

The Chatham Press

A monthly paper about the people, places and things that make Chatham and the surrounding towns so special

March 2013



After Sandy 4-5
Hudson Architects' energy innovations

Back health 9
Hospital opens Spine Institute

Sustainability 15-17
Two landscape architects' practices

History 27
The Cox family's Civil War connection

About Landscape Architects



Say ‘architect,’ and an image comes to mind of someone who can design and get a building completed. Say landscape architect and the image is not that clear. This article will clarify. Two registered landscape architects, Wendy Carroll of Chatham, and Jamie Purinton of Ancram, are practitioners sought by clients who demand a sustainable plan that encompasses natural and ecological systems – water, drainage, flora, fauna, micro-climate, soils and topography – what’s truly unique about a property.

Wendy Carroll’s vegetable garden at the Edna St. Vincent Millay home in Austerlitz, and Jamie Purinton’s work on a private home in Hillsdale, focus on what is natural to each site.



By Rich Kraham

Becoming a landscape architect is no walk in the park. In fact, in order to design and build a park, or zoo or playground or undertake a large public project, or even do rural planning, one needs to be a Registered Landscape Architect (RLA). It is like being in a guild, and there is a rigorous process to get there. First you have to be in an accredited program at university, then there is advanced graduate work, followed by five years of apprenticeship to even stand for your license. And to remain a licensed RLA in New York State, you must take 12 credit hours of study annually.

Landscape Architects **Jamie Purinton** and **Wendy Carroll** have done just that. Purinton studied at Cornell University first, the College of Agricultural and Life Science, where she received her B.S. in 1983. There she was on the Organic Agricultural Dean’s List & was a Teaching Assistant. Later she went to SUNY’s Syracuse School of Environmental Science and Forestry for a Master’s in Landscape Architecture. Purinton later taught in the Cornell University Landscape Architecture Department as a Visiting Associate Professor for Urban Design Studio and Graduate Design Studio on Garden Theory and Practice. She was also an Adjunct Professor for Landscape Design Studios for the City College of New York Department of Urban Landscape.

Carroll is a graduate of SUNY Albany, Magna Cum Laude, took graduate landscape architecture seminars at Radcliffe College, and got a Masters of Landscape Architecture from Harvard’s Graduate School of Design.

Don’t let the credentials fool you. Although they do monitor final construction of their designs, these gals also get into the trenches and get their hands dirty. And both espouse a natural, sustainable approach to design. We profile each individually on the next two pages.

Continued on next page



Carroll

About Landscape Architects

“I make places for people to be. I work with clients to help them to understand, to acknowledge, to reveal, and to appreciate their site, exposing and, or defining unanticipated delights,” said Landscape Architect Wendy Carroll.

“I try to make people’s every day just a bit better with simple moments – blueberries in the morning cereal from their courtyard, watching the sunset and picking wild strawberries off their terrace.”

“I am an artist sculpting and painting with the land. Landscape architecture is pragmatic, it changes people’s live while resolving needs and providing working ecological systems. I attempt to work with the systems rather than denying their existence – and re-establishing when possible healthy systems. But it is fortunate when art and landscape architecture fuse such as at Teardrop Park.” (See pictures and caption at top right.)

From pulling weeds to bigger projects

Carroll worked with the earth as a child, pulling weeds for neighbors and building creations by the stream bed at her home. As an adult she trained as an artist and worked with kinetic sculptor George Rickey. After that it was off to Harvard.

“I was able to study and visit the gardens of Burle Marx in Brazil and Le Notre in and around Paris. Vaux Le Vicompte, and Versailles – the garden of the kings.”

“I was fortunate to work with some of the finest – Dan Kiley and Michael Van Valkenburgh. I was witness and participant to the passion needed for such a profession. I began to understand the complexities of the process and was fortunate to work on some incredible projects.”

Carroll opened her practice in 2002 and was licensed in 2007. Her work is mainly for private individuals, some historic, some public planning. She is now working at Steepletop, home of poet Edna St. Vincent Millay to revive Millay’s fabulous historic gardens and site.

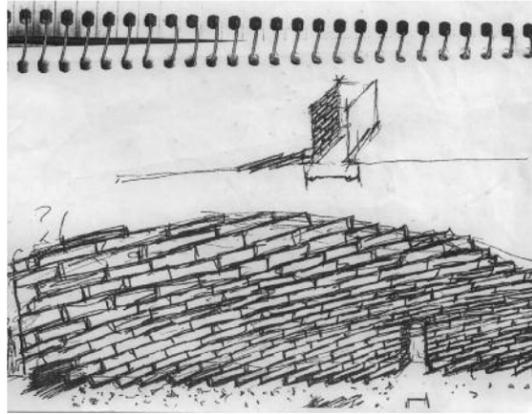
Carroll offers design, planning and construction supervision working with a lot of area subs, but is not opposed to doing stone work and plantings herself.

Work process

Carroll does site surveys, site plans, sketches, photo montages, models, perspectives, visits nurseries and quarries to tag materials, and does on-site planting. For example: Carroll did a creekside restoration after a previous gardener stripped the edge plantings and an upstream neighbor cleared lands – so the stream eroded. She salvaged stone from the site and rebuilt the edge with native plants to hold soils and help prevent future erosion.

Carroll often rethinks the use of materials like re-orienting hog fencing vertically to create screening.

“I like deducing the site needs – working with the land rather than imposing. It’s not all natural because it is all a built landscape, but I allow the site to respond and evolve naturally



A quick sketch on the subway by Carroll of a wall for Teardrop Park in New York City resulted in this masterpiece when Carroll worked for Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates in New York City.



Edna St. Vincent Millay’s pool in a file photo, far left. Carroll getting dirty in that pool today as part of her restoration of the landscape at this famous site in Austerlitz



Carroll created the rose allé at far left.

She often uses waves of native grasses to great effect as in the picture at left



Carroll works with stone, often laying them herself.

with subtle human intervention to create sustainable yet, client viable landscapes.

“In the old days an architect was the lead on projects and the RLA would get called in at the end to “shrub” up the building. Now, landscape architects are becoming the lead because of their skills and training with regards to site planning, storm water, and ecological systems. This is really a benefit for the client because it saves on unnecessary fees to the architect for issues they do not completely understand,” said Carroll.

The end result

“My designs are about the fleeting moments – spring ephemerals, wildflowers, passing colors, diverse foliage, birds, the insects, the butterflies. I actually believe that people move to this county to be in the landscape and would rather know the best practices for the ecological systems of their site to make informed decisions. Early site planning is crucial. Often a contractor might go in to clear the woods, build a drive right through a vernal pool, destroy the soil and create erosion problems, ruining potential landscape options.”

Carroll waxes poetically about native plantings in this county: vast drifts of native grasses, colonies of shrubs – red twig dogwood, sweet fern, the statuesque and cooling effects of shade trees, and drifts of blue phlox.

“Recently I have been fortunate to be exposed to, and participate in the The Farmscape Ecology Program – a great resource for our community. The program staff discovered rare natives and insects at Steepletop – such as a vast colony of pale green orchids and Aphrodite Fritillaries in abundance. They helped me see that a seemingly normal meadow is really a rare ecosystem to be respected.”

Carroll also thanks the Columbia Land Conservancy “as a mapping resource for the community – to help us understand the natural systems – soils, and water.”

“For our town we were fortunate, as well, to have the Department of Environmental Conservation prepare a town habitat summary with water information.”

Carroll insists that all these eco-systems must be respected if true landscape architecture is to be successful. 🌿

Purinton



A non-functioning old wasps' nest, a duck decoy, drafting table, computer, bookcases full of books on flora, fauna, botany, and her own two books, *Voices of the Land* and *Landscape Narratives*, grace landscape architect Jamie Purinton's design office attached to her home in Ancram on Lower Rhoda Lake. In the windowsill are cans full of yellow pencils.

"Sometimes you have to erase," said Purinton, scads of tracing paper drawings scattered about as evidence of her superior pencil sketches of new ideas for clients that will be built in the spring.

Purinton said that Landscape Architecture is a broad and varied field that includes range of work such as creating public playgrounds, planning housing developments, doing city planning and also rural town planning. There are not that many large public projects when one chooses to live in the beautiful countryside of southern Columbia County, in a veritable living laboratory of sustainable landscape practice right outside one's window. Purinton does not mind and finds that 75 percent of her work now is residential landscape planning.

Sustainable practices

"Landscape architects can help you save money if you practice sustainable design that reduces the impact on the site. That might mean shorter driveways, creating hedgerows that buffer drifting snow, avoiding low spots that might get icy if drainage is not correct, making ponds instead of pools and helping prevent planting mistakes. We can provide valuable advice to a landowner before they start their building plans by analyzing the specific opportunities and constraints on your site including your soils, wildlife habitats, wetlands, plant communities, slopes and microclimates. Knowing what is precious, fragile and irreplaceable is the first step to site planning," she said.

"We can help protect wells from pesticides used on lawns and also protect wetlands for their natural beauty."

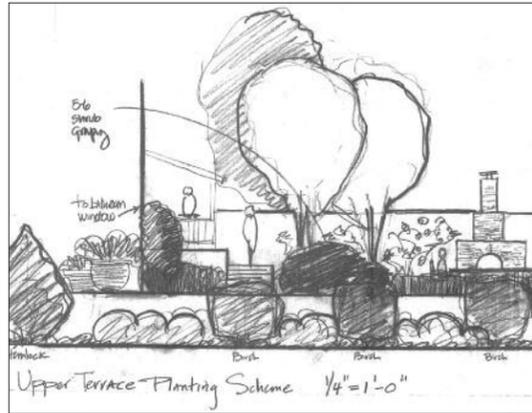
"Lawns are not the best. Neatness is not a virtue ecologically. Without them you save on gas, and provide cover for bees seeking natural clovers. Improving the biodiversity of your site is always an underlying goal. This may mean reducing lawn areas, providing more blossoms for birds and insects, adding native plantings to stream edges, or adding understory trees to a cleared woodland.

A broad design and writing portfolio

Purinton has practiced landscape architecture for more than twenty years; written two books, *Voices of the Land* and *Landscape Narratives: Design Practices for Telling Stories*; and taught landscape architecture at City College and Cornell University. As a landscape architect, licensed in New York State since 1992, Purinton has worked on a wide range of projects, including residential properties, housing projects, waterfront parks, street-scapes, college campuses, arboreta and botanical gardens.

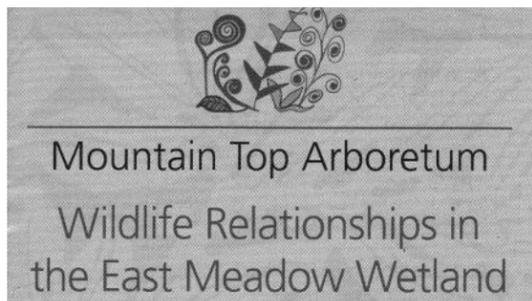


Examples of Purinton's residential projects



Allium at the back gate, far left

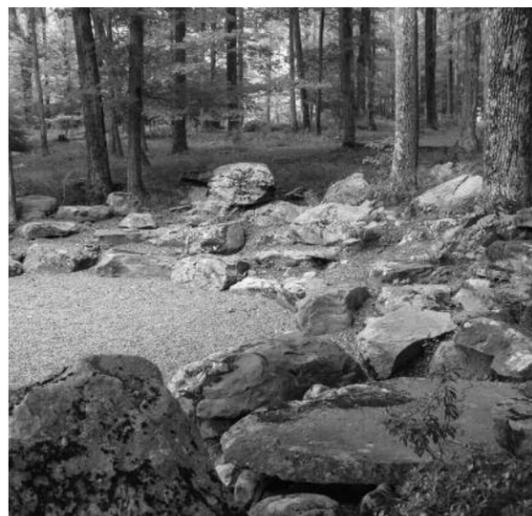
Purinton favors loose pencil sketches as opposed to computer assisted drawings.



"My practice emphasizes working with landscape narratives and developing sustainable designs."

"*Landscape Narratives: Design Practices for Telling Stories* is a cross-discipline inquiry into the connections between narratives – memory, history and environmental and cultural experience – and the making of unique places. All of my work is shaped by the expressions and stories of the site's place and people."

Purinton's long-term commitment to sustainable design is underscored in her book *Voices of the Land*, a collection of letters to inspire property owners to design homes that are responsive to the character and ecology of their landscape. All of her design projects begin with an understanding of a site's natural systems, and with a commitment to protect and enhance each site's important natural resources. For example, Purinton is chair of the Ancram Conservation Advisory Council – leading the work of mapping biodiversity habitats and advising on green infrastructure practices.



With funding from New York State DEC, Purinton designed an outdoor classroom within Tannersville's Mountain Top Arboretum Woodland Walk. This classroom is sited in a natural amphitheater space with field stone seating and native woodland plantings. The stonework is designed to tell the geological story of this place where glaciers dragged rocks over many miles.

Comparing apples to apples

"One of the advantages of hiring a landscape architect is that they can provide plans and bid documents so that an owner can compare estimates from a number of contractors, comparing apples to apples. Saving my clients money is a goal. My fees are based upon the hours it takes to design versus a percentage of the cost of construction. This way I am on the side of saving money," she said.

"I help find ways to help envision design ideas before they are built so the client makes informed choices, always keeping in mind that simple, cost-effective solutions conserve time and resources. I do collaborate with the contractor and the client in a lively, open and engaging exchange so that the project benefits from everyone's experience and ideas."

Collaborating with Purinton to get your project right are a host of subs: architects, builders, biologists, lighting designers, engineers, excavators, fencing contractors, foresters, gardeners, nurseries, quarries, and stone masons.

Purinton walks her talk. She and husband Tad Higgins make their own maple syrup from their trees, make dill pickles from their garden, have a buffer along a stream corridor running to the lake, make bird houses out of gourds, have planted many trees, let areas go to meadow, hang laundry out to dry, and, most importantly, live lightly on the land. 🌿