





Cynthia Knauf *Landscape Design*

BY SARAH ZOBEL

CREATING BEAUTY FOR HOME OWNERS & THE COMMUNITY



Cynthia Knauf spent childhood weekends

helping her father dig up and transplant trees around their property in eastern Pennsylvania. Fast-forward to 2012. Knauf is once again siting trees, but she's also installing shrubs, native plants, ponds, water walls, and hiking trails—as well as baseball and soccer fields. As the owner of her eponymous landscape design firm, Knauf (pronounced “noff”) creates unique outdoor spaces for residences, schools, businesses, and municipalities around Vermont and Quebec. ▶



A series of level outdoor spaces step down the steep slopes of this narrow, ridge-like property in Stowe, Vermont, all affording spectacular views to the ski trails on Mt. Mansfield. Photos by Susan Teare.



Fieldstone was gathered from the property for this net-zero home and landscape overlooking the Mad River in Vermont. Photos by Susan Teare.

An Open Mind & Love of Plants

It was not a straight path to landscape design for Knauf, who enrolled in Moravian College in Pennsylvania with plans to become a veterinarian—until she decided the science courses were too dry. She switched to journalism and found a post-graduation job with Rodale Press, where she stayed for eight years as an editor in

the direct-marketing department. An intended three-month sabbatical from Rodale to work as a naturalist for the Appalachian Mountain Club in the White Mountains turned into a two-year stay.

“It opened my mind to the possibilities,” says Knauf, explaining that at AMC she fully realized her love of plants and the outdoors,





and also discovered enjoyment in working on projects on both a broad, conceptual level and in greater detail. “A lot of landscape architecture is architecture and civil engineering, and that requires really getting into the details to make a space function.”

Knauf then earned a degree from Conway School of Landscape Design in western Massachusetts and continued north to Stowe, where she worked briefly for a land planner before joining forces with Ernie Ruskey, an architect, to form Ruskey-Knauf Associates. They collaborated on residential projects until Knauf established CKLD in 2005.

Beyond the Backyard

Knauf continues to work with architects on both new builds and renovations, specifically those who share her passion for green design and sustainability. Often that focus goes beyond—even above—the backyard; Knauf has designed two examples of what is perhaps the ultimate green build: a roof garden. One is atop the Burlington headquarters of environmentally sensitive household-products manufacturer Seventh Generation. The company’s goals were to have a rooftop patio where meetings could be conducted, but also where edibles could be grown. So among the ornamental grasses and flowers, Knauf made space for strawberries and blueberries. In keeping with both Knauf’s and Seventh Generation’s commitments to sustainability and staying local, the walkways are slate



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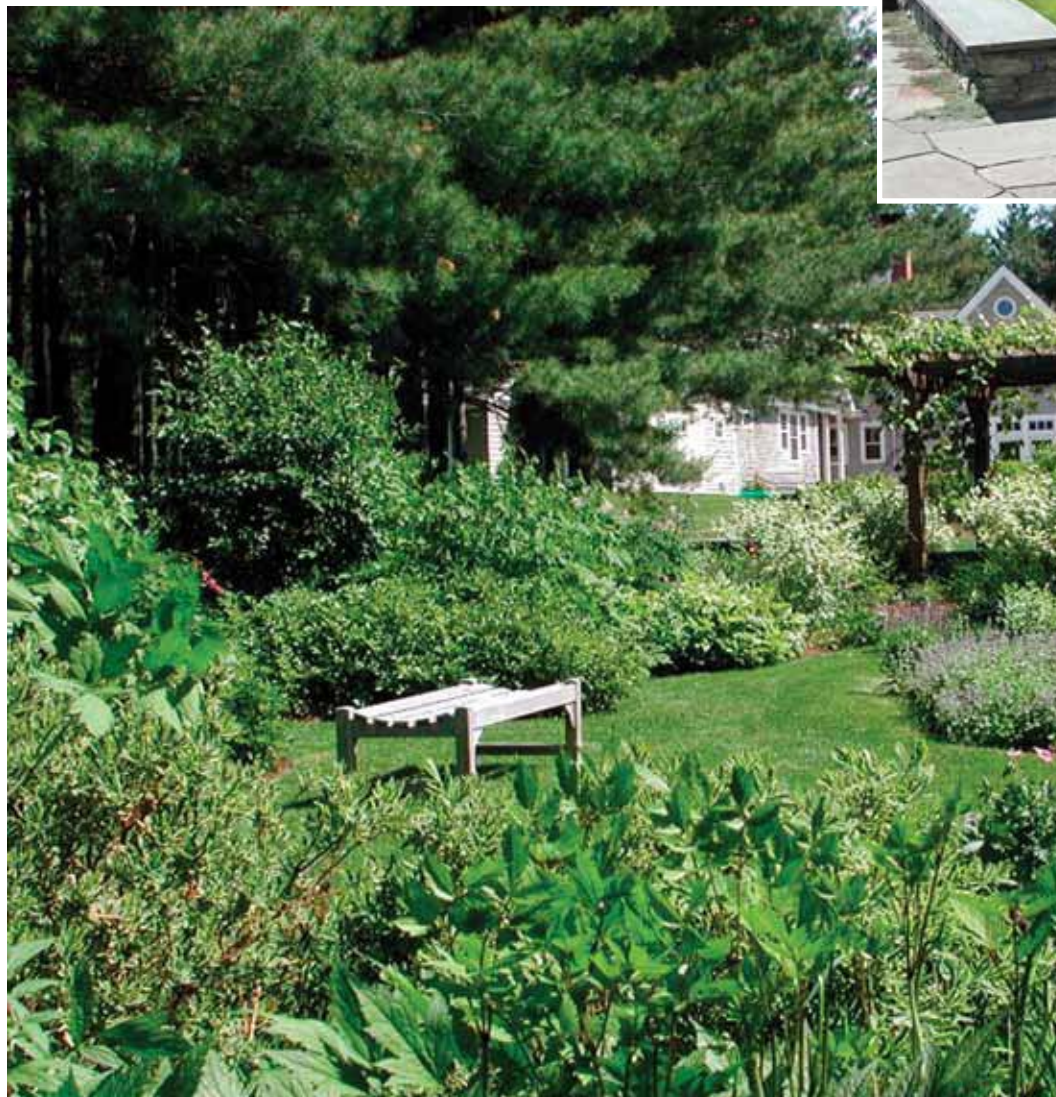


Owners of this family mountain retreat, which overlooks the Stowe Valley and Mt. Mansfield, enjoy the year-round color and interest of their gardens.

from southern Vermont, while the terraces are crafted of Barre granite.

The second of Knauf's roof gardens is atop a new net-zero (energy) house in Moretown. It helps moderate the temperature indoors; like most roof gardens, it also absorbs rainwater, releasing any overflow to the garden below through downspouts.

Such roofs, says Knauf, are easy to maintain once they've been established. The plants selected will depend on the depth of growth medium used, but they should be native to the area so they don't require special






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Overlapping textures and colors in the plants and stone of this Morrisville, Vermont, Japanese-style landscape mimic the patterns found in nature. Two small photos by Carolyn Bates.



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attention. Sedum is a popular roof choice, though with more medium it's possible to include shrubs—even small trees.

While roof gardens are not yet commonplace, Knauf expects to be called on to design more of them in the near future. “Home owners are really becoming curious about what, exactly, is green design,” she says, “and how a landscape can be sustainable and low maintenance.” They’re seeking Zen-like spaces outside their homes where they can enjoy peace and calm.

“I like finding opportunities for the home owner to enjoy everything on their property,” Knauf says. “I try to break it down to differ-



ent experiences; you can admire the view or the morning sun with a cup of coffee, or you can go to an intimate space where you feel wrapped in your garden and secure.”

A Variety of Projects

Knauf happily tackles properties of all sizes. Recent projects ranged from the revitalization of a backyard in Burlington’s Five Sisters neighborhood to the renovation of a landscape—including a pool, spa, and water wall, all within a half-acre—of a modern house in Montreal, and the comprehensive design of a 75-acre property in Stowe, complete with pond and hiking trails. ▶



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She's also collaborating with two colleagues to create a master plan for the village of West Dover, in the interest of making it more pedestrian friendly through narrower streets in the downtown area, more streetlights and sidewalks, and the planting of trees, whose canopies have a slowing effect on drivers. Municipal planning is nothing new to Knauf, who worked with a civil engineer on reclamation plans for a 15-acre site of tailings from an old talc mill in Johnson. That land now includes soccer and baseball fields, as well as a playground area, open spaces, and walking trails. Resort projects in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and Sonora, Mexico, have allowed Knauf to work in different climates and with diverse flora.

Regardless of a property's size, Knauf will first familiarize herself with the landscape to determine the various grades and which areas get the most sun and shade or are particularly dry or wet. Refining her initial big-picture concept, Knauf offers two or three proposals to the client, listens to their feedback, and revises to a final plan that they fully agree on.

"That's the most important thing," Knauf says. "The client has to be involved with it and know it's going to work for them." As for her own backyard, for now Knauf lives in a South End townhouse. There's just room for a small garden, which, given her busy work schedule, is just fine.



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