



INNER GARDEN

When the folks at Mariani Gardens approached Harry Allen about designing the interior spaces of the nursery, he leapt at the offer. "It's such a good concept," says Allen on the patio of his schoolhouse Bedford home.

Though he made his mark winning awards for his furniture and home accessories, Allen has given fresh looks to interior spaces before: the SoHo gallery Moss, the nightclub SX137, a Japanese apparel store among them. But Mariani was close to home and a fresh idea. "I'd just returned from France where there was a similar type of place," says Allen, of the Bambouseraie, a nursery with restaurant, gift shop, and water features. "I drew inspiration from it."

The idea was to sketch a café (photo below) and gift shop to augment the Mariani experience. The problem for Allen was the concept came to him last November, and the project had to be done—as in, "Would you like a latté with that tulip tree?"—by spring. But they managed. "I'm really happy with the way it turned out," says Allen. "I just can't believe they got it done on time."

—Geoffrey Morris



Royal Palms

Bringing a touch of Versailles to Bedford

BY ABBY LUBY

THERE IS ARTISTRY at work at the newly expanded Mariani Gardens in Armonk. Walking among the Royal Palms, the purple-leaved *Riversii* Beech, the bronzed Chinese Photinia shrubs, one feels less a customer and more a visitor at a formal botanical spread. Pots of small pale-green shrubs and colorful annuals encircle larger, dark green bushes, symmetrically placed around perfectly pruned trees. A stone bench or statuary is the still, silent accent to the floral expanse.

"My inspiration comes from Versailles," says garden owner Mark Mariani, who was born in the Bronx and raised in Armonk. After running a Mount Kisco-based landscaping business, Mariani branched into real estate, building 20,000-square-foot houses on spec in the Greenwich area, accentuated with his signature landscaping. His impressive collection of towering trees, rare shrubs, and flowers framing wooded pathways has been a visual delight since 2005. Now,

additional greenhouses have been added, filled with an even wider array of choices to enhance any landscape. "We design a garden for twelve months of the year," Mariani says, who offers both hardscape and landscape services and has been collecting large and exotic specimens for fifteen years.

Sam Walsh, general manager of Mariani Gardens, says the outdoor areas are an ever-changing parade of plants. "We sell rare trees and shrubs grown all over the country," says Walsh.



STROKES

INSIDE MANHATTAN'S Hubert Gallery, Champagne corks popped, while out in the February cold, a gaggle of Madison Avenue passersby stared at the portrait of a woman with dark, deep-set eyes and an intense, primitive look: the centerpiece of an exhibition by Bedford's Betsy Podlach.

Podlach nurtured her now burgeoning career at Silvermine Guild Arts Center, then at Harvard, and honed it further at art schools in New York and Italy. Along the way it took two daily waitress jobs combined with modest sales to stay afloat. Today, waiting tables is a thing of the past.

First to notice Podlach's commercial potential was Concetta Nardin of the Nardin Gallery in Somers. Later, Doerte Neudert, an early supporter and steady advisor, began to feature Podlach's work at her Nantucket Art Cabinet Gallery. Slowly, collectors began to acquire Podlach's work—among them, George Stephanopoulos, Jack Welch, and Italian Princess Donatella Borghese, who gave Podlach an apartment in her castle as a studio. Next came the decision of both Pfizer and NYU to add Podlachs to their collections. Currently, works are on display in Key West, Chapel Hill, Nantucket, New York, and most recently, closer to home in Cross River's Gallery Yellow.

"We purchase boxwoods and hornbeams that were planted 55 years ago. One 80-year-old maple was collected from an estate and is about 60 feet high." On a recent tour of the garden grounds Walsh explained that large trees and evergreens are in demand for newly built homes, including Mariani's favorite, deer-resistant American boxwoods, selling for about \$5,000.

Walsh explained that many clients want landscaping for a house they have just purchased or built. "Usually they spend up to 20 percent of the purchase price of their property on landscaping," he says, adding their most recent client paid about \$9 million for a property. If you want tropical plants like palm trees swaying next to your cabana, Mariani's can do that, too. They will unearth them before winter, tightly

wrap the root ball, store it, and return it to your property come spring.

The Bedford Road showplace offers interior landscapes as well. Inside the greenhouse, the handcrafted Neptune fountain, a large limestone water wall, is a backdrop for

arrangements and bouquets of cut flowers. And don't miss the café, open for breakfast and lunch, whose menu highlights include Salad Crêpe with Smoked Turkey and Brie, Traditional or Egg White Omelets & Pancakes, Spring Beet Salad with Goat Cheese, Seared Lemon

WE PURCHASE BOXWOODS AND HORNBEAMS THAT WERE PLANTED 55 YEARS AGO. ONE 80-YEAR-OLD MAPLE WAS COLLECTED FROM AN ESTATE AND IS ABOUT 60 FEET HIGH

exotic orchards and bonsai. Outdoor furnishings are placed alongside striking moss-covered urns, elegant stone planters, fountains, and benches. The statuary is Mariani's Collection by Chesney's of London. You'll find displays of flatware, home design accents, and coffee tables replete with artful displays of books. There's also a staff of florists on hand to create

Chicken and Avocado on Bed of Greens, and for dessert: Crème Bavarese, Dark Chocolate, White Chocolate, Strawberry, or Mango Mousse.

Visually impressive, selling everything from exotic plants and trees to outdoor and home furnishings, Mariani's will undoubtedly be an inspiration to any suburban homeowner. The trick is finding the green.

