionally variegated euonymus, clothes the concrete walls, causing them to melt into the landscape. In the northeast-facing courtyard, the relationship between the ivy-clad walls and the gravel paving is as classic and serene as any medieval cloister.

Whitcomb had a knack for combining different elements, often from disparate eras, in ways that provoke questions, encouraging the examination of long-held assumptions. Not being able to quite categorize what you see serves to sharpen the senses, which in turn increases your appreciation of the garden and ultimately of the sweeping view below.

