

# THE WIRTZ GARDENS



The countryside around St Gallen in Switzerland is rich with dense forests, rolling agricultural fields, alpine meadows and beautiful old farms. In the distance, very high peaks are most of the year covered with snow and form a dramatic background. To the north, the views go as far as the Lake of Konstanz. This transition area between the city of St Gallen and the pure alpine farmland forms the setting for this garden looking down over deep valleys and up to Mountain Säntis. Built up on a steep hill flank, it is surrounded by nearly neighbouring houses and below a curving street. A 3 floor storey residential house by Hilmer and Sattler gives access to the site with a steep staircase that passes along the back of the property. It is the only opening in an otherwise hermetically closed composition of terraced hedges. They form like a compact variation on the theme of the tea plantation. Here and there, a group of ornamental trees like Crab Apples or Cherries pop up out of this rhythm of hedges. Towards the house, a group of Fastigiata Hornbeams and Oaks seem willing to enter in a dialogue with the tall towering house. The genetic variation of the beech seedlings gives a rich variety in greens during the spring, even in budding timing. In win-



ter, they are all equally brown. Even on a dark day the sculptural spectacle of the terraced curved forms reads very strongly, picking up the weakest light and radiating a reddish rusty brown rural boldness. The contrast with the pristine whiteness of the painted stucco facades is at all seasons very complimentary. It is as if a multi-layered scarf embraces the white facade that towers out above. All staircases and terraces are made of a nice grey local stone. On the garden wall, a sculpture of Ian Hamilton Finlay reads against the open sky, and adds an intriguing poetic note to the ensemble. The garden wall and the house frame an unexpected flat meadow space which is a haven of calmness, unsuspected from the street. Hidden from all views by carefully planted trees to the periphery, it links the house to hidden service access, higher up the hill. The lawn is the heart of the garden and serves as a belvedere to view the valley and the mountains.

This small garden attempts to create maximum magic on a small difficult piece of land at a high elevation. It is truly a soft nut in a muscular shell, disguising entirely from the street the private world behind its multiple screens.









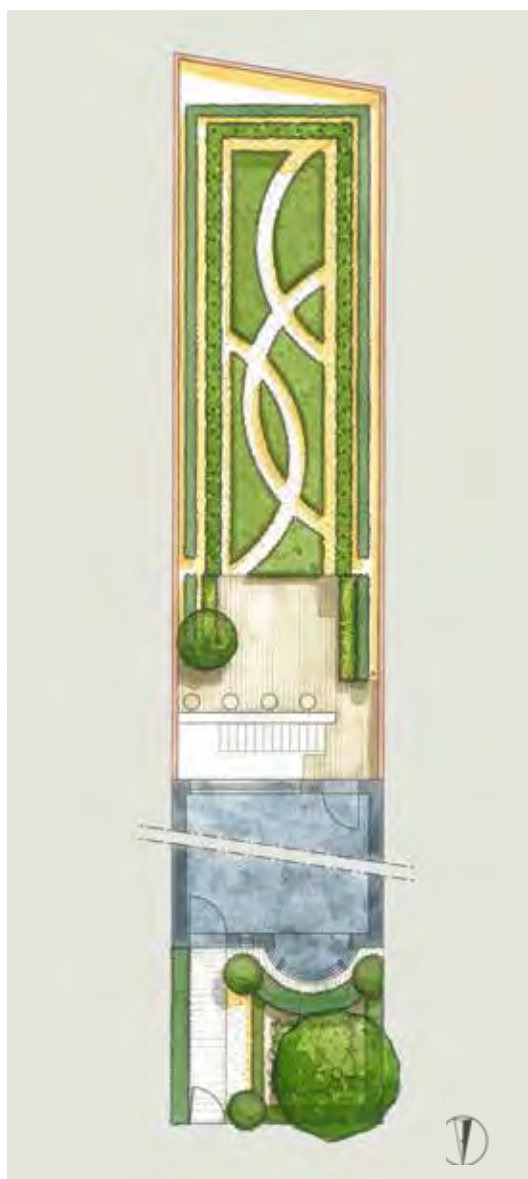




## II

This Brussels hidden city garden is like a quiet private cousin of the New York pocket parks, in mini format. From the street, it's quite a change of worlds! The busy moving noise from the street is exchanged for a static quiet and almost monochromatic oasis of freshness. In the beginning, when the children were young, the ground level was a lawn for playing. Later, consideration was given to converting it into a labyrinth, more to observe from the house at different floor levels, than a garden to walk in and enjoy. In the end, the design became like a paraphrase of a French "broderie" with boxwood and gravel but in a modern non symbolic manner. Domesticated nature, to be observed from the castle's windows, was replaced by playful, clipped boxwood patterns to be looked upon from 3 levels of a modern inner city row house.

To make the maximum out of this very reduced space, the narrowness of the site is played out even more. To create more privacy, the framing of the space with the garden walls is raised with a single densely planted line of *Fagus sylvatica* on standard. As much the narrowly clipped veil of foliage as the rhythm of



the trunks form the beauty of this space definition. They cast a shadow on the brick wall behind, and allow to read the beauty of the limbed up trunks against a dark background. Their roughness contrasts with the smoothness of the fine textured boxwood parterres. The crisp forms of boxwood read interestingly as a play of light and shadow on the light reflecting dolomite gravel. The fascination and reading of boxwood parterres and beech frames transform as you change floors in the house. Only at the top floor, the relative minuteness of the pocket space is revealed to the eye, when you see the adjacent gardens in one glance. The boldness to create a sunlight filtering screen around the garden space adds a certain mystery and ultimate privacy to this garden. The connotation of a colonnaded cloisters garden with a centre you look on to, but don't necessarily need to enter, is not far. Also the ritual of the evergreen floor, contrasting with leaf exchanging rhythm of the deciduous beeches has a meditative aspect, which works wholesome.

It makes life in the city only more enjoyable!







### III

The guesthouse garden of Pollmeier Massivholz GmbH is situated on a long narrow stretch of land along the River Ifta in Creuzburg, Thuringia (Germany). Across this narrow, but fast running river, is the major wood processing mill of Pollmeier Massivholz, one of Germany's largest beech wood exporting firms. In this region, which reminds immediately of Germany's romantic poet's nature descriptions, rolling fields alternate with forested hills, abandoned orchards, castle ruins or wild rivers. Also Eisenach, Bach's birth place and his cultural heritage are very present in the air. The willow and alder rows along the Ifta River form a vertical clouded screen that cuts through the fields. It reminds of Durer's paintings and is one element of a very rich wild life along the river. On the west side, the project site is framed by a raised field track on a row of ruinous but picturesque pear and plum trees with wild roses.



This creates a sunken long field of rich loamy soil on which Cornelsen + Seelinger built a guesthouse for the Pollmeier company, parallel to the river. It forms like an arthouse for the corporate headquarters they built first, opposite the river. Embedding itself in this peculiar long space, Wirtz stretches the projection of the guesthouse on the land by adding a series of parallel mirror canals and long mixed flowerbeds at the west side of the building, this gesture invites the eye to look in the distance and go for a walk. To the north, the canals point to an elevated hornbeam arbour, surrounded by a canal as an end point. To the south side a seemingly endless meandering walk will end on a 5m tall grass mound, which can serve as a belvedere to look back. The narrowness and unilateral direction of the space provoked to come up with a structure to

rhythm and break up the spatial experience of the visitors. The idea was to lay out a sequence of oval beds, between which the pedestrian is manipulated to read the "world". One time, he slaloms in between, another time he crosses an oval bed, constantly unaware of the distance he still has to go and of the narrowness of the garden.

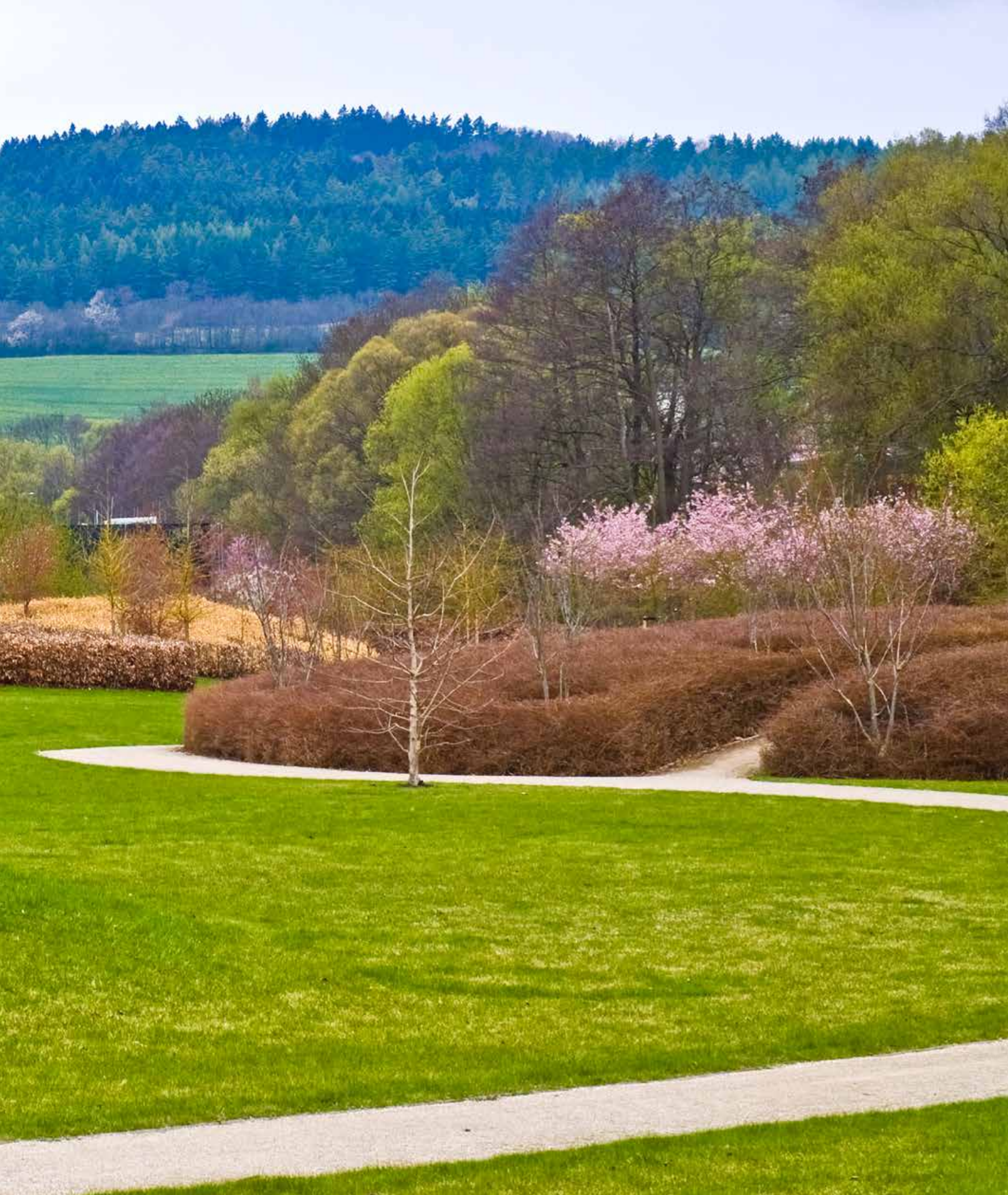
Added elements like a mirror pond, or a sudden proximity of the river come as discoveries. When the space grows larger, he can see again the surrounding hills and climb up the mound to understand where he comes from.

The oval mounds are all planted with a different cherry or crab apple variety on a groundcover of a clipped shrub, f.i. *Symphoricarpos*, *Fagus sylvatica*, *Cornus mas*. The cherries quietly start to tower out above the oval edge like ascending umbrellas. One long month in a year, the visitor walks between flower bouquets that are white, pink, purple or cream yellow

before they change into the graceful summer canopy forms. One oval with *Malus Everest* turns orange in the winter. The cherries are *Pandora*, *Umineko*, *Accolade*, *Shidare Yoshino*, *The Bride*, *Yedoensis*, *Ariel*, *Kanzan*, *Shimidsu*, *Tai Haku*, *Yae Murasaki*, etc, covering a long sequence in flowering and good fall foliage colouring. At the end, near the mound, young apple, plum and pear varieties with huge canopies like *Sülibirne* and *Flaschenbirne* will form a complement that will enhance the picturesque image of the landscape.

In this project with almost no hardscape elements, the chosen plant species and planting bed layout determine the identity of the garden. The lyrical experience walking through this moving imagery is purposefully enhanced one moment in the year, when all the cherries flower in an overwhelming abundance.





















The campus of Ernsting's Family in Coesfeld-Lette, Westphalia, Germany, is the vision of Kurt Ernsting, the founder of the business. He built up his clothing retailing business as a post-war pioneer, with now 1.800 outlets over the entire country and Austria. He always combined his business savviness with an interest for creating motivating working environments, good architecture and making people come together. "As my products bring joy to people's lives, your landscape also should radiate joy and lift up people's spirits" is one of his memorable quotes during the Schematic Design Phase. The commission is the result of a limited competition during the development of the main service centre by David Chipperfield Architects. Two remarkable pieces of architecture by Schilling

Architekten and Santiago Calatrava were already on site and were joined later by a parking garage by Birk und Heilmeyer Architekten. The project is situated in a sandy area with some remains of overgrown dunes. This explains the way the project is discovered from the main street and announces the language of what is to be discovered: modern pieces of architecture, in an orthogonal relationship to each other, but set in an organic landscape with earth movements, clumps of trees, curvilinear walking connections, bouquets of ornamental shrubs and rolling lawns. This language jumps over the streets that separate the buildings and becomes the binding agent to convert the old industrial feel into a true campus atmosphere. Even small contained areas like the SW corner "Das Ohr" are treated in the same lush way, trying to visually escape its contained space. Parking spaces at the monumental entrance are screened by beech hedges



and clipped *Tilia platyphyllos*. At the NW corner, a big old oak is preserved to reinforce a vulnerable corner and forms with opposite tree groups a transition to the new park garage landscape and truck parking. The landscape is as well to be discovered from the inside as from the outside. Particular attention went to the main courtyard of the new service centre. This courtyard with its alternation of curvilinear hedges and mounded shrubs, is almost a miniature of the larger campus landscape. A rich alternation of evergreen foliage textures and perfumed flowering shrubs like *Hamamelis*, *Viburnum*, *Trochodendron*, *Azalea* and *Sarcococca* welcome the visitors and the inhabitants as a true oasis.

A large lime stone terrace welcomes the staff for a coffee break during the summer, overlooking a wide reflecting canal along the building facade. Wide grass steps invite to walking through the landscape and connect to the other buildings. From all windows of the building, the landscape is a joy to observe. Also the view from the dining hall on the second floor of the Schilling building gives wonderful views back. It also reveals an old industrial warehouse that was wrapped with a 5 meter tall beech hedge to neutralize its expression.

Responding to Mr. Ernsting's interest in trees, the opportunity was enjoyed to enrich the curvilinear landscape with a collection of trees and shrubs. A generous oak collection (*Quercus pontica*, *Q. bicolor*, *Q. imbricaria*, *Q. macranthera*, *Q. x turneri Pseudoturneri*) alternate with cherries, crab apples, *Eucommia*, *Gymnocladus*, *Taxodium*, *Magnolia*, *Sophora*, *Cornus*, *Paulownia*, *Zelkova*, etc.



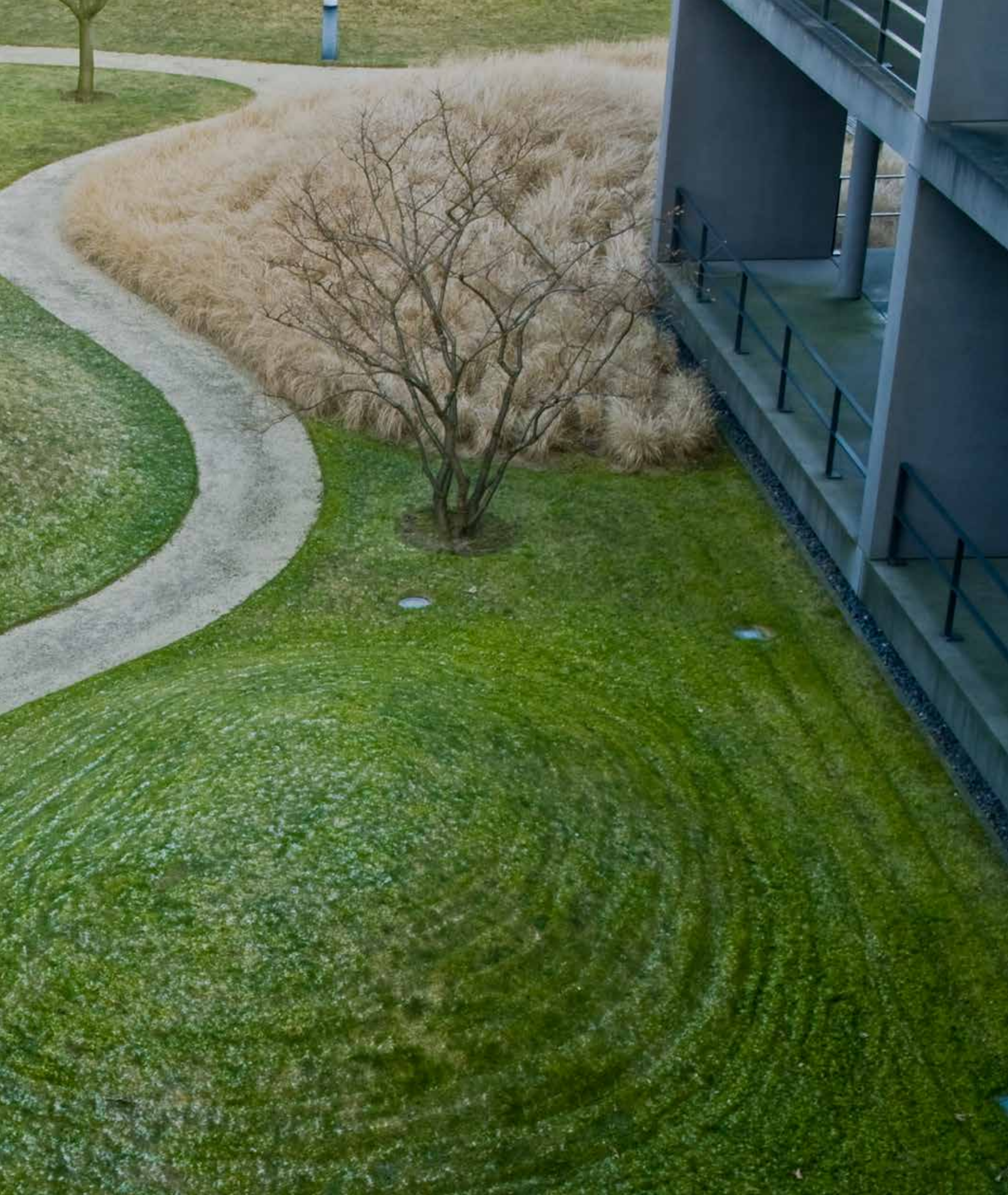




















This marvellous property in South Dartmouth, MA, is situated in one of the rare regions on the east coast of America, where rolling agricultural fields still end in the ocean. Lovely dry stone walls divide the fields and forests. White painted wood farms and sleepy villages still pop up as the only witness of human activity in this very rural world. Salt marshes and wide river arms are everywhere and provide along their borders

generous wild reserves with an abundant bird life and wild flowers. The project of 2006 revolves around a new shingle clad large family home on the top of the hill. It was built under the wings of old ash and elm trees that form the end of a large open field, that descends to the salt marshes, a prelude only to open water. Enclosed on one side by an Audubon Reserve and on the other side by a thick forest, the property truly forms a room with a view to the ocean.

The project consists mainly in embedding the Merrill, Pastor & Colgan Architects house in the landscape with its beautiful heritage of old trees and stone walls. The second theme is to address the circulation between all the architectural components and create a sequence of spaces and connections. A central courtyard with old trees services the main house to the south on a raised level and a family guest house to the north. A series of brick paved loggia's, staircases and hedged corridors connect the main and service entrances, but also give access to porches and terraces. To the east, two wind shielded courtyards provide shelter in spring and let the garden enter the architectural composition. One is on axis with the Cherry Walk beyond one of the old dry stone walls, that define the edge of an orchard. It was meant to end on a raised gazebo, to



overlook the field beyond, but was never built. The other one is the only very colourful perennial garden courtyard with flower parterres, gravel paths and a nice sitting area. To the south, the house is screened from the neighbouring field by a long Lilac Walk. At the east it starts at the basis of a giant Bartlett Pear Tree, the yearly home to Baltimore Orioles. To the west it ends at a fire pit, sheltered by a grove of

Juniperus trees. A playful festoon of Ilex crenata swirls through the lilac alignments and gives it evergreen order and definition. Its implementation was fit through 2 existing openings in the dry stone walls. Two outdoor showers are hidden in hornbeam arbours, close to the house.

The Lilac Walk also gives access to the west terraces of the house, the ones with gorgeous views to the ocean. Also here, the essential task was to edit the setting of the house in the existing landscape, primarily between the old chestnut trees.

To the north the landscape with shrub plantings forms the transition to the humid forest. It contains also an outside dining space under pleached plane trees and a large garage courtyard. A wide driveway gives access to the fields and connects this guest wing to the main access drive of the property.

The bucolic atmosphere on this property is remarkable. The combination of grand open views with enclosed private spaces close to the house is very cheerful and uplifting. The inside-outside merging with loggia's, porches and courtyards, all paved with the same brick, create a very harmonious ensemble. The structural elements, beech hedges and bricks, combine the rural with the sophisticated.











