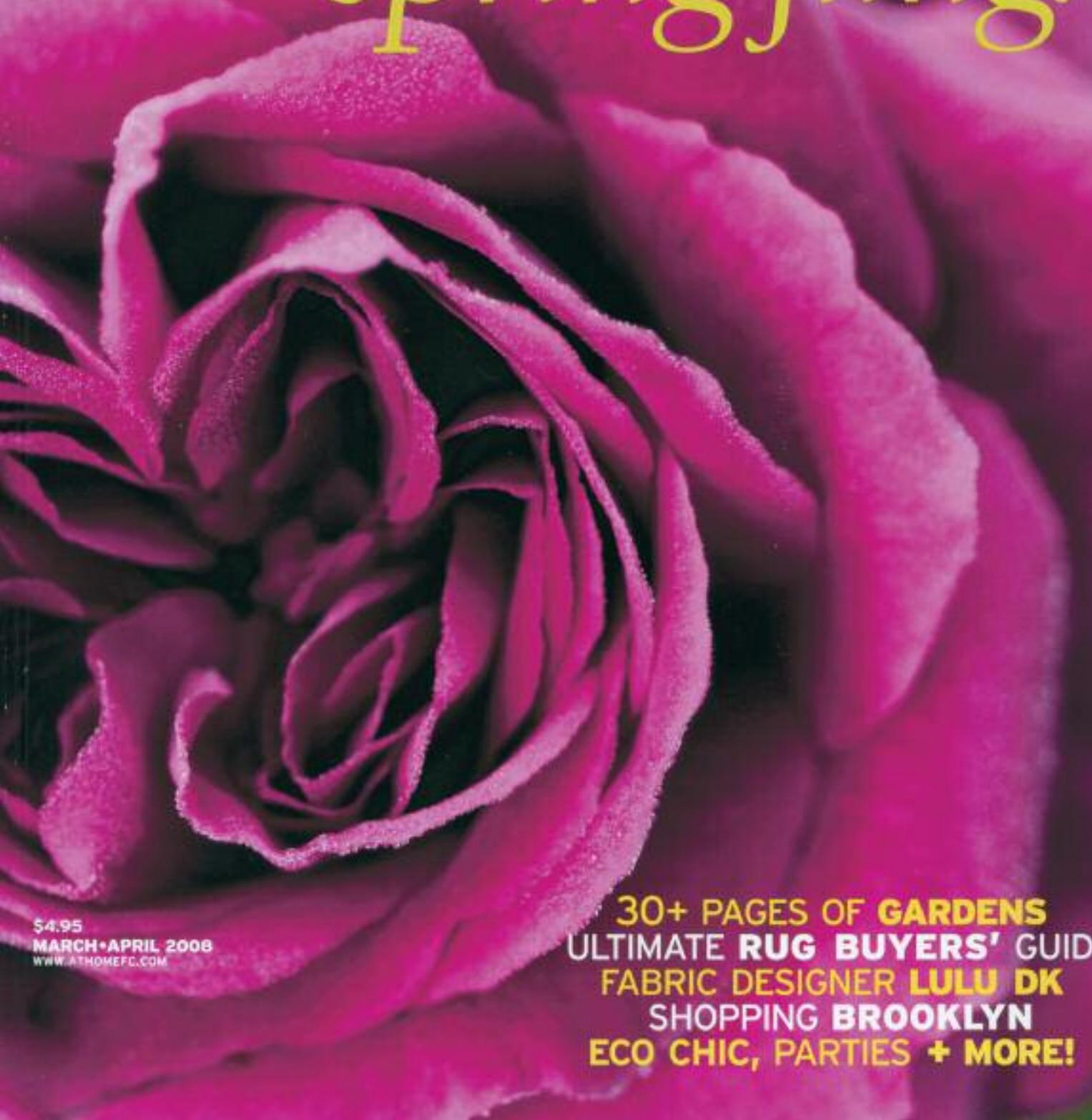


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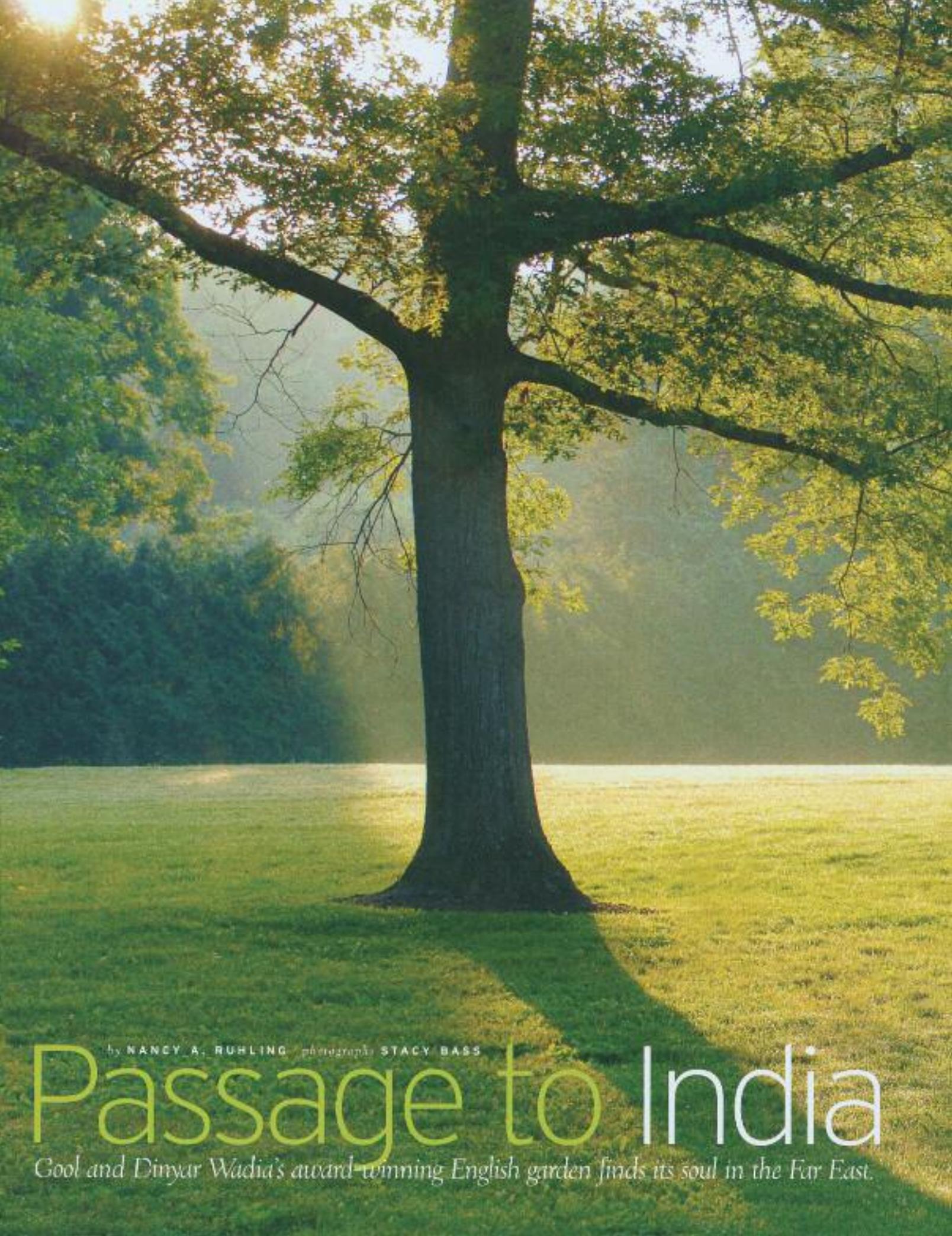


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by NANCY A. RUHLING, photographs STACY BASS

Passage to India

Cool and Dinyar Wadia's award-winning English garden finds its soul in the Far East.



Sunlight filters through
the leaves of an oak tree,
illuminating the stately
potting shed in Gool and
Dimar Wadie's
New Canaan garden.



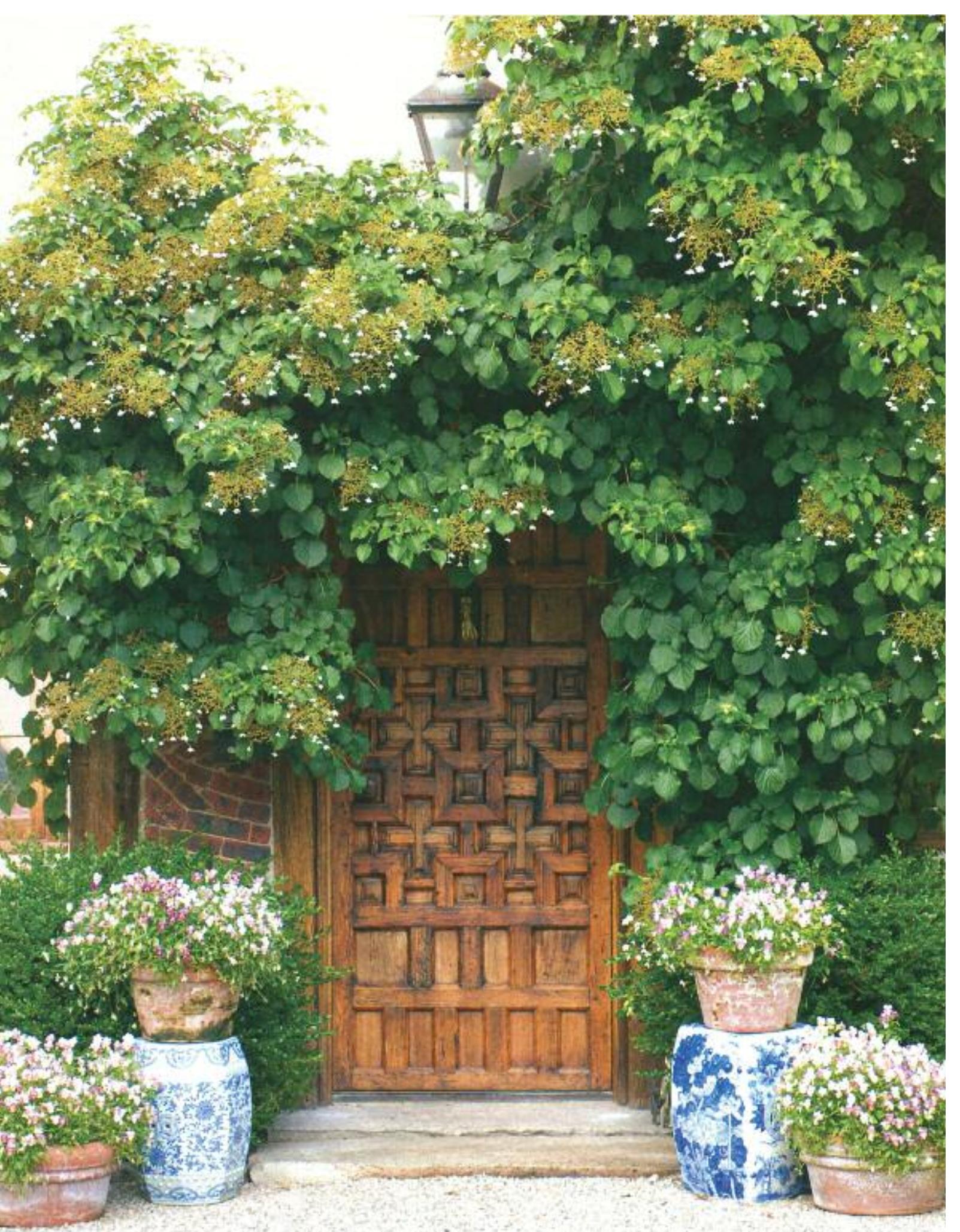
At first stroll, the garden on the 10-acre pastoral estate in New Canaan looks all prim and proper English, the sort of space where the stiff upper lip has the upper hand. The haughty hollyhocks hold their heady blooms high, the pretty primroses offer their bouquets like homecoming queens and the regal rhododendrons wear their blossoms like crowns.

A second peek behind the leaves of the magnificent copper beech and great ash trees reveals an unexpected Indian accent. It is heard, ever so softly, in the fragrant blossoms of the Madhumali vine and is echoed in the sensuous evening perfume of the snow-white Mogra flower. It is picked up and repeated in the collection of antique bronze statues, including the good-luck god Ganesha, tucked into a niche near the loggia.

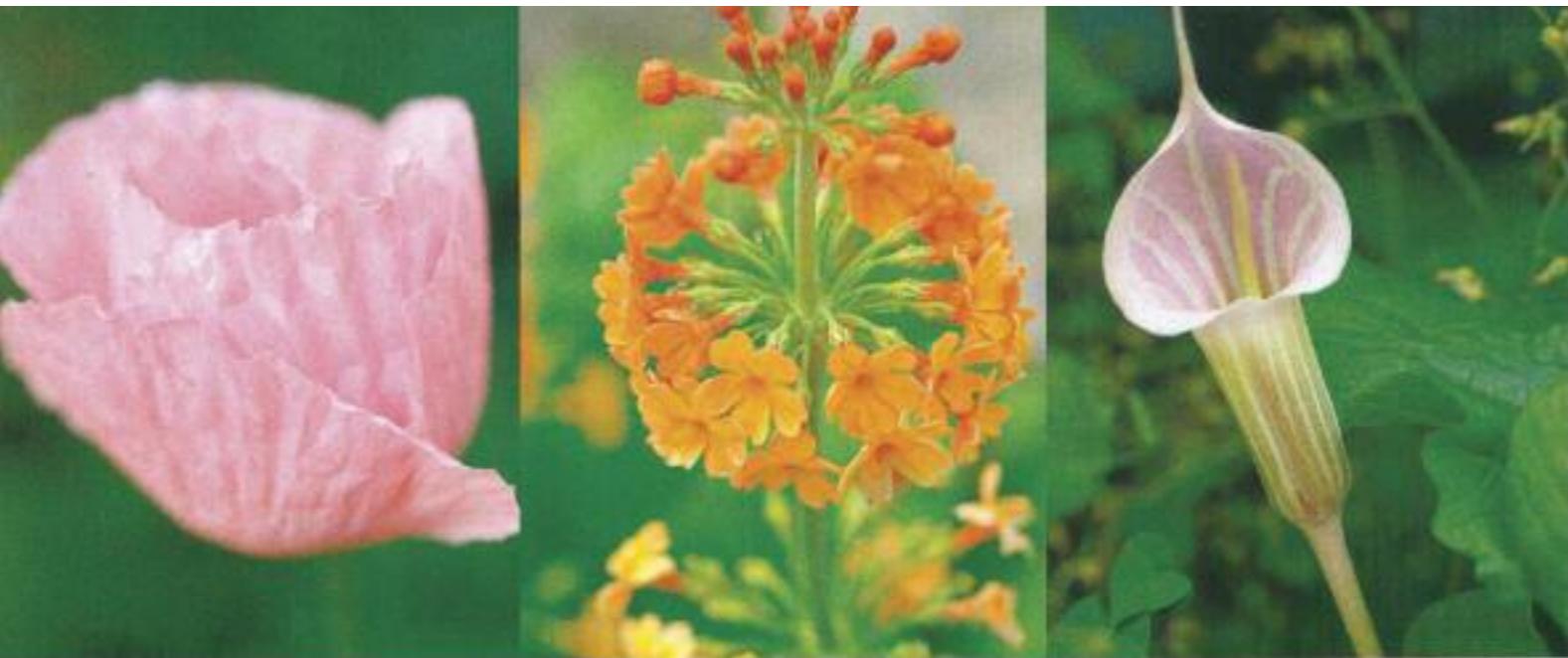
The exciting and exotic voice of the bucolic garden, which recently won a Palladio Award for excellence in traditional design, comes from architect Dnyan Wadia, of New Canaan-based Wadia Associates, and his wife, Gool, who have infused its English country roots with charming idioms from their enchanting native land, India. ➤

clockwise from above: The gables of the Edwardian English-style house look out over the herb garden; the journey to India begins at the curved drive at the front entrance of Dibangali; architect Dnyan Wadia and his wife, Gool, relax in the teahouse.

opposite page: A bountiful climbing hydrangea creeps itself over the carved front door, which is from a French abbey built in the 1600s.







"We keep up the TRADITION of serving tea in the English style. I come home for lunch every day for tea. Tea drinking is part and parcel of our DAILY LIVES." —DINYAR WADIA

"This estate was built by an English architect for an English family," Gool says. "It feels like it's in the Cotswolds. My husband and I love English gardens. The English were in India for 300 years, and, as Indians, we have learned to mix with all cultures, which is what we have done in this garden."

The Indian influence is felt at the front gate, where the estate's name, Gitanjali, sets the tone for the garden's theme. Hindu for "Song Offerings," it refers to the nature-themed epic poem of India's 1913 Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore. "I'm very traditional," Gool says. "I miss India. This may be my country, but India is my motherland."

Surrounded by a deer fence concealed by a mixed English border of trees, shrubs and flowering plants, the circa 1870 slate-roofed and stucco cottage, which is in Edwardian English style, has welcome written all over its vine-covered walls. "Indians are well-known for their hospitality," says Gool, who designed the garden. "It is natural for us to invite people—friends and clients—for dinner and to walk around the grounds."

In addition to the 5,000-square-foot main house, which was the estate's original guest house, visitors see a veritable Eden complete with an English-style potting shed, a stone gardener's cottage, pool house and swimming pool, two greenhouses and a teahouse that has a stone hearth and a leaded-glass window.

"We keep up the tradition of serving tea in the English style," Dinyar says. "I come home for lunch every day for tea. Tea drinking is part and parcel of our daily lives."

And the teahouse, which is original to the property, makes the ritual extra special. "We brew our own tea, which is imported from India, and I make my own blends," Gool says. "I use fresh lemongrass, mint and cardamom from the herb garden and add it to hot milk and a little sugar."

When the Wadias bought Gitanjali eight years ago, the house and garden needed a lot of tender, loving care. They updated the interior of the house and restored the exterior and grounds to look much as they did in Victorian times. "We even rebuilt the bluebird house in cedar so that it will last 100 years, longer than we will," Gool says. "We hear all the birds chirping at 5 a.m. every day, but we haven't had any luck getting any bluebirds to move in."

from left: Gitanjali's garden blooms with pupples, primula bulleyana and Asian jack-in-the-pulpit.
opposite page: Potted annuals, ready for planting, wait outside the greenhouse.



A stately border
of boxwood and
hydrangeas leads to
the tea house.



"The WHITE-FLOWERED MOGRA, which looks like a pompon dahlia, is used in temples, and HINDU WOMEN put it in their hair as decoration." —GOOL WADIA

Mature plantings, notably the 200-year-old trees, the climbing hydrangeas at the front door and the mammoth azaleas, rhododendrons, holly bushes and magnolias formed the basis for their English/Indian planting design scheme. Gool, who had tended to the garden in the couple's previous home, decided to dedicate her new garden to the cultivation of flowers. "I cut my flowers, and I bring them inside so I can enjoy them when they are in bloom," she says, adding that she delights in creating her own unusual arrangements. "I've been fascinated with flowers ever since I was a girl, and each of the ones in my garden was selected because it is special."

To showcase the blooms, she created several gardens within her garden. There is the brook garden, which is planted with maiden grass, hostas, irises and astmonsia and crisscrossed with stone footbridges; there is her woodland garden, which is filled with coral bells, trillium, bergenia, bishop's hat and rare Asian jack-in-the-pulpit. If you can find it, a secret garden shelters a statue of a young woman feeding the birds. There is also a kitchen garden, where moss covers a charming brick herringbone path. It is the peony garden, however, that is Gool's pride and joy. "I collected more than 100 Chinese peony trees," she says. "The most unusual are the intersectional peonies; their flowers are an awesome treat to see."

In the greenhouses, the tropical treasures are tended. Three of Gool's favorites—the Madhumalti, the Mogra flower and the bougainvillea—remind her of her beloved India. "The Madhumalti is a most beautiful vine that blossoms in the fall only," she says. "Its flowers are pink, and it grows like a weed in India, and it is so fragrant that everyone there has it. The white-flowered Mogra, which looks like a pompon dahlia, is used in temples, and Hindu women put it in their hair as decoration. And you have no idea how colorful the bougainvillea is; it comes in orange, red, purple, yellow and white."

In addition to the subtle English hues of blues, pinks and purples, the Wadia garden contains just the right bright blooms. "Every flower is selected because there

from left: Dahlias and irises are among the colorful favorites in the Wadia garden. **opposite page:** The brook garden, quintessentially English, is lush and lovely.







"Indians are well-known for their **HOSPITALITY**.
It is natural for us to invite people—friends and clients—for dinner and to **WALK AROUND THE GROUNDS.**" —COOL WADIA

is something special about it color-wise or cultivar-wise," Cool says. "I love old-fashioned style roses and flowers that have different cup shapes. I mix colors in the beds, and I choose mostly bright colors because we Indians like bright colors."

This is most evident in the summer border, which is outside the kitchen window. A riotous rainbow, it is filled with sunflowers, Helenis flowers, canna, ornamental ginger, Joe Pye weed, sea hollies and purple fountain grass.

Gitanjali's garden is a joy to behold. The Wadias love walking through the acres in all seasons, and their two Rough Collies, Droops (whose ears do just that) and Arjun (a real coward who gets his name from the Indian mythic warrior), take great pride in protecting the property from all manner of wild animals, including foxes and raccoons. "The garden has a nice, tranquil feel," Diryar says. "We use it to the fullest."

Whether she's admiring the white blossoms of the handkerchief tree, trimming the trailing clematis or potting a batch of daffodil bulbs, Cool is in tune with the good earth. "I'm not an expert, but I pick out everything myself, and I get great pleasure from seeing how everything is blooming," she says.

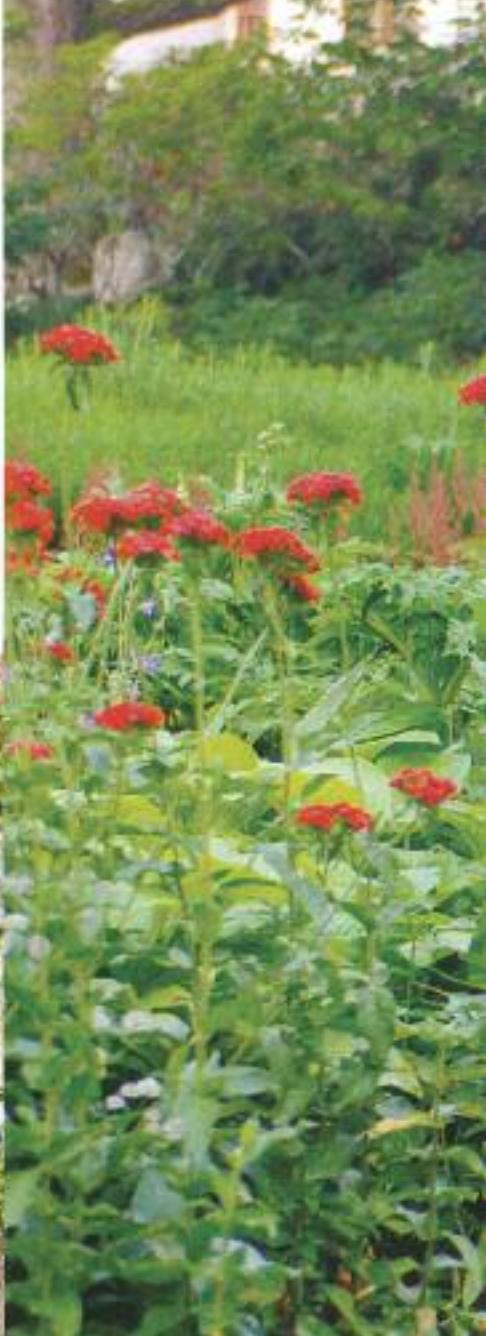
Gitanjali's marriage of cultures and cultivars is most suitable for the Wadias, who met when they were in college in India and settled in New Canaan in 1969. He is from the commercial port city of Bombay, and she hails from the industrial city of Baroda. "It was an arranged marriage—a wife-arranged marriage, that is," Diryar laughs. ➤

By design, the English-style potting shed is a pleasant and handy place to tend to plants. A guest suite occupies its second floor.
opposite page: The branches of a centuries-old elm tree, one of the rarities in the garden, shelter the verdant path to the creek garden.





From above: In the secret garden, a statue of a girl holding doves is framed by ivy and hydrangeas; the whisper-light persicaria; a shell-shaped fountain in the box-wall makes a peaceful statement. **opposite page:** Arjun, the Wadras' Rough Collie, poses by the brook garden.



The garden brings out the best of both worlds, and that's because the Wadias have searched the world, particularly England and Germany, for great ideas. But Gool adds that good gardeners, whether they be English or Indian, know when to let nature take its course, and that is exactly what she has done at Gitanjali. "Each garden has a mind of its own," she says. "And the flowers are so independent that they do whatever they want."

And that's just the way Dinyar likes it. "I can't say that I have a particular favorite part of the garden," he says. "Each section blossoms in its own time, and then our focus moves elsewhere. We love our house, and we love our garden. They are just right for us." ■

Resource

Wadia Associates, New Canaan, 966-0048; wadiassociates.com

