

THE ART OF THE MATTER



The fantasyland persona of the Magoon Sculpture Garden in Aspen, Colorado, is captured in Tom Friedman's *Circle Dance* and some 30 sculptures.

SURPRISES ABOUND IN A SCULPTURE
GARDEN ON A COLORADO HILLSIDE.

BY NORD WENNERSTROM / PHOTOGRAPHY BY BLUEGREEN|JASON DEWEY

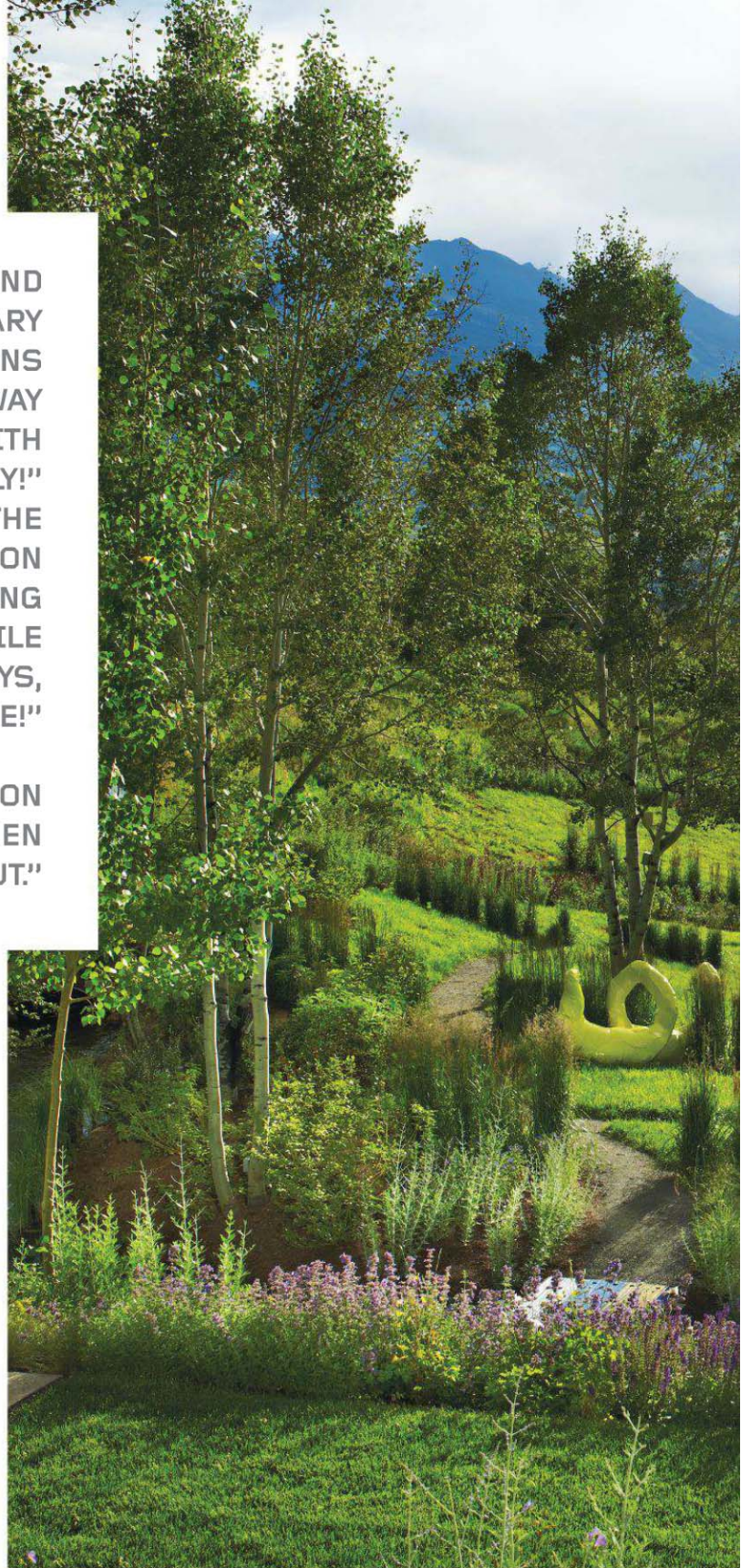


THE APPROACH TO NANCY AND BOB MAGOON'S CONTEMPORARY HOUSE IN ASPEN, COLORADO, BEGINS WITH A BOULDER AT THE DRIVEWAY ENTRANCE SPRAY PAINTED WITH THE PHRASE "LOCALS ONLY!" AND CULMINATES NEAR THE FRONT DOOR WHERE A MOTION DETECTOR ACTIVATES A FLASHING OVERHEAD WHITE LIGHT WHILE A DISEMBODIED MALE VOICE SAYS, "GO AWAY! THERE'S NO ONE HOME!"

"PEOPLE FREAK," NANCY MAGOON LAUGHS, "ESPECIALLY WHEN IT'S DARK OUT."

That greeting, courtesy of the artist Aaron Young (*Locals Only*) and the video artist Tony Oursler (*Sound and Light*), offers insights into the Magoons, who are seasoned and savvy collectors of art that is humorous, demanding, political, clever, and destabilizing. And it also indicates what the landscape architecture firm of Bluegreen, based in Aspen, faced in creating a sculpture garden for more than 30 works, including one, a helter-skelter collection of used water heaters held together with wire, that had previously enraged the neighbors (more on that later).

The Magoons are noted patrons who recently donated \$2.5 million to the Aspen Art Museum. They have strong opinions. As Nancy Magoon told me, "We buy what we like. No one coaches us. We like cutting-edge works and we collect work mostly by younger artists." And of the sculpture garden, she said, "What's outside is outside because it's too big to be inside." Those "too big" works include a large red Godzilla and a gigantic iron made from a rowboat and tires.





“IT’S HARD TO PLACE SCULPTURE
IN THE LANDSCAPE
WITHOUT IT
LOOKING SMALL.”

— NANCY MAGOON





PLAN

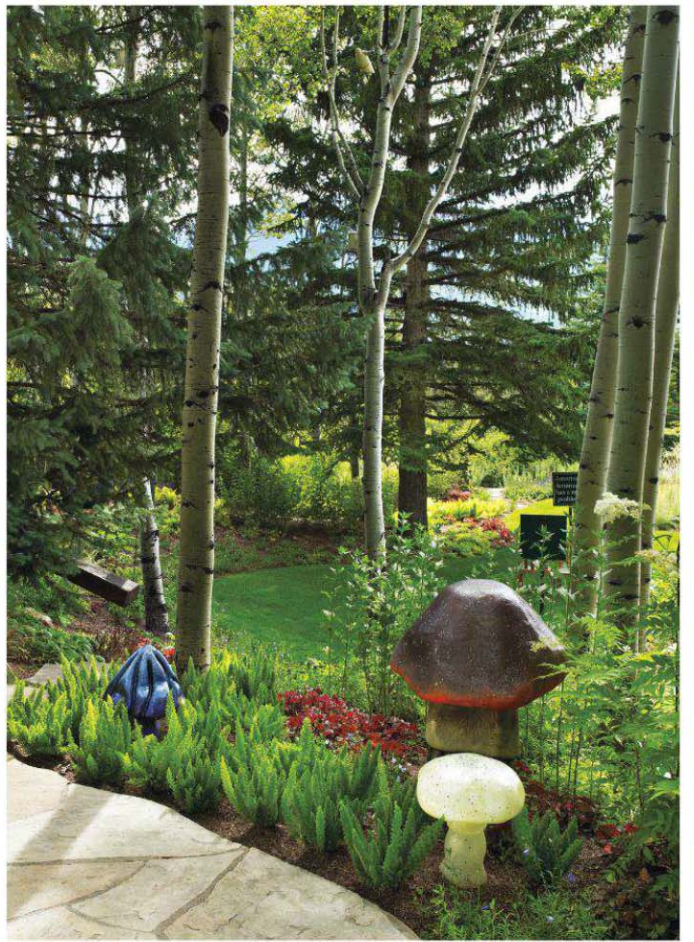
- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 AARON YOUNG,
<i>LOCALS ONLY</i> (2006) | 17 JAN MANCUSKA,
<i>UNTITLED</i> (2010) |
| 2 ARMAN,
<i>BOAT PROPELLERS</i> (1997) | 18 LIZ LARNER,
<i>GHOST STORY</i> (2002/2003) |
| 3 TONY OURSLER, <i>SOUND AND LIGHT</i> (2001); TOM SACHS,
<i>ICE SKATE AX</i> (2004); GAVIN TURK,
<i>BIG BAG 3</i> (2001) | 19 JASON MIDDLEBROOK,
<i>COPPER BEACH MEMOIRS</i> (2005) |
| 4 JOEL OTTERSON, <i>TEA PARTY FOUNTAIN FOR ASPEN</i> (1995) | 20 UGO RONDINONI,
<i>MOONRISE EAST JULY</i> (2006) |
| 5 JASON MIDDLEBROOK,
<i>FUN WITH FUNGI</i> (2009) | 21 RICHARD WOODS,
<i>BRIDGE</i> (2010) |
| 6 GARY HUME, <i>BACK OF A SNOWMAN BLACK</i> (2000) | 22 JASON MIDDLEBROOK,
<i>THE BEGINNING OF THE END</i> (2004) |
| 7 JASON MIDDLEBROOK,
<i>DWELLINGS IN THE AIR</i> (1994) | 23 FRANZ WEST,
<i>SITZKULPTURE</i> (2004) |
| 8 TODT, <i>EYE TOWER</i> (1994) | 24 NOT VITAL,
<i>HERD</i> (1990) |
| 9 CARLOS AGUIRRE,
<i>RECONSTRUYENDO LA NATURALEZA</i> (1994) | 25 TOM FRIEDMAN,
<i>CIRCLE DANCE</i> (2010) |
| 10 GHADA AMER,
<i>LOVE PARK</i> (1999) | 26 SUI JIANGUO,
<i>MADE IN CHINA</i> (2005) |
| 11 JUAN HAMILTON,
<i>UNTITLED ROCK</i> (1985) | 27 BO YOUNG JUNG/
EMMANUEL WOLFS,
<i>SQUARE TREE TRUNK BENCH</i> (2008) |
| 12 PAULA HAYES,
<i>PAIGE ECCENTRIC PLANTER</i> (2001) | 28 RICHARD WOODS,
<i>BRIDGE</i> (2010) |
| 13 PAUL MCCARTHY,
<i>BOXHEAD</i> (2001) | 29 WILLIE COLE,
<i>1726%</i> (1997) |
| 14 TONY CRAGG,
<i>CODE NOAH</i> (1988) | 30 NANCY RUBINS,
<i>HOT WATER HEATERS</i> (1995) |
| 15 MICHAEL WOLFSON,
<i>SOUNDFORM BENCH</i> (2008) | 31 PAULA HAYES,
<i>BIRDBATH</i> (2009) |
| 16 RICHARD TUTTLE,
<i>GARDEN SCULPTURE</i> (1995) | |

A couple of years ago, the Magoons, who had been looking for a landscape architect, encountered Bluegreen's work by chance at a friend's house in Aspen. They were immediately impressed. The relationship that developed was a close one, especially given that the Magoons live primarily in Aspen. Sheri Sanzone, ASLA, a principal of Bluegreen, says that as she and her business partner Ryan Vugteveen, ASLA, were working, "They'd see us outside and come out to discuss what was happening." Vugteveen adds, "The Magoons really got into the process." Of course, a hands-on client can be a handful, especially when this is the designers' first sculpture garden. But to Sanzone, it was symbiotic: "We learned a lot about sculpture, and they learned a lot about landscape architecture."

The clients were clear about their concerns and goals. As Magoon says, "It's hard to place sculpture in the landscape without it looking small and [having it] not matter. We wanted to showcase the sculpture, make sure it wasn't insignificant, and make the landscape look luscious." To prepare for the job, Vugteveen says he and Sanzone listened closely to their clients. Magoon wanted something "dramatic," Vugteveen says. "She felt the existing garden was tired."

To orient themselves, the Bluegreen team looked at other sculpture gardens, including those of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City and the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden. But, Vugteveen says, "Those places have a clear hierarchy for the sculpture. Our goal with the Magoons was to have multiple access points."

They had to work with a nearly two-acre site that is 8,000 feet above sea level, informally terraced on land that slopes down from the back of the house, framed by a native landscape of aspen, spruce, and Gambel oak, and has dramatic views to the surrounding Elk Mountain Range. The other starting conditions were an "exceptionally harsh climate, destructive wildlife browsing, and an extremely limited plant palette," Vugteveen adds. It was also overgrown with wildflowers, grasses, and vigorous and invasive species, and, for better or worse, much of the sculpture had already been put in place.



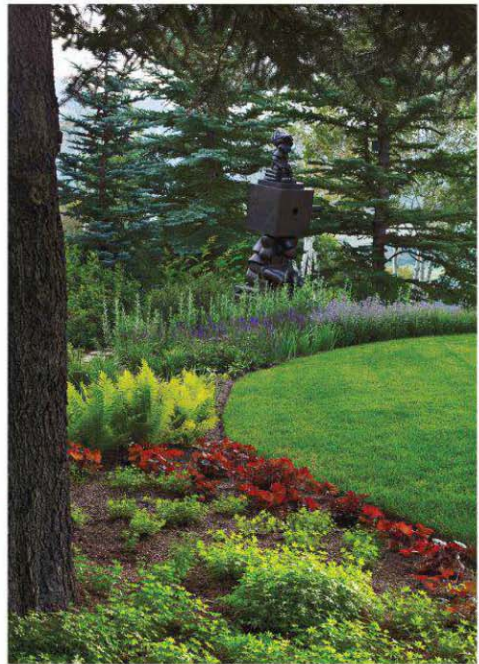
ABOVE
Fun with Fungi by Jason Middlebrook is in a naturalistic setting near the front door.

OPPOSITE
Pathways and stairs lead to informal terraces with artwork such as Jan Mancuska's letter-perforated umbrella (*Untitled*).

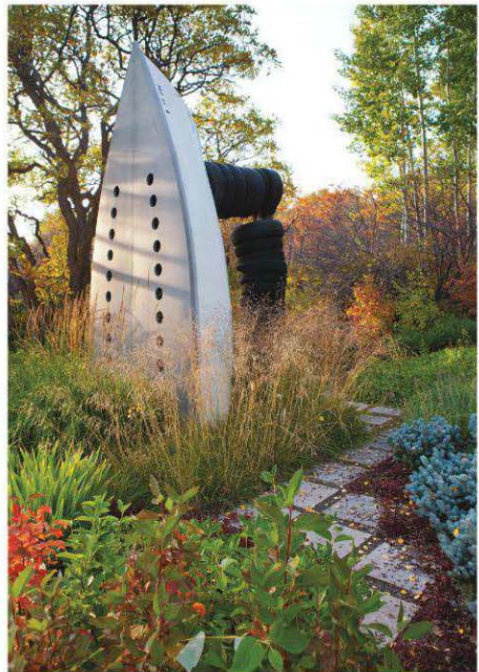


THE DESIGNERS WANTED TO BRING OUT
THE PLAYFULNESS OF THE SCULPTURE
WITH THE PLANTINGS.





TOP
Paul McCarthy's *Boxhead* seems to lumber through purple perennials.



BOTTOM
Grasses and pavers provide a lively setting for Willie Cole's iron-shaped *1726%*.

OPPOSITE
Bluegreen used woods for verticality and native grasses for planting beds around artwork including Ugo Rondinoni's *Moonrise East July* (far left) and Nancy Rubins's *Hot Water Heaters* (right).



ABOVE AND RIGHT
TODT's *Eye Tower*
and Aaron Young's
Locals Only flank the
Magoons' driveway,
a slightly disorienting
introduction to this
intriguing sculpture
garden.

THE SITE IS HIGH, THE CLIMATE HARSH. THERE ARE HUNGRY ANIMALS AND INVASIVE PLANTS.

After ruminating on the client's collection, Bluegreen opted to treat the garden as a conceptual work of art that would be organized through a series of overlays that would suggest its choreography and anchor its spatial relationships, an approach, Vugteveen says, "the Magoons got right away." They learned the best way to work with their clients was to provide "visual guides, Photoshop, other renderings, and mock-ups—there was a heavy use of photography," says Sanzone. "We also drew lines in the landscape with string, laid out the plantings in sections, and then got the okay to install."

The designers made a detailed inventory and chose to maintain some of the existing areas and work with much of the topography. In fact, sustainability and strategic reuse were core design principles. "Bob liked the wildflowers," Vugteveen notes, so they were retained along with several existing trees, shrubs, and grasses. They also concluded that the siting of the sculptures would not need to be substantially altered. "We were blown away at how playful the artworks are, and we sought to reinforce that playfulness with our planting design," Sanzone says. They reduced the amount of lawn, recycled hardscape, introduced rich stands of woods for verticality, used native grasses for planting beds, along with blue and purple perennials—all drought tolerant and bought locally—and tapped water from a historic irrigation ditch on the property. The existing terracing was also preserved, on which they created paths of lawn and decomposed granite, as well as a pervious paving system.

Borrowed scenery was also an important factor. "The long view across the valley is amazing—you have the layers of the ridgelines and tree masses," Sanzone observes. They wanted to balance the inward and outward orientations of the garden and make intimate spaces that focus inward but also give glimpses of a distant peak.

The Magoon property's persona is decidedly fantasyland versus, say, the magisterial milieu of sculpture gardens at the Museum of Modern Art in New York or the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, the Netherlands. Indeed, the sculptures, including Tony

Cragg's helix-like *Code Noah*, which coils upward from a plinth of grasses shimmying in the wind, plausibly inhabit their setting; the environment created is both buoyant and picaresque. When I first looked out across the garden's irregular geometry I was intrigued and delighted by its different paths and bridges, glimpses of art-filled enclaves, colorful dollops of wildflowers, and, lumbering toward center stage, that big red Godzilla (*Made in China* by Sui Jianguo). Wandering through the garden I was constantly tempted in different directions (I took nearly 100 photos and regret that was not enough).

The whole project took about a year. The garden was installed in one April-to-September planting season, which is particularly impressive because much of the work was done with small equipment and by hand to keep heavy machinery off the grounds. The clients, because of their close involvement, developed a richer and more nuanced relationship with a garden that they had previously viewed mainly from their house. They are clearly happy. "Each of the sculptures in our garden looks important because of Bluegreen," Magoon says.

There was also a sort of redemption around their choices that she didn't expect. "Our first outdoor sculpture was acquired in 1995, and it was also our first commissioned piece—Nancy Rubins's *Hot Water Heaters*. We had a tremendous problem with the neighbors, and it became a cause célèbre. It was ultimately resolved with the homeowners association when we agreed to plant trees to block the view. Ironically, nearly all of the neighbors who complained have moved, and our current neighbors want us to cut down the trees so they can see the art." ●

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Project Credits

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT BLUEGREEN, ASPEN, COLORADO (SHERI SANZONE, ASLA, AND RYAN VUGTEVEEN, ASLA). **LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR** ROCKY MOUNTAIN GARDENS, CARBONDALE, COLORADO. **CONCRETE CONTRACTOR** ACME INC., OLD SNOWMASS, COLORADO. **ART HANDLER** PEAK FINE ART SERVICES, INC., ASPEN, COLORADO.