

Avenue, February 2000

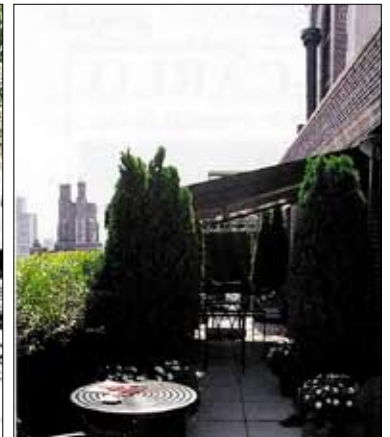
Green Space by Andrew Page

Beauty Within Bounds

In 1997, the co-op board of Anne Barish's building informed her that she would have to remove many large planters from her apartment's rooftop terrace garden, because they were too heavy for the prewar building and possibly contributing to roof leaks. "It was the fourth time I had to have my terrace torn up," she says.

On the recommendation of her building's managing agents, Barish chose Plant Specialists to redesign her garden. The firm had more than twenty-five years experience with terraces in Manhattan and was well acquainted with the increasingly strict rules facing owners of rooftop gardens.

Philip Roche, one of Plant Specialists' top designers, found a way to divide up the expansive terrace by creating several distinct, manageable spaces without adding excessive weight. Along with pagodas made from light but strong copper tubing, hedges and trees in wooden planters were used to demarcate the terrace's distinct areas. The concept was to have the outdoor layout echo the arrangement of the interior rooms. An outdoor dining area is situated right outside of the indoor dining room; a group gathering space is outside the living room; a private area with a chaise lounge is off the bedroom; and an herb garden sits just outside the kitchen.



Though there are dozens of small pots and planters artfully arranged to show off seasonal flowers (such as the white daisies and geraniums that added subtle color to the terrace last summer), the majority of the plants on the Barish's terrace are evergreen trees and hedges. "We used 90 percent evergreens so that the terrace would be green year-round," says Roche, who trained in his native New Zealand, where he completed an apprenticeship at the Botanic garden in Wellington, the country's capital. "We wanted a formal but simple design that was elegant and easy to maintain," he says.

The design was drafted at Plant Specialists' headquarters, a complex of brick buildings located just over the 59th Street Bridge in Long Island City, Queens, which was once an iron



foundry. In addition to designing and maintaining outdoor gardens for private and commercial clients, plant Specialists also provide fresh flower arrangements for corporation and co-op lobbies and even delivers firewood with its fleet of eight trucks.

“We are an all-in-one firm,” says Dagny DuVal, Plant Specialists’ president and founder, whose husband, Tim is the firm’s vice president and top designer. “There are not many that do the full spectrum that we do.” DuVal started in the plant business with a company called Terrestris in 1967 and went on to found Plant Specialists in 1973. She moved the company from Manhattan to its Queens location in the early 1980’s, and the rooftop of its headquarters now doubles as a showroom for a wide variety of landscaping techniques and paving designs. Roche joined the firm six years ago.

In addition to numerous private clients, the firm has served commercial clients over the years, ranging from the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel to the Rockefeller Centre, for which DuVal created topiary animals in the 1980’s. About 20 percent of the firm’s work is executing the plans of the many other landscape designers who depend on Plant Specialists’ expertise to realize their designs.

“Other designers know what they want, but they have no idea how to accomplish it within strict regulations,” says DuVal. “We will work with them and make it happen.”