



# THROUGH THE HEDGE



*A Charlottesville garden embraces  
a woodland*





## Southern bells

The woodlands contain a colorful understory of ferns, Solomon's seal, Virginia bluebells, foam flower and English bluebells, among others.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY COLE BURRELL



“An unfolding story” is how one Charlottesville resident describes her collaboration with landscape designer Cole Burrell. That’s apt—their work together has logged nine years and counting. But it’s also a fair description of what happens when you walk through the garden. From the street to the rear property line, the landscape here reveals one lovely chapter after another.

When she moved in in 1998, said the homeowner, “the basic geometry of it was in place.” That is, a series of terraces cascaded downhill from the house, flanked by long perennial beds along the sides. But there were no walls, and two oversized boxwoods hid the rear half of the property from view. “It wasn’t articulated and it wasn’t elaborated in relation to the house or the mountains,” she said.

In 2006, she read about Burrell’s work in *The New York Times* and, realizing he was local, called him up. “I explained that what I wanted was to look out and feel pulled into the garden,” she said.

Now, the view from the rear windows of the house is nothing if not enticing. Brick walls define the terraces and wide steps lead from one level to another, beckoning one forward. Burrell replaced the boxwood screen with lower-profile Japanese maples and worked to add texture and color throughout all seasons. “We have bulbs and hellebores that bloom early, and we have interesting things into autumn,” he said.

But he didn’t envision this all at once. “I don’t like to superimpose an idea on a site,” he said. “I have to work closely with the person,” slowly developing a plan that will answer the needs of both site and client.

In this case, he began by renovating perennial beds. The property—nearly an acre and a quarter—was already blessed with remarkable bones. Enormous magnolia and holly trees stood in the side lawn, and two huge tulip poplars anchored the lower section. (One has since been felled by lightning.)

Fortunate accidents have in some ways driven the process. Just off the rear porch was a towering Deodar cedar that lost its whole top portion in the derecho of 2012. Now, a massive trunk and a smaller crown make for a charmingly mismatched pair. “It was the best thing that could possibly happen,” said Burrell. “It brought it to a more manageable scale. I love the fact that it’s reinvigorated the plant.”

As Burrell and his client picked up steam—tackling a patio and fountain just behind the house, installing a parterre garden—they eventually confronted the jungle-like rear section of the property. A swimming pool, about halfway from house to property line, pushed up against

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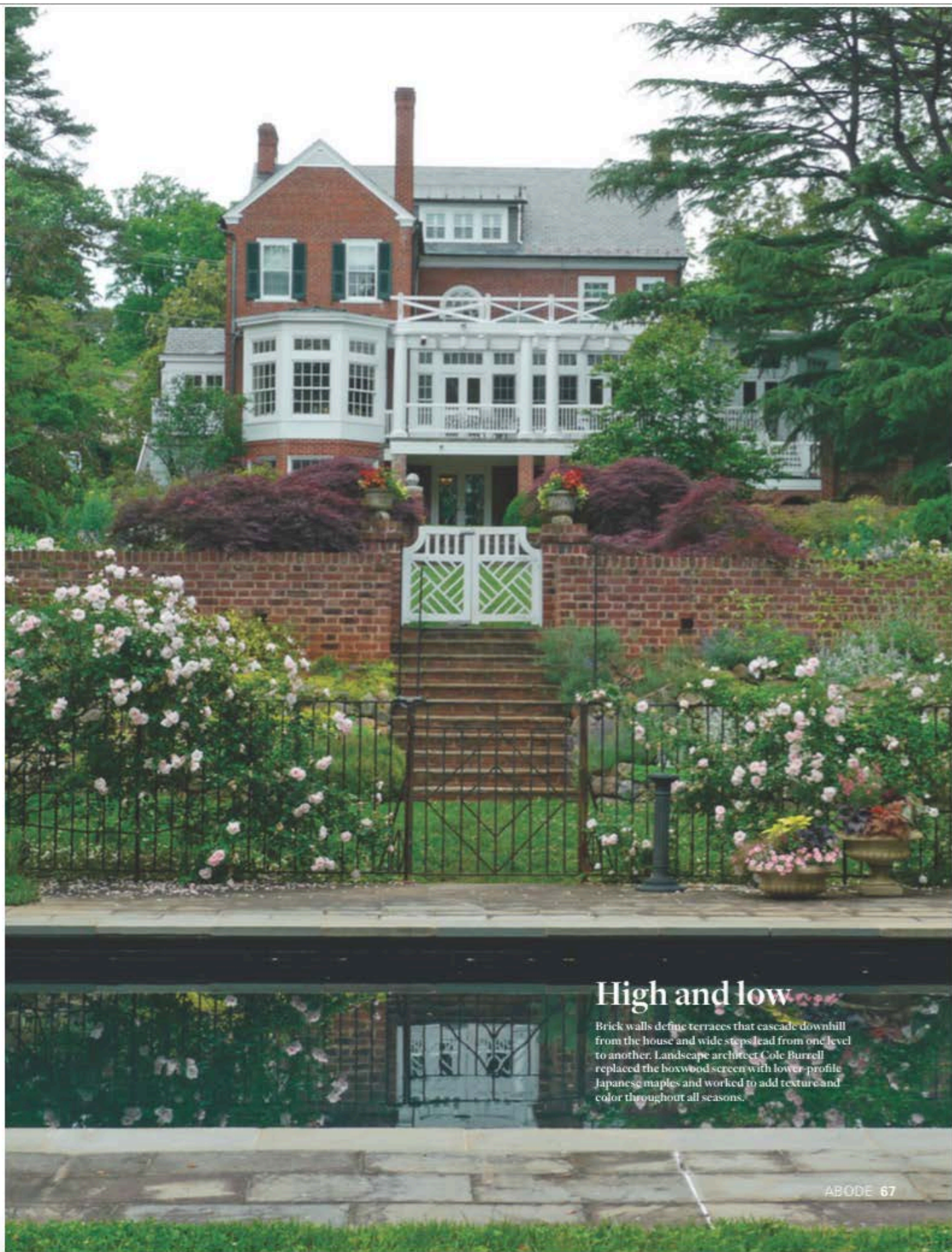


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Burrell created intimate moments throughout the garden, including installing a parterre with tulips at its center.





## High and low

Brick walls define terraces that cascade downhill from the house and wide steps lead from one level to another. Landscape architect Cole Burrell replaced the boxwood screen with lower-profile Japanese maples and worked to add texture and color throughout all seasons.





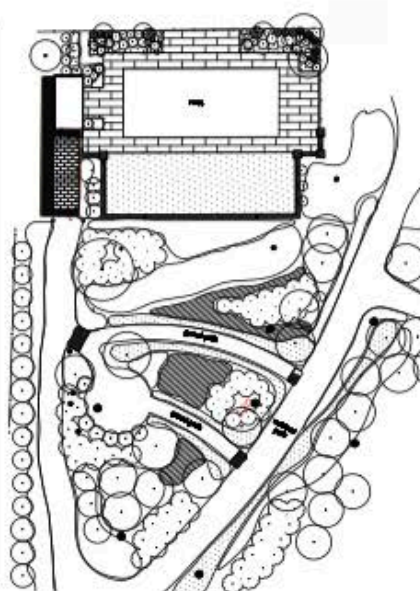
The woodland garden has dirt walkways curving organically among dogwoods, redbuds and wild azaleas.

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a laurel hedge and a line of hemlocks. "We were peeking through the hedge," said Burrell—and what they saw was a massive and intimidating stand of bamboo.

Again, the weather came to the rescue. Heavy, wet snow took down many of the bamboo stalks. "When we hauled out the downed bamboo," said the homeowner, "it was a revelation." Instead of removing it all, they could selectively cut, allowing clumps of bamboo to remain and define the structure of a woodland garden.

Today, the property's rear section has been considerably tamed, but still feels a delicious world apart from the neat geometry of the upper gardens. Whereas the landscape near the house is crisp and symmetrical, the woodland garden has dirt walkways curving organically among stands of bamboo and native trees. Rocks cleverly disguise a runoff channel from the nearby road as a pretty little stream. Mosses, ferns and



hellebores draw the eye to ground level, while birdsong laces through the trees overhead.

On a recent visit, just at the cusp of spring, Burrell and his client delighted in the appearance of snowdrops and crocuses, blooming happily in some of the perennial beds. Even as they assessed the effects of winter, they were planning plenty of projects for the upcoming warm season. Burrell would like to add native witch hazel, which will bloom in November, and plans to redo a rock garden above the pool with "millions of dwarf bulbs." And, he said, "editing" the bamboo is a monthlong annual process from April into May.

Burrell's client walks in her garden every morning, appreciating the small daily changes that mark the seasons. She has praise for the vision behind Burrell's work—even if that vision manifests itself only gradually. "Often Cole could see what it could be like," she said. "I often was resistant. I could only see what it was like now."

*Erika Howsare*