



VERMONT GARDENS

Story by Mary Landon
Photos by Randy O'Rourke

Home Outside

In Warren, a two-acre property with plenty of places for open-air living.

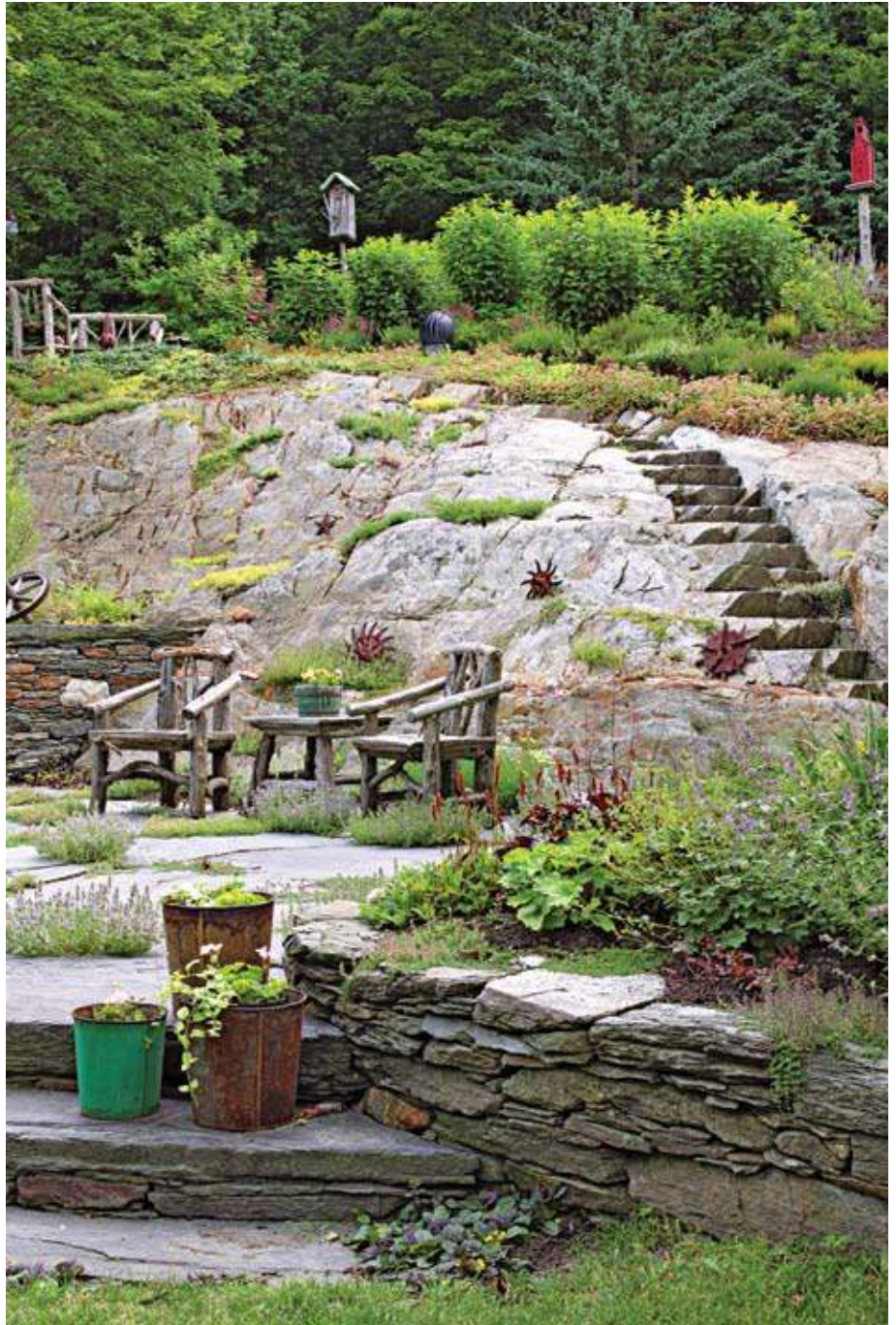
SOMETIMES A WRITER just has to get the words down on paper. Julie Moir Messervy had a book to write. A well-known Vermont landscape designer, lecturer and author of four other books, Julie had a head full of ideas about landscape design that she wanted to share with the world. And she needed great projects to illustrate her writing.

“I want homeowners, as well as gardeners and other landscape professionals, to realize that designing the land around one’s home can be a very personal and joyful process,” says Messervy, who moved her design studio to Saxtons River from Boston in 2004. “Like any other creative skill, it’s possible to learn some good basic rules to get started. I want to encourage people to get back outside with their families, enjoy the outdoors and create special places for favorite activities. It doesn’t have to be intimidating. And it’s really a healthy alternative to our increasingly sedentary lifestyle.”

Thus was born her latest book, *Home Outside: Creating the Landscape You Love*. Julie sent a call for submissions to her colleagues and hoped for good material.

One of the first packets came from Broadleaf Landscape Architecture in Waitsfield, where principals Kirsten Siebert and Megan Moffroid are celebrating their 10th year of business. Together, this design-build team has worked on a variety of residential, commercial and civic projects in Vermont and beyond.

Julie knew the Broadleaf project would be perfect for her book: a quintessential red Vermont farmhouse with crisp white trim, a tree swing and wooden rockers on a shaded porch. The “before” pictures of the two-acre Warren property showed some promising outdoor spaces—as well as over-



Kirsten Siebert of Broadleaf Landscape Architecture suggested carving steps out of a solid rock ledge that was previously hidden under mixed growth and tangles. The steps lead from one seating area to another and serve as a striking centerpiece to the diverse landscape.



Local stonemason Ted LaRock designed and built a raised patio of Vermont schist with wide rounded stairs, a connecting walkway to the guesthouse, and retaining walls for various flowerbeds.

Everyone wants to save money and nest a bit more.

grown foliage, shrubby trees and lots of unruly growth. The “after” pictures demonstrated key design principles that are central to Julie’s book: creating flow, placing focal objects, forming “open air rooms” for different activities, and dealing with a challenging slope.

Local stonemason Ted LaRock, of LaRock Property Maintenance, first started working on the property 20 years ago. He listened closely to the clients, who wanted plenty of places to get out and enjoy their Warren home. LaRock designed and built a raised Vermont schist patio with wide rounded stairs, a connecting walkway to the cozy barn guesthouse, a stone grill and retaining walls for various flowerbeds. Stone steps lead to the expansive patio, where guests can sit on a log chair and smell the herbs underfoot.

Broadleaf joined the design team in 2002. According to Kirsten, Broadleaf “works with the *genius loci* of a place: the ‘spirit of place’, its distinctive atmosphere.” The firm specializes in developing a master plan that covers the entire property, creating a harmonious and appropriately scaled landscape. “Keeping things simple while corresponding to a big idea—that’s a mantra you hear a lot around here,” says Kirsten.

Broadleaf’s most dramatic contribution to the design was tackling an imposing stone ledge that was hidden under mixed growth and tangles. Kirsten was inspired after seeing some carved stone steps in a Montpelier cemetery; working with Ted, they designed a handsome set of steps that he carved out of the solid hillside ledge. The new steps lead to another cozy seating area, with a view to the scene below. The stairs are a striking centerpiece to this diverse landscape. Pockets along the ledge are filled with several colors of creeping phlox that add a soft cascade of color in the spring.

A shaded hammock, colorful birdhouses and a lovely perennial bed, held fast by retaining walls and more steps, accent the top of the ledge. Potted plants, old artifacts, garden art, bird feeders and work by local artisans focus the eye along the paths. The property also has a wildflower meadow with apple trees, blueberries and native flowering plants that attract birds and butterflies. In other areas, Broadleaf cleaned up the foliage, expanded the gardens, added plants and rejuvenated existing beds.

Many of Broadleaf’s clients begin a conversation with: “I have lots of ideas but don’t know where to start. Can you help?” The firm encourages clients

Just the Facts

Julie Moir Messervy Design Studio works with residential and institutional clients in New England and beyond. The studio offers full-service onsite design services as well as online design. Her next local workshop is in Saxtons River on August 22.

The photos that accompany this article were first published in *Home Outside: Creating the Landscape You Love* (The Taunton Press, 2009, \$30). Signed copies may be ordered from the JMMDS Website. The book is illustrated with homes and projects that are modest in size and scope. “It is a guide to help do-it-yourselfers, or to assist homeowners when they engage professional services. It encourages good clear communication about concepts,” says Julie. For more information:

Julie Moir Messervy Design Studio
Saxtons River
(802) 869-1470
www.jmmds.com

Broadleaf Landscape Architecture
Waitsfield
(802) 496-5331
www.broadleafvt.com

LaRock Property Maintenance
Warren
(802) 496-4725
www.lacrockpm.com

to actually “live in their landscapes, as opposed to treating the landscape as something you just look at,” says Kirsten.

“As we see in the news every day,” says Julie, “more and more of us are choosing to stay home, fix up and improve what we already have, and make the most of what is there. Everyone wants to save money and nest a bit more. We need to realize that there is a great resource right outside our doors. Developing a ‘home outside’ not only expands the amount of valuable living space one has, it also increases the pleasure one gets from the property as a whole.”