



Gardens in the City: New York in Bloom

*Text by Mary Jane Pool/Photography by Betsy Pinover Schiff*

### **A Year-Round Garden**

Like a garden beside a country house, the terrace garden of a city apartment adds beauty and is an extension of the dwelling. The eye enjoys it, and the mind uses it to expand one's horizon in every way. The owners of this roof garden asked architects Pietro Cicognani and Ann Kalla to design a solarium to bring more light inside and enhance the view of the garden outside. Fortunate to have a large area with which to work, Timothy DuVal and project designer Deane Ferrant-Payne of Plant Specialists, Inc., specified plant containers that can be brought in from the perimeters to adjust the space as needed.

Large Japanese hollies give the sitting area under the awning more privacy, and crab apple trees frame the sunsets and views down Park Avenue. The spiral Junipers add a formal touch. Pots are loosely placed about, with decorative terra-cotta feet for better air circulation. Plantings are changed seasonally. The owners particularly like azaleas, with their vivid purple and red flowers. In the winter, the standing evergreens and the ilex with their red berries are embellished with cut boughs of evergreen, dogwood branches, willow branches, and corkscrew euphorbia. All year long the terrace delights the eye and offers the feeling of escape from the city.

### **The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum**

Sculptor Isamu Noguchi once wrote: *"When the time came for me to work with larger spaces, I conceived them as gardens, not as sights with objects but as relationships to a whole. I would say this came from my knowledge of the dance theatre, where there is evidently a totality of experience by the audience."*

*"Through gardens I came to a deeper awareness of nature and of stone. The natural boulders of hard stone—basalt, granite, and the like— which I now use are a congealment of time. They are old. But are they old as sculpture?"*

Noguchi's garden museum, in the borough of Queens, is an amazing place in which to view a comprehensive collection of his work. It was created by the artist and dedicated in 1985, three years before his death. An outgrowth of his studio, which he moved to Long Island City in the early sixties to be near the marble suppliers on Vernon Boulevard, the museum houses works he retained for himself through the years. His passionate involvement with nature, his heritage, and the influences of his life in New York and Japan come together here.

The garden reflects his great interest in stage design and his experience of designing sets for the Martha Graham dance company for many years. The brilliance of sculpting space with rocks, stone, water, trees, and shrubs enhancing the spirit of his own work, is evident.

Some elements of the traditional Japanese garden are interpreted in this setting of white birch, weeping cherry, katsura, magnolia, black pine, and ailanthus trees, bamboo, juniper, Boston and English ivies.



In his book, the Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum, Noguchi wrote: *"For me it is the direct contact of artist to material which is original, and it is the earth and his contact to it which will free him from the artificiality of the present."* (Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, New York, 1987.)

### **Garden of Textures**

Serenity and communion with nature were important to the owners of this townhouse garden. Responsible for both the interior and exterior, architects Tod Williams and Billie Tsien suggested that the garden be an extension of the rooms, rather than separate and purely decorative. The garden is on two levels, owing to the natural contours of the land, and the upper garden can be viewed from the family room, kitchen, and the living room above. There are many textures: a bridge made of stone and blue-green glass, white stucco walls, and American bluestone paving alternating with random insets of Mexican water-washed black stones. The planting materials follow the vertical and horizontal patterns of the enclosure. Timothy DuVal of Plant Specialists Inc., specified 'Heritage' birches, tall and lacy, planted close together for a grove effect. Underneath there is a shade-tolerant lirioppe, European ginger, maidenhair fern, and cherry laurel. The bronze sculpture is Kiki Smith's *The Virgin Mary* of 1994.

### **A Skyline View**

When Timothy and Dagny DuVal bought an old paint and varnish factory in Long Island City some years ago, they wanted to have a guest apartment and a garden on the roof. Now, both have been accomplished. The 1880s building accommodates their own living quarters, offices for their garden design firm, Plant Specialists, Inc., and fifteen other tenants ranging from a baker to a furniture maker.

Dagny DuVal designed, planted, and continues to maintain the roof garden. Old timbers, found in the building were used to make the pergola that shelters the dining area. The other section is left open to enjoy the dramatic views of the Queensboro Bridge and the Manhattan skyline. Casual suppers, with the city lights at night a blaze of diamonds, are based on food cooked on the grill. Weekend lunches take advantage of the sun and the breezes from the East River.

A mixture of dwarf and regular black pines and an assortment of grasses that includes pennisetum create a background for the garden. Loosestrife, one of the weeds that grow year round in the wetlands of New York, thrives in this unusual setting, with purply-pink blooms mid summer. Breynia, with its variegated white-and-pink leaf, is a tropical plant sent up from Florida every spring that likes this sunny rooftop. A lot of color is provided by a profusion of 'Betty Prior' roses, and ivy has been started, with hopes it will eventually cover all the walls. Like most gardens it is a work in progress. Cast pebble pavers were chosen to reflect the light, and the large planters are wood or terra-cotta. Black plastic grow pots, spilling over with blooms, are often massed together for an extravagant display of color. The flowers hide the sides of these lightweight containers, which are easily moved around. There is an automatic drip watering system, and small, low-voltage fixtures light the plantings from above and below. The garden has a life of its own, and is so appealing that the DuVals no longer feel they have to escape to the country on weekends.