



# STATE OF ENCHANTMENT

Landscape design firm, ZEN Associates creates an oasis for relaxation and renewal in Marstons Mills.

By Julie Craven Wagner  
Photography by Nat Rea

Once upon a time, a delightful and happy couple—proud parents of a growing family who were all starting journeys with families of their own—were in search of a family home for the ages on Cape Cod. This couple, Allen and his wife Jone, are delightfully calm, gratefully joyous, and artistically inquisitive, so when they found a home large enough to accommodate their multi-generational brood, the task of identifying how to tame the 3 acres of woodland that meandered down to an idyllic estuary commenced. The couple had engaged in discussion with Woburn’s ZEN Associates on a project at their previous home in the suburbs of Boston. That project never materialized, yet in this instance the couple knew ZEN would more than likely come up with a plan that would meet their needs.

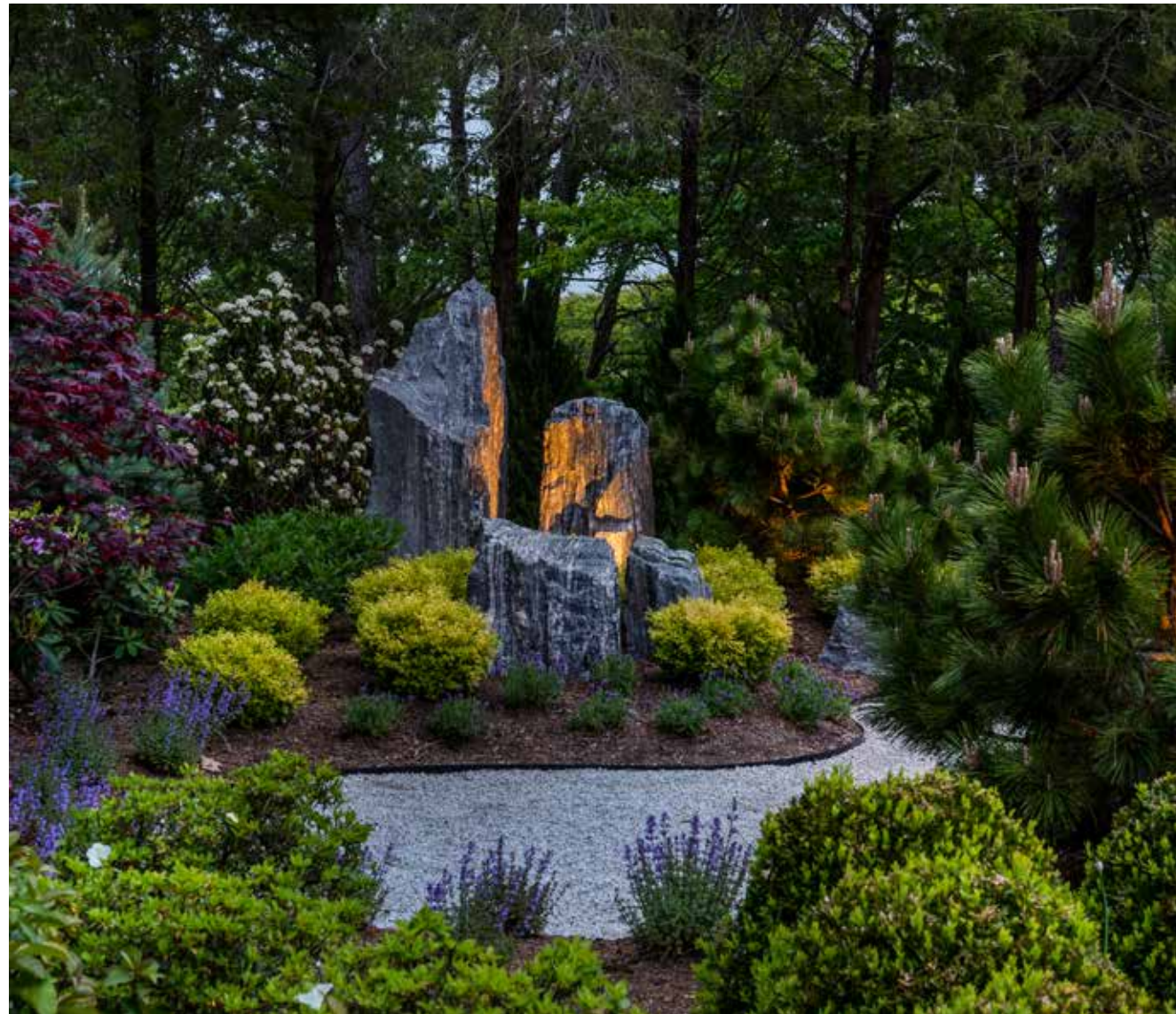
ZEN Associates is a very unique firm, in that they provide an array of design + build services that include landscape architecture, interior design, and landscape construction—the breadth of that kind of expertise is rarely found under one roof. Peter White, principal of ZEN Associates says their clients have found synergy between the various disciplines and benefited from the cohesive and collaborative approach the firm brings to bear. Allen and Jone couldn’t agree more, “We didn’t really know what we wanted. We knew we wanted elements to engage and occupy our active family. But we didn’t have any idea about aesthetic, or a big picture understanding of how everything would work in the way I believe ZEN makes it all look natural and appropriate.” Allen also shares that one of his sons is an architect and while he served as a guide for his parents, he too agreed that the project ZEN proposed and ultimately brought to life was a very enjoyable and unique experience.

Beginning with the active portions of the program—the pool and the sport court, local zoning and conservation constraints did not leave much of a buffer when considering installation of an in-ground pool. That was perhaps the first opportunity for ZEN’s out of the box thinking. “The pool shape is very non-traditional,” White explains. “Due to the setbacks, we determined the scope of the usable area. We took the



cues from the natural landscape to define the shape and footprint of the pool.” To point a finer point on Whites’ explanation, portions of the pool’s perimeter are supported by an above-grade stone retention that shines in its functionality as well as its aesthetic appeal. A fire pit area with generous seating and a built-in spa with a waterfall feature gives a reason day or night to gather.

In addition to the immediate backyard, and accessed by a circuitous, engaging landscaped pathway from the front of the house, ZEN designed and installed a sport court—an enclosed high-performance area that includes marcation for a variety of activities: pickleball, tennis, basketball—is in constant use according to Allen and thus has functional and aesthetic lighting for late summer nights and early fall evenings. Since the sport court



is a bit removed, White says, “It was intentionally designed and placed there so that it becomes an adventure destination. They asked for that and the kids really love it. We tucked it off to the side, but it is still visible and you can see the kids riding their bikes down to it, just like they would to any playground or park, but it is all theirs.”

Yet despite all of these bells and whistles, it is really the overall presentation of the property that reminds the residents and any visitors, “You are in a very special, highly considered environment.”

White recalls, “There is a very long drive from the street to the front of the house. Many homes on the Cape celebrate that kind of approach with a very nice looking driveway, flanked on each side by planting beds of shrubs, perennials and annuals, and then a broad green lawn. This is a much different site. You can really appreciate the natural environment as it has probably been for centuries. We wanted to preserve that very special allee. We punctuated the beginning of the drive with a sculpture, then we embraced the very stately wooded landscape, and the openness of the understory and the high





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canopy of the trees makes it feels quite magical.” White and his team instead created a sense of anticipation culminating in a confirmation of arrival. The long drive quietly brings the home into view, under the broad branches of the trees that have been limbed at least 20 feet. Plantings slowly unravel and reveal themselves as one gets closer to the residence as an impeccable and entrancing Japanese garden begins to take shape. “There was a pretty uneventful arrival scene in the original scheme,” White explains. “Now when you pull into the drive court and you get out, even before you greet the special people who own this home, you are presented with a striking Japanese garden that has strong stone arrangement. It immediately lets you know this is a family who loves art, respects

form, and wants their family and guests to enjoy the space as much as they do.”

Allen and Jone are avid art collectors—when asked if there are any artists, mediums or styles they gravitate toward, Allen responds with a laugh, “Not that I am aware of, given the scope of our collection. But seriously, I suppose I would say we are more of a modern art collector. We respond to color and generally pieces that ignite joy in us.” Throughout the home their art is an integral part of their surroundings. Outside, White knew this was a client that would respond and embrace art in a variety of forms throughout the landscape. To that end White was thrilled to introduce sculpture for the Japanese garden that is evocative of Japanese origami birds. “You can’t have a discussion about a Japanese garden without art being part of it, that why this choice was so perfect for this couple,” White states. A pensive and thoughtful exploration of the garden reveals subtle artistic elements along the way, both of the natural variety and the man-made kind.

The choice for the resulting Japanese garden was not the only one on the table. White says he prepared two proposals. “They really had no specific idea about what they wanted to do, particularly as far as an aesthetic,” White explains. “We definitely discussed the concept of a secret garden, that couldn’t seen from the approach, but revealed itself upon arrival. I presented a formal English Garden, with a perennial border that was beautiful and would have thrived in that site



Greg Premru Photography

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as well. They very much liked it and responded to the infusion of color and overall impact. And then...we unveiled the design for the Japanese garden. There was no doubt. They immediately lit up. We could all see how it would be so striking. And the ultimate decision came when I explained that this garden would provide visual interest year-round, and a Japanese garden is sculptural in and of itself, while incorporating artistic accents, and that's what appealed to their senses."

White says one of things he loved about working with this client on this project is the way they embraced the entire experience. "The Japanese garden in particular will evolve, and Allen and Jone are completely committed to the maintenance needed to foster that evolution. I am really looking forward to seeing the garden mature. I expect it to have some unexpected changes that will

impact the entire space, like the way branches will extend or contort. And as excited as I am, I think the clients are looking forward to the next chapters as well."

Allen says working with ZEN Associates was an unparalleled experience. "First and foremost, this was a partnership—and that couldn't have happened otherwise. They do a really good job of listening. They are so respectful and patient in their style of communication. They absolutely led us through this process, we never once felt rushed, or hurried, or pressured. It was an evolution of thought and they were our guides. We honestly never imagined—and our whole family feels this way—we would love and enjoy our home as much as we do. ZEN Associates is responsible for that."

Julie Craven Wagner is the editor of Cape Cod LIFE.



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