

PRODUCED AND WRITTEN BY *DEBRA PRINZING*
PHOTOGRAPHY BY *LAURIE BLACK*

trip to bountiful

On a rural island outside Portland, Oregon, artist and designer Linda Wisner has transformed a 1.3-acre field into an artful botanical garden that she generously shares.





THIS PHOTO: Both beautiful and edible, large heads of red cabbages add a playful note to the vegetable garden.

OPPOSITE: Linda Wisner, gardener, artist, designer, and plant-lover, is in her element taking an early morning stroll through her beloved garden. Flowers abound in her herb garden, now no longer limited to edibles. *Verbena bonariensis*, black-eyed Susans, and daylilies reach for the sun, while the cherished morning glory vine ascends a rebar trellis.

A few years ago, Linda Wisner, a past president of

the Hardy Plant Society of Oregon, wrote an article about her landscape for the society's quarterly journal. She called it "The Shape of Things," the perfect title for explaining how organic geometry defines and connects distinct areas of her Sauvie Island, Oregon, garden. As a graphic artist and historical exhibition designer, Linda is a mostly self-taught garden maker. She may think about many of her commercial projects as two-dimensional, but when she turns her attention to the garden she clearly shifts to three-dimensional thinking.

A longtime Portland resident who spent magical summers as a child playing outdoors at her grandparents' country inn near the New Jersey shore, Linda loved her 1904 Portland foursquare home and the city garden she developed there.

Yet she began a quest for more space. The rare chance to purchase property on Sauvie Island in 2003 was entirely freeing for Linda. Approximately 15 miles long and 4 miles wide with two-thirds of its total acreage devoted to wildlife refuge, Sauvie Island is just 13 miles north of Portland and home to only 1,000 residents. The parcel included a 1950s ranch house, a garage, a barn, and a few small outbuildings on land that was once part of a large daffodil farm. "It was a blank slate—just what I wanted," Linda says.

She later named the home and garden Flicker Farm, in honor of her father, an ornithologist. "I grew up around birds and I especially love the look of flickers," she says. Fittingly, bird life thrives here, thanks to Linda's organic gardening practices.



BEFORE

ABOVE: Most of the courtyard furniture and plants are movable, allowing the space to accommodate variously sized gatherings. Vines are trained along the deep overhanging roof to provide shade for humans and tropical plants alike. After returning from a recent trip to Italy, Linda and her partner, Chet Orloff, strung heavy-gauge wire and café lights above the courtyard, where they hope to train more grapevines to create a living green canopy overhead.



LEFT: The 10x15-foot glass greenhouse is employed for starting seeds and housing tender plants during the winter. A solid green wall of arborvitae came with the property and helps to define its perimeter. **RIGHT:** The hands of a talented graphic designer created this eye-pleasing vegetable garden. With giant red cabbages defining the perimeter and spires of amaranth and scarlet runner beans that climb tall poles, the plantings create an intentional pattern, with an interplay of shapes and lines. **BELOW:** As an open-air dining and living room, the courtyard is enclosed by outer walls of the house and library, as well as prolific and flourishing plants. The rusted metal pear was made by Oregon metal artist Marta Faris, its finish echoing metalwork throughout the garden.





In the past 13-plus years, Linda has approached her garden's redesign in sections, moving outward from its hub, a courtyard formed by the L of her house and the garage-turned-library, a separate building that is now home to art, comfortable furniture, and her partner Chet Orloff's massive collection of historic books.

A pattern of cast-stone pavers carpets the courtyard floor, creating an ideal surface for furniture, sculptures, and pots of all sizes. Linda and Chet love the deep overhang of the home's roof and porch, the edges of which support grapevines and porcelain berry vines and extend far enough to shelter tender tropicals beneath. Home to dinner parties and alfresco gatherings, the courtyard gives "the sense of being inside a compound that flows from indoors to outdoors," Linda says. The property is long and narrow, 125 feet wide by 430 feet deep. The front and side gardens are deeply shaded in the canopy of numerous trees. Here, Linda has created two garden rooms where groundcovers, Northwest natives, and low-light plants thrive in the understory of smaller trees, including a mimosa (*Albizia julibrissin* "Summer Chocolate"). A welcoming bench and ornamental objects reveal Linda's and Chet's personalities and a touch of whimsy, such as their stone collection that mimics the root lines of a long-ago-removed silver maple. These are the only areas of the property not fenced in, but without a route through the property, the island's deer population has mostly detoured around the front yard.

Entry to the courtyard is achieved by stepping through a set of openwork gates hung from a decorative, 8-foot-tall fence. River stones collected from the property are incorporated into the gate hardware. Local metal artist Ray Huston of Deezines fabricated gates and other functional landscape elements, including trellises, tepees, and arbors. Each

TOP LEFT: Vivid bloom color brightens the herb garden's greener palette, and vines such as Heavenly Blue morning glory and scarlet runner beans thrive on the tall trellises and tepee structures. One of three gravel paths begins at the corner, providing one entry option for visitors. **ABOVE LEFT:** Gathering and harvesting is nearly a year-round ritual due to the temperate gardening climate on Sauvie Island. Chet and Linda can't go anywhere without being escorted by their constant companion, Pinto, who willingly posed for this garden portrait. **LEFT:** The orchard is home to a variety of fruit, including Ashmead's Kernel apples.



1. Bosc pears. 2. Gold Rush apples. 3. Indigo Rose is a black cherry tomato chosen as much for its visual interest as for its flavor. 4. Damson plums. 5. The iridescent lavender tufts of the artichoke flower add to the rust-red, eggplant, and purple palette of the house and garden. 6. Linda pairs basil with two types of marigold as a pest-deterrent method in the vegetable garden. 7. Red-leaf lettuce. 8. Cucumber vines climb the tall amaranth stalk for an artful combination in the vegetable bed. 9. 'Sungold' cherry tomato is a staple in the summer vegetable garden.





TOP: Active in Portland's horticulture, environmental, art, and local history communities, Chet and Linda often start dinner parties by sharing favorite details of the garden with friends, including Carla Hansel and Scott Young.

ABOVE: A lover of curves, Linda selects art that tends toward organic forms, such as this openwork wire orb. She made the hypertufa ball using a glass vase as the mold and placed the finished piece inside the larger sphere.

piece is made from weathered steel, a unifying finish throughout the property. To Linda, the rusty accents pick up the home's deep reddish-purple exterior paint.

With the sky as her garden's "ceiling," Linda also made bold choices about the scale of plants and architecture. Volunteer amaranth stalks reach more than 7 feet at the peak of summer to create vibrant burgundy exclamation points in the vegetable bed; scarlet runner bean and Heavenly Blue morning glory vines soar high, trained on several rebar tepees. Instead of one fountain of giant miscanthus, why not have several? There are generous groves to walk beneath, formed over the years by clusters of cherry trees, native quaking aspen, white pines, and Heritage river birch. By leaving most of the meadow unmowed and threading a strolling path through its tall blades, the area feels lush, even though it receives no summer irrigation.

Living fully in the garden is an intentional choice that Linda and Chet have made. They eat from the garden, they entertain in the garden, they draw inspiration for their design collaborations in the garden, and they share the garden. For the past decade, their late summer "Garden Gatherings" are popular among friends who arrive with a bottle of wine or a plate of food to share, taste a menu created from the harvest, and return home laden with produce and flowers. "People can't leave without picking from the garden," Linda says. She wouldn't have it any other way. **CG**

SHAPE IN THE GARDEN: ORGANIC GEOMETRY

Playing with shapes on paper first allowed Linda Wisner to think about how humans could navigate her garden for maximum enjoyment. Curves, meandering lines, and softened corners play a key role in how one experiences a place, she says.

Linda began designing Flicker Farm using a Google Earth aerial photo of the property. She overlaid tracing paper to sketch paths, beds and borders, hardscaped areas, places for fruits, vegetables, shrubs, and trees, "approaching it much the way I approach the graphic design projects with which I make my living," she wrote in a newsletter article for the Hardy Plant Society of Oregon.

Quite intentionally, the shapes that once existed on paper alone now define the garden. Graceful curves and paths lead from the edge of the courtyard and draw visitors beyond—to the cultivated and semi-cultivated landscape, orchard, and mixed borders of native plants.

Garden guests have choices to make: Cross through or go around the herb garden? Enter at the southwest or the northeast point of the vegetable bed? Take the left path or the right path to journey through the wild meadow? No decision is disappointing, thanks to the surprises in store around each corner.

OPPOSITE: A. Linda sketched an idea for her garden bench, interpreted here by local metal artist Ray Huston.

"The armrests are made from flat stones that Chet and I collected on our expeditions," Linda says. The resting place and vantage point are popular for people who come to tour Flicker Farm. **B.** This "hallway" runs between the back of Linda and Chet's residence and a freestanding greenhouse to connect a protected food garden to the courtyard. The weathered display table is too wobbly to use for dining, but it's notable for the mismatched children's cowboy boots at the base of each leg. **C.** When deciding to enclose the garden from Sauvie Island's deer population, Linda asked Huston to fabricate a fence and gate to her specifications. "I was hesitant to have such a tall obstacle here, so we wanted it to be as transparent and interesting as possible," she says.

D. Gathering and harvesting is nearly a year-round ritual due to the temperate gardening climate on Sauvie Island.



For more information,
see Resources on page 110.



A

GARDEN AT A GLANCE WISNER

1. Shade garden
2. Front berm with stone bench
3. Paved driveway
4. Silver maple bed
5. Stump circle
6. Mimosa circle
7. House
8. Bioswale
9. East courtyard
10. Courtyard
11. Library
12. Greenhouse
13. Kitchen garden
14. Herb garden
15. Berm
16. Barn with studio
17. Vegetable garden
18. Cherry garden
19. Quaking aspen garden
20. Wild meadow
21. Berry round
22. Orchard
23. Artichoke mound
24. Maples, dogwoods, pine
25. Vineyard
26. Sculptured gate
27. Birch grove



B



C



D