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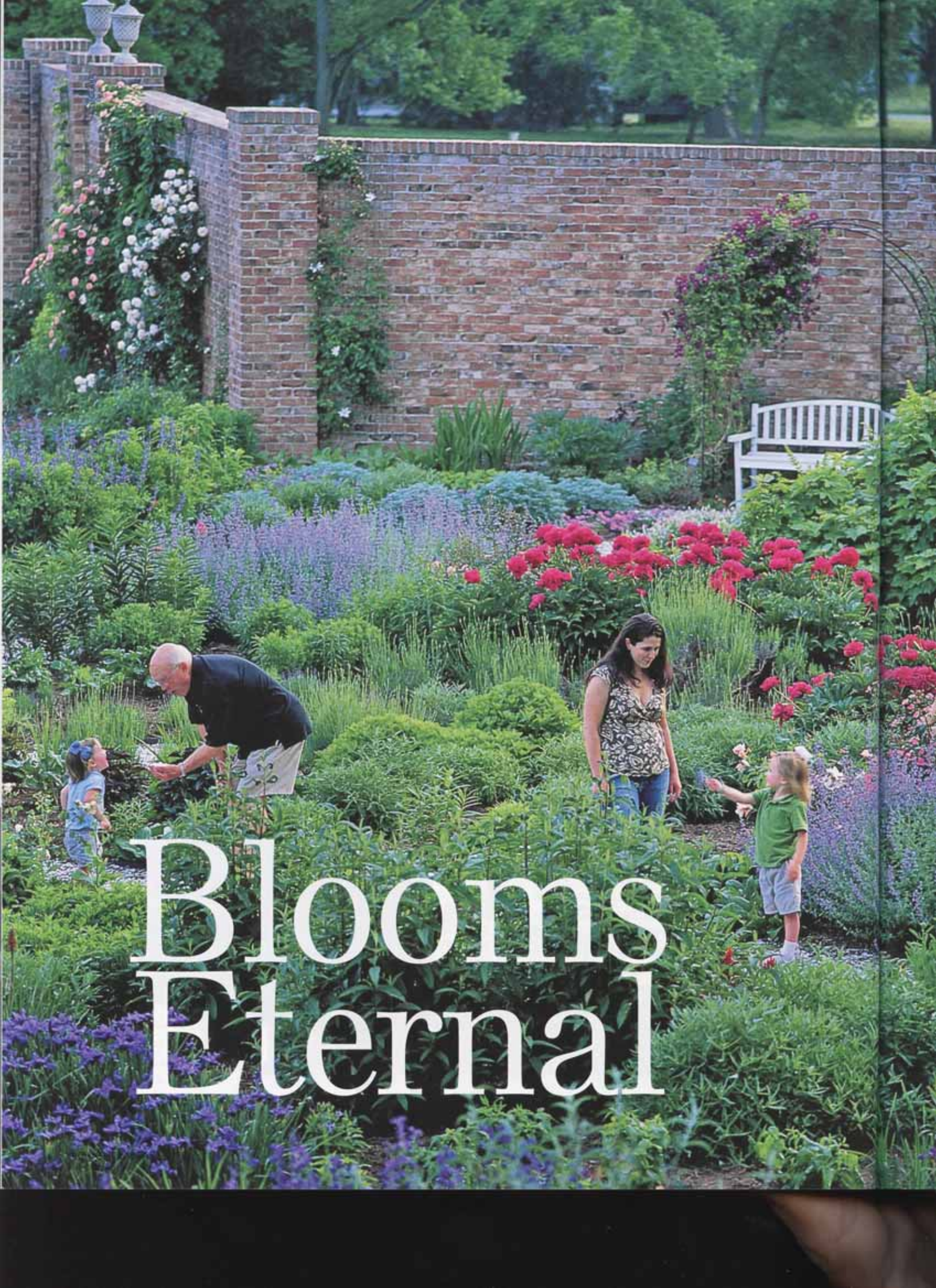
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# Blooms Eternal



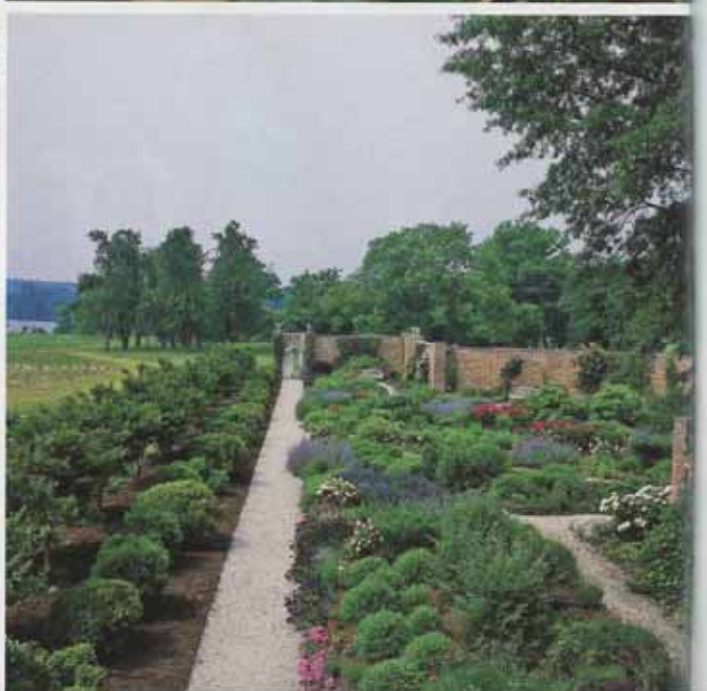
# A Centreville garden helps keep alive the memory of a beloved wife and mother.

BY KESSLER BURNETT

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CELIA PEARSON

**A**S LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT BARBARA PACA READ the two-page, handwritten letter from Bob Simmons, she crumbled. The letter explained that Simmons' wife, Marcia, had terminal cancer and wanted to make a garden on their Maryland farm to leave for her daughters. "He said it might be the last thing she'd be able to do and that she wanted to do it with me," recalls the Manhattan-based Paca. "I immediately canceled all of my appointments and went to the Eastern Shore the next day."

When the Simmonses purchased Centreville's Reed Creek Farm in 1996, their idea was to turn the main house, a brick Georgian mansion built in 1775, into a B&B. But when Marcia's illness, which had been in remission, returned two years later, the couple decided to focus their energies on a more meaningful project: creating a formal Anglo-style garden that would honor both the house's architectural vernacular and Marcia. "I sent Barbara that letter without Marcia knowing," confesses Bob, who knew his wife had admired Paca's work in gardening magazines. "That way, she wouldn't be disappointed if Barbara told us 'no.' Or it would be a happy surprise if she told us 'yes.'"



Marcia, a master gardener and voracious reader of British gardening magazines, and Paca immediately formulated a plan for the entire 175-acre estate. Marcia sought Paca for her sophisticated approach to land planning and discussed with excitement the concept of a property possessing a heart (the flower garden) and a soul (the spiral mount, a feature south of the garden).

Marcia knew precisely what she wanted: a garden with a saturated French Provençal color scheme of orange, burgundy, and denim blue. "I remember thinking, 'Wow!'" says Paca. "It was so forward thinking. People wanted only white or pastel cottage gardens back then. And it was a bonus that she could write the script with me. She was a participant in what she was leaving behind."

### When the design was completed, Paca turned over the helm to Marcia, who devoted the last years of her life to planting, pruning, staking, and meditating in this, her living memorial.

Paca's ultimate challenge was combining appropriate horticultural symbolism with Marcia's request for specific colors. "In my mind, I envisioned a garden of pale-blue lavender—an ancient cure for melancholia—and orange poppies, icons of peace and rest," says Paca, whose Princeton doctoral dissertation was on the iconography of gardens.

Before implementing the design, the Simmonses visited a dozen landscape parks and gardens in England handpicked by Paca, who suggested they take note of details they might want to incorporate into their private Eden.

It was in the gardens of Hadspen, a 17th-century Somerset estate, where Marcia found the muse for the project's centerpiece: a meandering brick wall with an exedra-like recess that would create a theatrical backdrop along the rear of the garden, and, at the same time, provide a graceful barrier against the harsh prevailing winds that gust off the farm's bordering creeks.

"That wall is the most exquisite souvenir that any client has ever brought back from their 'grand tour' of gardens," says Paca, whose husband, architect Philip Logan, structured the wall and gates and detailed its design. "When it was being built, it looked like we were creating the Great Wall of China, but it fit the space perfectly. Things tend to shrink when they're out of doors, and plantings scale down

architectural features even more. Furthermore, it wasn't precious—it was as honest and muscular as the land that it was built upon."

For an unexpected, contemporary twist, Paca sited the garden at the south side of the house and not along the property's rear acreage, as is custom in classical English designs. To give the space depth, she created a goose-foot shaped series of paths, which stretch from the main horizontal axis like three elegantly tapered fingers. A stroll toward the top of the garden is a lesson in the art of composition, as stocky English lavender gives way to taller emberglow montbretia and even lengthier Lord Baltimore hibiscus. The secondary paths merge with a curved path following the gentle arc of the garden wall.

While the wooden gate at the end of the center path opens to the multi-dimensional view of the encroaching cornfields and creeks beyond, the gate at the end of the horizontal axis leads to the garden's folly, Bob's boldest contribution to the project. "I decided to turn the 15-foot-tall mound of leftover soil and rock that we were going to pay someone to haul off into a viewing mount," he says. "It was just my style to recycle a pile of junk instead of acquiring an obelisk or something like that."

Paca loved this idea and dressed the spiral mount, nicknamed "Bob's Folly," with English lavender, orange potentilla, Oriental poppies, and miniature orange petunias and installed a winding brick walkway that leads to a bench at the top.

When the design was completed in 2002, Paca turned over the helm to Marcia, who devoted the last years of her life to planting, pruning, staking, and meditating in this, her living memorial.

Since Marcia passed away in 2006, it has continued its life under the guidance of Paca, who is instructing Bob and Marcia's daughters, Catherine and Barrett, in the fine art of continuing Marcia's vision. "Each time we are in the garden working, with Marcia's funeral urn situated in the wall overlooking the beautiful setting," says Bob, "I give thanks that we encouraged her to create this garden that means so much to all of us." ❏

**Opening spread: Bob Simmons and family tend to the memorial garden. Opposite page, from left to right: The brick wall was inspired by the garden wall at Hadspen, a 17th-century English estate. The plantings continue with flower pots reaching the main house. David Austin roses line the series of paths. Crocosmia 'Emberglow' reaches upwards, but burgundy peonies steal the show. A pathway leads to Bob's Folly, a spiral mount and garden highlight.**