

*An Air of Romance*

WEDDINGS WITH STYLE, GRACE AND A TOUCH OF WHIMSY

# GREENWICH

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## A GRAND ESTATE

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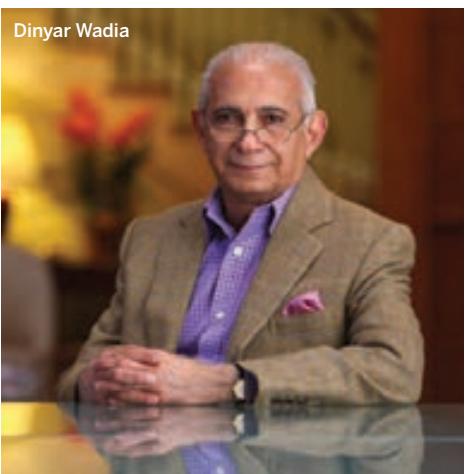




# HOW HIS GARDEN GROWS

Though best known for designing over-the-top homes,  
**Dinyar Wadia has a special love of the outdoors**

by NANCY A. RUHLING • photographs by JONATHAN WALLEN



PORTRAIT BY PETER OLSON

**F**OR THREE DECADES, NEW CANAAN ARCHITECT Dinyar Wadia has been designing great gardens and great houses. In a wide-ranging discussion on the art of gardening, Wadia, whose firm has won both a national and an A-list award for landscape architecture, reflects on “the green-thumb disease that gets under your skin.” He then adds: “A thoughtfully executed landscape turns an ordinary house into an extraordinary one. It also provides the family a great deal of pleasure and enhances the resale value of the house.” We sit down with the iconic designer to find out what it takes to create gorgeous landscapes. »

*Opposite page:* For a home in Greenwich, Dinyar Wadia used a stone gazebo as a passageway from the motor court to the gardens. *Top:* For an apple orchard he employed the same bridge technique.





1.



2.



3.



4.

## “One romantic view of the garden **is the lady with the basket**

1 A tennis court, surrounded by hornbeam hedges to conceal its metal fencing, is nestled into the gardens. 2 A classical urn provides interest. 3 Wisteria wraps around metal decorative balconies. 4 The glorious datura trumpets its beauty. 5 A man-made brook bubbles through a garden planted with irises, hostas and a Japanese maple.



**Q. As an architect whose focus is on traditional-style homes, what sparked your interest in garden design?**

Frustration. I could not find a landscape architect who was more into plant material and less into grading and terraces. They were timid in their use of color and massing—so most landscapes looked alike. In my travels abroad, I visited Wisley, just outside of London. It's the flagship garden of the Royal Horticultural Society. That changed everything for me. I began to study plant material and its placement and gradually got the hang of it.

**Q. Why is it best if the house and garden are designed by the same person?**

One vision. Too many cooks in the kitchen spoil the broth. In the old days, there wasn't an architect, landscape architect, decorator and builder. There was only a master builder. He designed the house, laid out the gardens and did the interior design and decoration. After the Second World War, specialization kicked in as

colleges were set up to train different disciplines. The lack of one vision is glaringly apparent to me. When one visits old homes in Europe or the UK, we are taken by their design and landscaping but do not realize that most were designed by one master builder. I feel that since my firm has a vision of the way the house sits on the property and relates to the site, the next natural step is to design the landscape.

**Q. What are the basic elements of a great garden?**

One has to match the scale of the plant material to the proportions of the house. This is not possible immediately because it's expensive to purchase mature plant material. However, one has to pick plants that will grow with time to complement the house without overwhelming it. It's important to choose material that is in keeping with the style of the house. If it's an English cottage, you want to have an English cottage garden. If it's a more stylized house, a crisp garden would be in order. A shingle-style home needs to be more relaxed.



**and shears cutting lilacs for the breakfast table.”**

—DINYAR WADIA

Saving mature trees is paramount, as a house built in juxtaposition with a few large trees makes it feel as though it has been there for a hundred years. However, the trees should be carefully pruned to allow for maximum light to enter the house. Color combinations are important, too. Most people don’t just want a green garden.

#### Q. What are the most common mistakes people make with gardens?

They choose a style they like, say from a magazine, that sometimes doesn’t go with the house. A house in Nantucket should have a garden that is in keeping with the style and scale of Nantucket. A common mistake that homeowners make after the garden layout is finished is to visit a nursery and buy a plant on impulse; it’s like buying the puppy in the window and not knowing what to do with it when you get it home. I encourage homeowners to purchase plants they like, but with careful consideration of their destination. Also, one must try not to overplant the garden, as plants need to breathe—air circulation is

very important for the good health of any plant.

A well-cared-for garden needs pruning, grooming, fertilizing and general maintenance. A garden left to care for itself can quickly become rather shabby.

One romantic view of the garden is the lady with the basket and shears cutting lilacs for the breakfast table. If you want flowers for the house, you need to have a separate cutting garden so you don’t rob the color from your gardens. Snipping blossoms from your plants at the wrong time of the year can be detrimental to the plant. Yes, occasionally it’s possible to take a bloom off the hydrangea to enjoy in the house, but if done routinely, it can damage the plant.

Gardens need skilled people to look after them; you can’t expect the guy who cuts your grass to know how to correctly fertilize your plants. Another common mistake is to use a grass-cutting service to fertilize anything, especially mature trees. A good arborist is the only way to go. I’ve had clients who lost major trees and ended up spending tens of thousands of dollars to replace them because they assumed that anyone could fertilize them.»

6 Espaliered fruit trees make a stone wall come alive. 7 A clematis vine climbs to the sky.

8 Azaleas in full bloom

9 Lush plantings and flower beds along a stone wall conceal a motor court.

10 A cutting garden for fresh bouquets



The dining loggia blends with the gardens, providing spectacular views of the property.

## Q. Can you recommend any low-maintenance, high-show plants?

There are very few shrubs and trees that need little maintenance. The magnolia tree and the Kousa dogwood are disease resistant. There is a whole range of hydrangea shrubs like Endless Summer that bloom for a very long time. There are many interesting blood-red mountain laurel and a few roses that can put up with the high humidity in our area. However, everything takes work. Lilacs can get mildew and can look awful if not sited and cared for correctly. Rose of Sharon drops its spent blossoms, which need to be swept up. Most of us love peonies. But they have a very short blooming time. The best way to grow peonies is to have a dedicated space for them, for once they are done blooming, they are not pretty to look at. There are many interesting plants that need just a little bit of care and are beautiful—crepe myrtle has a wonderful pink or red flower, and the *Photinia x fraseri* has stunning foliage tipped with red. »



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## Q. How much of the house-building budget should be devoted to the landscaping?

It's a fairly substantial investment. The houses we design are \$5 million to \$10 million. The gardens run from \$500,000 to \$1.5 million. You really don't need to spend thousands of dollars buying large trees. Smaller plants and trees grow and multiply faster than larger ones that don't do anything for a couple of years.

## Q. What are some of the challenges your Greenwich projects have presented?

Each garden is a challenge. We designed a home in backcountry bordering the polo fields, where a deer fence would not be appropriate as it would block the pastoral view. So we designed a wall garden in front of the house to protect the plants deer love and left the rear, where there was no wall, to be rolling lawn. The lawn that merged into the polo fields made the house feel as if it were built on fifty acres instead of four. Since deer can easily jump six feet plus, the wall was designed to be about four feet high and was topped with a metal

railing so it didn't look like a fortress. Although the property was four acres, we only had one acre of available space to build the house and gardens, because of the mature apple orchard that ran parallel to the house just outside the rear terrace. We planted purple wisteria and espaliered magnolia grandiflora up the walls of the house. This is common in Europe and England, but in America people are concerned about plants growing on the house, so we developed a framework system of low-profile, stainless-steel aircraft cable to hold them. The plants won't hurt the house as long as they are trimmed and well-maintained. **G**

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