



Ted's water features are striking, and he designs paths through all parts of the garden.

The Artful

Ted Bair is what you might call a gardener's gardener.

He has crafted, along with partner Harvey Filister, an urban oasis filled with artfully pruned conifers and unique specimen trees coaxed into striking shapes and forms. Ponds brimming with friendly koi, a symphony of waterfalls

and features, pert perennials, bold containers, nearly 600 hosta varieties (all meticulously marked), sculptures with memories attached, and comfy seating areas from which to take in the vistas round out the scene.

A stone's throw from Lake Harriet in south Minneapolis, the gardens that



Sculptural,
colorful,
lovingly kept,
this garden
inspires and
awes.

Story and photos by
Eric Johnson



Sculpture and plants mingle in Ted's garden, such as this cherub near an Australian fern.

Gardener

surround Ted and Harvey's 20th century Tudor home have been a 17-year labor of love. The garden is Ted's second in Minneapolis, but he grew up gardening. His parents' yards in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana were happy, welcoming places.

"Most of the pictures I have of me

when I was young, I was in a diaper and sneakers in my mom's garden," he recalls. "When I grew my first garden on Park Avenue, I couldn't wait to have fox-gloves like my mom had because they are so tall. Well, they're not that tall; it's because I was just a kid. They just seemed so tall!"



Precisely pruned trees are at the core of Ted's garden. Pruning is done formally in front and in a more relaxed fashion behind his Tudor home.



Textures from stone, sculpture and greenery add to the beauty of Ted's garden.



Ted coaxed a weeping larch along an iron fence, creating a softer edge to the garden.

An Open Gate Policy

Ted's current garden is welcoming and happy, too. The summer brings a continuous parade of parties and tours, both planned and impromptu. Ted accommodates almost all his visitors, many of whom are neighborhood walkers he discovers with their faces pressed up to the cast iron fence. "At times I like privacy, but I really, really love sharing my garden," he says. "When you spend as much time as I do working on it, it helps keep you going."

If the garden gate is open and Ted is working, he will usually allow visitors to explore on their own. Self-guided tours work well because Ted's garden pulls visitors in and draws them through, with gentle twists and turns and sneak peeks of what is around the next corner. The property contains formal and informal elements, as well as Asian influences, but one style flows effortlessly into the next. The many vertical elements divide the space charmingly. "I wanted to make sure that it wasn't like a miniature golf course, with everything being separate," Ted says.

Ornately pruned hedges and topiaries, adding privacy, border the front gardens and also hint that something special lies beyond. The front entry garden is a valentine to one of Ted's passions—the growing and pruning of conifers—and is home to his personal favorite, a 'Mt. Vernon' Japanese white pine, with its colorful needles, interesting form,

and striking cones. "It is the one thing in my garden that I let be natural ... almost," he says. "I love the contrast of something so natural next to something that has been trimmed severely."

A tidily clipped 'PeeGee' hydrangea holds court, front and center, in the entry garden as it shows off interesting branching beneath its bushy top. "You have to prune it hard to get the great shape at the bottom," he says. "I only leave 6 inches of new growth every year. I love it and it's really pretty in the winter." Ted removes about a third of the buds in the early summer, which helps to create enormous blooms.

Follow the Path

A meandering path, flanked with a popping blend of 'Helmond Pillar' Japanese barberry, *Heuchera* 'Marmalade', and 'Catlin's Giant' ajuga, gently leads you to the back portion of the front garden. The combination recently replaced a row of golden yews Ted considered too structured. Towering columnar 'Maypole' crabapples add impact and vertical interest as they anchor the front garden. A weeping larch is coaxed along a fence and a weeping Norway spruce adorns an arbor, creating a softening, garland effect.

The front garden is also home to a pristine maze of boxwood hedges with four stone cherubs at the corners and a 'Miss Kim' lilac grafted onto a standard as a topiary focal point. Delicate



Ted Bair in his garden.

Clematis viticella 'Alba Luxurians' works its way up two structures. When asked how he goes about his intricately designed gardens, Ted responds: "I oftentimes will sketch an idea out, but I always will make changes as I go. While I was pruning the lilac, I noticed a branch sticking up and thought, 'Maybe I should do a second story!'" Like the PeeGee hydrangea, the branching is a large part of what makes the specimen attractive. "To see it in the winter, with snow on it, is just beautiful. Even better when a cardinal lands in it," he says.

'Degroot's Spire' arborvitae line much of the border of the front garden, offering up drama and a little extra privacy. It is the only type of arborvitae Ted grows. No winter protection is necessary, and they easily retain their tall, slender shape.

A manicured *Magnolia acuminata* lives near the front of the house. Harvey surprised Ted with the specimen one day, and without knowing for sure what it was, Ted planted it. The first year, it grew to the gutters. Instead of tearing it out, Ted pollard it—a method of shaping trees by cropping the branches. Every winter, he prunes the magnolia back to the top of its 5-foot trunk and it lives happily as a small specimen tree.

The southwest corner of the property is home to a massive pool of koi, used for quarantining newly acquired fish. (Ted



Martagon lilies and a variety of hostas give color to a shady corner of the garden.



The back garden has an Asian aesthetic with northern plants.



Three types of ajuga mingle along a stone path.



Koi swim under a bridge in the back garden.

and Harvey trek to Japan most Octobers to purchase koi.) “Koi are like a pack of dogs, each with its own personality,” says Ted, who occasionally takes a dip with the koi in the back garden ponds. An antique stone fountain (originally from Italy and purchased by Ted’s friend at a St. Paul estate sale of another great local gardener) circulates the water.

The Second Show

As you wind your way along the side of the house, under an enormous large leaf linden, you get the feeling that another curtain is about to rise. Two gentle lions (gifts from a friend who was moving into an apartment and had to give up his garden) guard the passageway. You turn the corner and you get a big “ta-da.”

The back garden is less formal than the front, and consists of meandering paths leading around and over two ponds and a winding stream. “You would think that with us having a Tudor house, I would be drawn to a more formal English look, but I just can’t limit myself like that, especially with the Asian influence from our visits to Japan,” Ted says. You pass many Japanese maples, more conifers, sculptures, countless hostas, Martagon lilies (and other shade-loving perennials) and a patio, ending in a Japanese-inspired, artfully eclectic garden structure and a secret garden.

Australian tree ferns are stunning at 6 feet in height as they display them-

selves near a cherub sculpture. The emerging fiddleheads are sculpture, too. Ted overwinters the ferns in his basement, cutting off their fronds and removing them from the soil. “When they emerge in the spring, they are the sorriest-looking things,” he says. Within a month, they are back in their glory. A ‘Tina’ crabapple anchors a neighboring bed. Ted controls the tree’s growth habit with copper wire, much like a bonsai artist, and the tree’s lateral, Asian-inspired shape is stunning thanks to, as Ted puts it, “torturing it to tears.”

Waves of *Ajuga* ‘Chocolate Chip,’ ‘Bronze Beauty,’ and ‘Black Scallop’ weave their way throughout a path of Asian steppingstones, around patches of yellow, green, and blue hostas. The backyard is a tapestry of color and texture, thanks in large part to the varying colors of conifers, the Martagon lilies, and the many varieties of hostas. When *The Hosta Journal*, the publication of the American Hosta Society, profiled private hosta gardens in America, Ted’s was on the list, primarily for his use of hostas in the garden’s design.

One particular hosta stunner is ‘Gunther’s Prize’. With its mottled chartreuse and forest green streaks, it stands out from a distance and is enchanting up close. ‘Gunther’s Prize’ was acquired during a visit to its namesake, Gunther Stark, a famed hosta breeder near Des Moines, Iowa, when



Harvey convinced him to sell them an eye. Streaked and yellow hostas are Harvey's favorites, and blues are Ted's favorites, so the union is perfect.


As you stroll through the back garden, points of interest are at every step. Dwarf Japanese white pine, weeping larch, blue spruce, a hackberry, *Abies koreana* 'Horstmann's Silberlocke', magnolia, and Japanese tree lilac fill the densely planted space. As you work your way to the pinnacle of the back garden, you find yourself at the eclectic garden structure, complete with a large vintage stained glass window featuring one of Ted's favorite creatures, the peacock. Sitting in the structure, one has a sweeping view of the entire back garden, including the statue of a winged angel that Ted installed in honor of his mom and dad.

The Secret Garden

At the far back of the garden is a secret space, so peaceful you would never guess you are 4 feet from a city street. "You can't beat the morning hours in the garden with the sounds of the birds and the water," says Ted. "It's so peaceful and so beautiful, even before the sun." A 'Purple Fountain' beech is a focal point and weeping crabapples enclose the space.

Gardening is a hands-on affair for Ted and he loves sharing this with people. "I always say, you can buy a garden, but

it's not the same," he says. "It's about living in it and working in it over the years. When you actually work in your garden, you have so many more opportunities to happen upon beautiful views.

"I think of my garden as my art. You can't hire someone to do your art. I like getting things small and working with them. You have to let something grow into its space and then it just seems right." 

Minneapolis-based garden writer and designer Eric Johnson blogs at www.gardendrama.com.



Boldly designed containers create focal points.



Ted prunes trees and shrubs, such as this PeeGee hydrangea, to create the shapes he wants.