

Capitol Hill Hideaway

BY DEREK THOMAS



The houses on the 1200 block of E St. SE are fortunate in that the size of their rear gardens are very large by Hill standards. And though they are just within earshot of Pennsylvania Avenue, these gardens have a private, secluded feel. Peter Theil and Peggy Friedlander's garden is a fine example of the many wondrous urban hideaways to found behind our Capitol Hill homes.

A Multi-faceted Garden

Peter and Peggy's garden occupies three

times the space of most Capitol Hill back yards. Easily 40'x16' the garden has room after room of meticulously maintained garden nirvana. It has been a continuous source of enjoyment and pleasure for the pair.

The excitement starts from the back door where a neutral gray stained deck is flanked by an enormous lattice wall of fall blooming clematis and honey suckle. Planters flow over themselves with colorful annuals, and a staircase winds around a crape myrtle dropping you into the main level of the garden. The wooden stairs open onto a brick patio that is a bow to the traditional brick used in paths and walkways throughout the Hill.

The patio walk spills out in all directions and at each corner there is a specimen plant vying for your attention. A paper birch becomes magnificent in this most unlikely urban setting. A mature burning bush flanked on three sides by an enormous daphne competes flawlessly with the birch. An enormous hydrangea planted in an equally oversized planter exudes huge globes of pink excitement. The dogleg area, a space usually forgotten, contains a lush border garden of impatiens. If the garden were to end here it would be the envy of the masses. Oh but no. We have only just passed the entry and first formal room of this enormous tribute to all things green.



FROM TOP TO BOTTOM:

Peter and Peggy Friedlander in their garden.

The pergola is a secluded area covered with wisteria.

Lush winding paths connect the lush garden rooms.

The fountain adds the perfect punctuation to a great space.

Ahead lies the pergola. A secluded area covered with wisteria and surrounded with viburnum and toad lily, echinacea and Lenten rose, camellia and carex. At this point the garden's path winds left towards several specimen roses and clematis, alliums are sprinkled below each rose to keep the black spot monsters at bay and by now the garden is taking on a feel of conservatory garden and moving you further away from the predictable or expected.

As you wind your way by the pergola a sentinel rose and rudbeckia occupy opposing planters, flanking a cement-sitting bench that is perfectly placed below a mature dogwood tree. Lilies leap up five feet into the canopy of the dogwood and in mid-July the scent is both alluring and invigorating. The rear garden room is shaded and contains one of the most magnificent private collections of mature hostas I have ever seen. Coral-

bells and ferns add complexity and texture to the hosta

garden and species rhododendron and azaleas bring forth riotous color in early spring.

As you return to the house, the west side of the garden is alive with sun loving hostas and weigela, butterfly bush and native daylilies and it is now you start to double take and see all the secondary plantings that create lush green layers for a mature gardeners garden. Peggy gives credit for the garden to Peter and Peter humbly accepts the credit.

Transitions

While I sat and visited with Peter and Peggy, the discussion moved from the garden to the changes that are on the horizon for the pair. They are in the process of moving across the Hill to the new town homes on the south of the freeway where their new garden will most likely be very different. Peter has a look of uncertainty about the future of his beloved garden, while Peggy has a calm certainty that her partner will always have a unique green space.

Writers Note

This month marks my fifth year of bringing Hill Rag readers garden news and reviews. It is only fitting that Peter and Peggy have given me the honor of sharing with you their magnificent garden retreat on this special milestone in my writing life. Each month I am honored to share fun gardening facts, news about advancements in the craft, or like this month, sharing with you the special urban gardens that bring the beauty of nature into our urban surroundings. Enjoy.

Derek Thomas is principal of Thomas Landscapes. His garden designs have been featured on HGTV's Curb Appeal. His weekly garden segment can be seen on WTTG/Fox 5 in Washington. He can be reached at www.thomas-landscapes.com or 301.642.5182.

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