

Variegated hydrangea

In-Town Seclusion

Great escapes start with a good plan.
Trade an awkward, open space for
a lush garden retreat.

BY JULIE A. MARTENS PHOTOGRAPHER: ANDREAS TRAUTTMANSDORF FIELD EDITOR: DONNA TALLEY



BEFORE

Mike Banks wasn't thrown off by his home's wedge-shaped lot. With good planning, he infused the garden with charm and privacy while making it more useful as well.

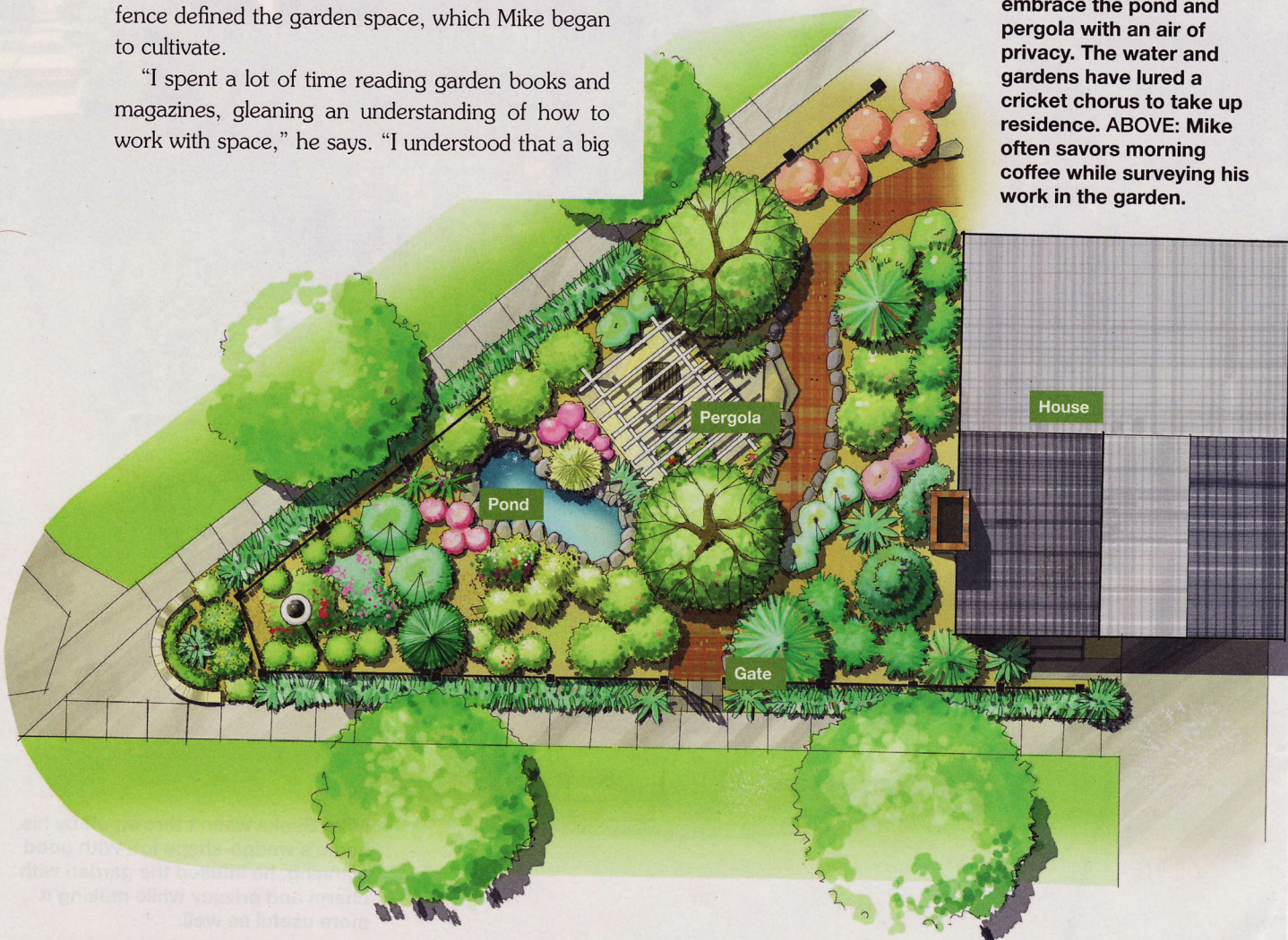
Urban planning takes on new meaning in Mike Banks' yard in Buffalo's Historic West Village. Embraced by sidewalks on two sides, his wedge-shape corner lot was far from the secluded space Mike desired, and he discovered that transforming the space would demand a plan for the long haul. "When I bought the house 15 years ago, I knew the things I wanted: a sitting area, a private space, and definition of the front and back," Mike says. "I mapped out additional hardscape segments over time."

The 700-square-foot garden came to life step-by-step, as finances permitted and Mike's understanding of the space grew. The garden's first building block was a black aluminum fence to thwart pedestrians who walked through the yard. The fence defined the garden space, which Mike began to cultivate.

"I spent a lot of time reading garden books and magazines, gleaning an understanding of how to work with space," he says. "I understood that a big



OPPOSITE: Lush plantings and tall evergreens embrace the pond and pergola with an air of privacy. The water and gardens have lured a cricket chorus to take up residence. **ABOVE:** Mike often savors morning coffee while surveying his work in the garden.



triangle is nothing but a big triangle until you divide it into smaller spaces.” The divisions evolved naturally as Mike lived in the space. For instance, the brick path developed after he noticed his routes through the yard. “I used mulch to define the path for a few years and then bought recycled bricks from a local dump for 10 cents apiece,” he says. “I laid the herringbone path, tucking the edges under a stacked slate bed edging.”

A garden bench beside a pond soon required a brick pad, which then called for a pergola. “When it was a bench, I wanted space for others to join me in the garden, so I built a brick pad for furniture,” Mike says. “Then I realized it was hot out there in the afternoon, so I added a pergola for shade.” Sweet autumn clematis will eventually scramble across the top of the pergola to deepen the shade.

Like the entire garden, the pergola is readily visible from the sidewalk. Accordingly, Mike sited it so it would look good from every direction. A combination of lattice, ornamental grasses, and vines set the stage for a secluded retreat, made more pleasant by a pond and trickling waterfall that drown out urban noise. “I can get lost in that space, watching

THIS PHOTO: Mike and a friend built the pergola and brick pad, adding latticework on the street sides for privacy. The area overlooks the water garden. **LEFT:** When Mike first added the fence, he forgot to include an entry point into the yard. “That was a mistake,” he says. “You can’t carry plants in without a gate.”



PLANT THIS BED

- A. Luscious Lemonade lantana
- B. Rhododendron
- C. 'Gay's Delight' coleus
- D. 'Pineapple' coleus
- E. 'The Flume' coleus
- F. Blue oatgrass
- G. Iris
- H. Variegated dogwood
- I. 'Butterfly' Marguerite daisy
- J. 'Stella de Oro' daylily
- K. 'Escapade' plumbago
- L. *Echinacea*
- M. 'Cologreen' juniper
- N. 'Silver Brocade' dusty Miller
- O. 'Wildcat Pink' anagallis

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the goldfish and listening to the water,” Mike says. “The sense of seclusion is only broken if someone passing by speaks to me.”

Gardening next to public spaces presents challenges. “I learned quickly that I had to be careful about putting plants that are way too inviting too close to where people pass,” Mike says. The Victorian-style fence not only dissuades flower pickers but also complements the many old-fashioned plants, such as hydrangea and rose of Sharon (*Hibiscus syriacus*). Evergreens absorb city sounds while enhancing the garden’s feeling of peaceful shelter. There are also hostas for texture, daylilies for blooms, and coleus for a pop of annual color.

With vibrant bulbs in spring, perennials in summer, and evergreens year-round, Mike’s garden provides an ever-changing tableau. “In the beginning, I had what I thought was a master plan, but that’s not what the garden morphed into,” he says. “My tastes matured based on observations of other gardens around the world. I learned by talking with people on the local garden walk, and the garden evolved.” The result is an urban jungle that offers an everyday escape. □

OPPOSITE: A topiary juniper adds balance to the front of the house. RIGHT: Two specimens of rose of Sharon form a living arbor, creating a natural feeling of enclosure.



Lantana and coleus

GREAT GARDEN DESIGN

Grooming a tiny yard into a garden escape requires focus from start to finish. Follow Mike Banks’ tips to design a gorgeous garden.

■ **Know your space.** The biggest obstacle is understanding your space. Learn where the sunlight falls, where the shade pockets gather, or where there’s a heat island effect. Pay attention to the space and let it guide your actions.

■ **Select shrubs with care.** Mike chose rose of Sharon shrubs with multiple trunks to form a living arbor. Their small stature fits his space perfectly. He prunes

the shrubs to maintain a treelike appearance, and nourishes them with compost-enriched soil.

■ **Add hardscape slowly.** Let hardscape grow over time, as your budget allows and your tastes mature. Choose materials that complement one another, and avoid including too many hardscape elements.

■ **Count on foliage.** Include plants with variegated and colorful foliage to sound steady notes of color in your plantings. A burgundy-tinted leaf doesn’t fade like a flower blossom; it lingers all season long.