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Photograph © Peter Macri/Esto

Richard Arentz's design for his own Virginia landscape reflects his pride in the Piedmont.
THE RAPPAHANNOCK RIVER rises in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains, flows southeast, and empties into the Chesapeake Bay east of Richmond and south of Washington, D.C. The river takes its name from an old Algonquin word meaning "where the tide ebbs and flows." It twists and turns through the Piedmont, a region of rolling verdant lands that attracted early colonial settlers, among them George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe.

In the heart of the Piedmont, Fauquier County's old agricultural homesteads eventually gave way to horse farms and vineyards and, more recently, to new suburban developments fueled by the dot-com boom, complete with shopping centers, traffic jams, and weekend visitors. Many of today's residents have a strong aversion to more growth, and there's now a significant effort under way to preserve the land and the county's small-town atmosphere.

Richard Arentz, ASLA, was seeking just that kind of quiet ambience when he began looking for a country property as a

Splashes of yellow in the perennial garden are picked up by the sweep of 'Tiger Eyes' sumac to the left of the guesthouse, above. The classic English perennial borders are surrounded by the natural landscape, right.
The north–south axis of the house aligns with the Rappahannock River, above left, before the river curves to the east. Shaded areas on the master plan, above right, show the placement of the house and guesthouse. Running cedar, right, is the natural ground cover for which the property is named. An elevation drawing, below, shows the rear of the property, with the main residence, major trees, and the passageway across the west lawn to the front courtyard. The hawthorn allée is underplanted with ‘White Lady’ hellebores, opposite top. At the main entrance to the property, a paved walkway leads to the stone wall and belvedere overlooking the Rappahannock River, opposite center. The view from the courtyard looks out on the west lawn and the woods beyond it, opposite bottom.

change of pace from his busy, chaotic working life as a landscape architect in Washington, D.C. In 2002, he bought 85 wooded acres on the Rappahannock, thick with beech, oak, hickory, and tulip poplar trees, along with a native ground cover, running cedar (Lycopodium digitatum), from which the property takes its name. It reminded him of his childhood and his family’s farm holdings in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. “I absolutely understand this landscape,” says Arentz. “This is what I grew up with and this is what draws me to this place. It feels very much like home.”

Armed with a handsaw and maps from the U.S. Geological Survey, Arentz made his way to the highest point on the property to evaluate the site and decide where to locate the house and gardens that he planned to build. He chopped off branches and climbed trees to study the views and finally decided upon a fairly level site about 125 feet above the river. He then, as he puts it, checked his “design ego at the door” and brought in two colleagues, architect Richard Williams and interior designer José Solís Betancourt, to challenge his ideas—to raise the thinking and add things I might not have thought of myself,” he says.

Arentz wanted a place to relax and entertain, but he was determined to make the residence, and the gardens as well, fit
Plant List

**TREES**
- Amelanchier canadensis • Serviceberry
- Carpinus caroliniana • American hornbeam
- Cheyanthus virginicus • White fringe tree
- Chionanthus virginicus • Kentucky yellowwood
- Cornus flava • Flowering dogwood
- Crataegus viridis 'Winter King' • Winter King hawthorn
- Fagus grandifolia • American beech
- Prunus laevigata • Franklin tree
- Taxus canadensis • American holly
- Juniperus virginiana • Eastern redcedar
- Lindera obtusiloba • Tulip tree
- Magnolia virginiana • Sweetbay magnolia

**SHRUBS**
- Aesculus pavia • Bottlebrush buckeye
- Buxus microsperma var. koreana • Korean boxwood
- Buxus sempervirens • American boxwood
- Cercis canadensis • Eastern redbud
- Chaenomeles x superba 'Jet Trail' • Jet Trail flowering quince
- Cotoneaster horizontalis 'Hummington' • Hummingbird summersweet
- Cotinus coggyria 'Golden Spirit' • Golden Spirit smoke tree
- Euonymus alatus • Winged euonymus
- Fothergilla gardenii • Dwarf witch hazel
- Hamamelis × intermedia 'Arnold Promise' • Arnold Promise witch hazel
- Hibiscus syriacus 'Diana' • Diana rose of Sharon
- Hydrangea arborescens 'Annabelle' • Annabelle hydrangea
- Hydrangea paniculata 'Limelight' • Limelight hydrangea
- Ilex verticillata • Common winterberry
- Mahonia bealei • Leatherleaf mahonia
- Rhododendron 'Exbury' • Exbury azalea
- Rhus typhina 'Tiger Eyes' • Tiger Eyes sumac
- Rosa 'Iceberg' • Iceberg rose
- Syringa meyeri 'Palibin' • Meyer lilac
- Syringa patula 'Miss Kim' • Manchurian lilac
- Syringa vulgaris • Common lilac
- Viburnum dentatum • Southern arrowwood

**PERENNIALS**
- Baptisia australis • False indigo
- Dianthus caryophyllus • Haas-scented fern
- Eupatorium spp. • Barrenwort
- Fothergilla × hybridus 'White Lady' • Lenten rose
- Hypericum 'Alba' • Dame's rocket
- Hypericum calycinum • Aaron's beard
- Iris cristata • Crested iris
- Iris setosa • Japanese roof iris
- Lobelia cardinalis • Cardinal flower
- Lupinus spp. • Lupine
- Mentha spicata 'Vittoria' • Virginia bluebells
- Nepeta x faassenii • Catmint
- Phlox paniculata 'David' • Phlox
- Phlox paniculata 'Miss Lingard' • Phlox
- Polygonatum spp. • Solomon's seal
- Polystichum acrostichoides • Christmas fern
in with the landscape and the region’s history. The team debated every single aspect of the living environment to come up with perfectly seamless transitions among the house, the gardens, and the surrounding woodland. They considered the views from each window and garden space, studied Virginia country vernacular forms, and used materials, particularly stone, in a minimal way for the highest impact.

The organizing principle was to orient the house on a north-south axis and the

The swimming pool, guesthouse, and main residence flank the boxwood-edged west lawn, top. Water pours into a basin at the front threshold, left, echoing the sound of the river below. A detail shows this water feature, above.
gardens along a perpendicular east–west line. Everything inside the simple orthogonal confines of the house and gardens is clean and crisp, while everything outside is a bridge to the woods and the Piedmont beyond. The configuration dictates the way visitors move through the space and experience the house and gardens.

The main house, which draws inspiration from simple farm buildings, is just one room deep and connects to the guesthouse via an open courtyard with a vine-covered pergola overhead. “It’s architecture as a garden wall,” says Arentz. “Kind of like the stables at Sissinghurst.” The long, narrow building is flanked in front and back with wide, flat lawns that reflect the simple, deliberate, and modern design.

Armed with a handsaw and maps, Arentz made his way to the highest point on the property and chopped off branches and climbed trees to study the views.

As you first approach the property, you encounter a low wall of Shenandoah fieldstone, all beige and buff and bronze and burnt sienna. With an adjacent walkway, it’s designed as a belvedere, where you can stop, hear the river, look down, and catch a glimpse of it. You can lean on the stone wall or use it as a handrail, engaging its strong natural attributes and beautiful colors as it leads you to the house. At the threshold, a water feature echoes the sound of the Rappahannock, what Arentz calls “an allegorical lifting of the river up to the front door,” which is painted a shade of terra-cotta.

Inside, light literally dissolves the structure’s walls. Making the most of this transparency was the rule for the three-man design team, and they did not overlook a single detail. The Shenandoah stone wall continues straight through the entrance hall along the same east–west axis. Stairs to the...

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second floor are anchored into the wall so you can see right through them. A wall of windows across the back of the house provides a view straight out to the gardens.

On the other side of the wall is the porch-like living room, a nine-square arrangement with three walls of glass windows. “We cut out enough trees to get a view down to the river,” says Arentz, “and in July the summer moon rises and lights up the entire valley.” Just outside, a rustic, irregularly shaped terrace is surrounded by native viburnums and Annabelle hydrangeas with a carpet underneath of Christmas ferns and, in early spring, Virginia bluebells. Sitting or standing, a visitor sees a huge drift of American ironwood trees that begin up close to the terrace and ebb out into the woods.

The main entry to the garden is through a breathtaking allée of Winter King hawthorns underplanted with hundreds of ‘White Lady’ hellebores. The walkway, of a local gravel called Weir’s Cave, matches the colors of the east–west stone wall and the main building’s stucco exterior. At the end of the walkway, you descend two steps into an oval space, where deeper gravel slows the pace and turns the view to long, classic perennial borders, Arentz’s hom-
Arentz checked his “design ego at the door” and brought in two colleagues to challenge his ideas.

says, “but I also wanted, as you get outside the confines of the orthogonal space—the east and west lawns—to transition back so that the entire design is about embracing the regional landscape and understanding that you’re in a bigger place.”

He gazes out upon a newly planted spring garden up a hillside just outside the front lawn. It’s planted with fringe trees and native azaleas, Tiarella, Solomon’s seal, and crested iris. It’s similar to a view you’d encounter from almost any window or garden space on the property: native plants like sweetbay magnolias and dogwoods, American hollies and eastern redcedars, willow oaks and shagbark hickories that fade back into the woods.

It evokes the same existential sense of home and history that poet Robert Frost was getting at when he wrote, “The land was ours before we were the land’s.”

Jane Berger is a professional landscape designer, writer, and publisher of GardenDesignOnline.com.


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