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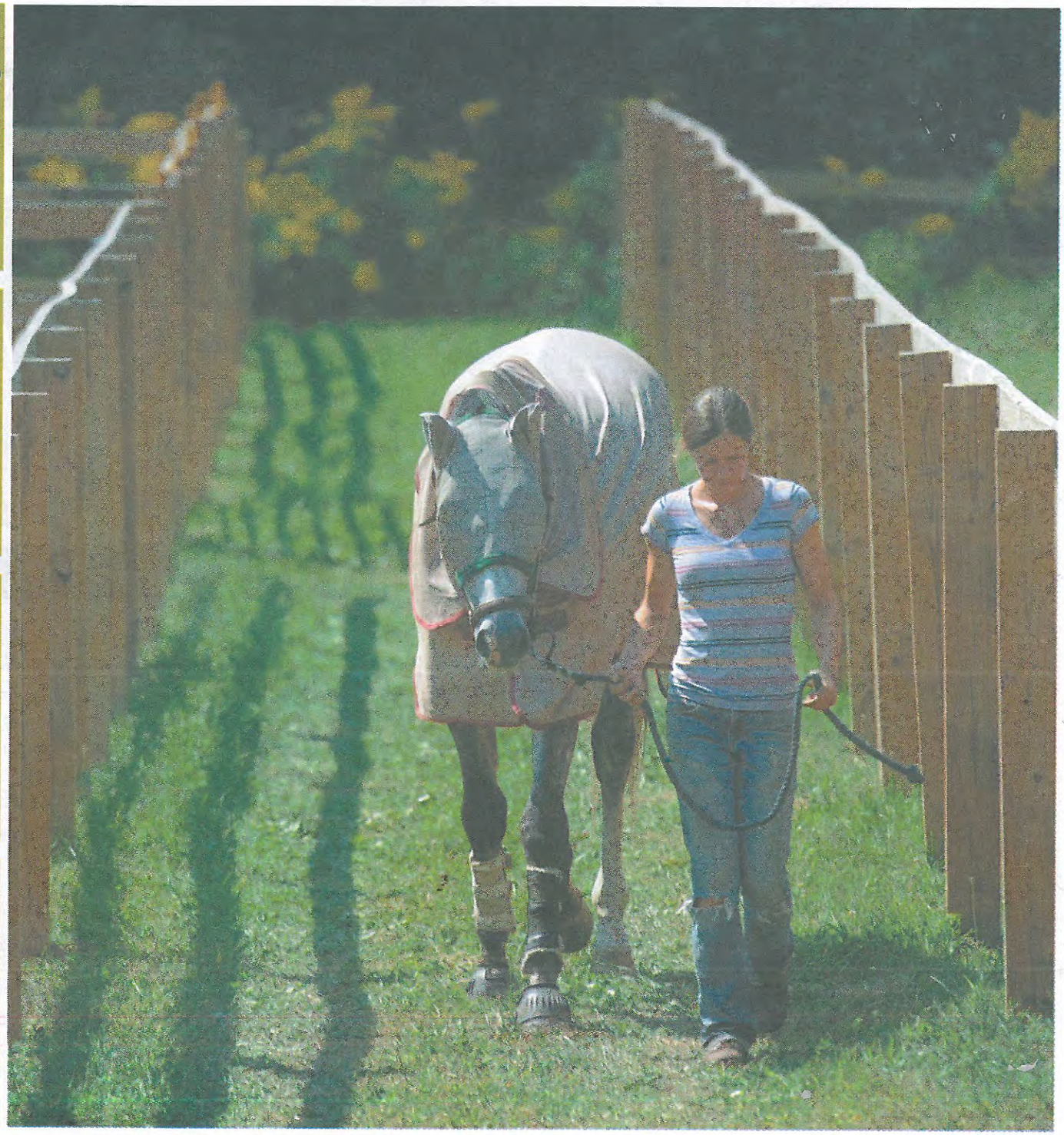
THE LITCHFIELD COUNTY TIMES MONTHLY

'Favorite Room' Is for Riding In Litchfield

Artist of the Air From Cornwall Has New Book

Salsa Spices Up New Milford; Homemade Jam

Antiques Show In Washington; Bunny Williams



WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY **Tovah Martin**

Bunny Williams' Litchfield Aid

Birthdays are always big moments, and when you turn 100, why not invite an icon to help celebrate? In the Litchfield Garden Club's case, they went straight for Bunny Williams to kick off their centennial year.

Prepare to have your design mojo updated and your outdoor vision extended, because Bunny Williams will be delivering a presentation entitled "Gardening Inside and Out" to the Litchfield Garden Club on Oct. 19 at 2 p.m., and the public is invited to join the festivities.

By launching its centennial with Litchfield County's own much-loved decorator and tastemaker, the Litchfield Garden Club is looking both ways—forward and back. After all, Ms. Williams has a timeless style that refuses to be cubby-holed. With offices in New York City, but also deeply embroiled in an affair with a certain Falls Village house, she is that rare blend of country and cosmopolitan, casu-

Above, left and facing page, scenes from the Falls Village garden of renowned designer Bunny Williams. Below left, Ms. Williams in her garden, in a photo she provided.

al but swank.

Her décor straddles the line between traditional, fresh and forward-thinking, with comfort being the common denominator. Long ago, she began translating her concepts to the outdoors. Yes, she's among this country's most prominent interior designers. However, all that she's learned from crafting her dashing interiors can be translated outside.

We're talking about 22 years at Parish-Hadley Associates, followed by 24 years at her own firm of Bunny Williams, Inc. Four years ago, she introduced BeeLine Home—her home furnishings collection.

This would be the same Bunny Williams who founded the trendsetting, much-imitated charity event Trade Secrets. The Bunny Williams of whom we speak is also the owner (with her husband, John Rosselli) of the Treillage Ltd. garden antiques shops. She is the author of ▶ 42

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◀ 41 four books and the recipient of numerous awards, including inclusion in the Interior Design Hall of Fame. And now, she's taking the stage to share a formula for design that's equally valid in your living room or your back patio.

There's nothing new about pairing Ms. Williams with the great outdoors. She has always made the leap between home and garden. For her, it was not much of a stretch. "When you're in a garden that's intimate and well-designed," she says, "you're enveloped by the space. It's like a room."

Of course, Ms. Williams is the first to admit that throwing open the doors to the outside was not necessarily a seamless segue. She had to learn the ropes first-hand. But her own personal garden in Falls Village attests to the fact that she tamed the beast and then some.

How she successfully taught herself to garden and then mastered landscape design was the topic addressed in her first book, "On Garden Style" (Simon & Schuster, 1998), and it will updated in this lecture. It also bears witness to what she's discovered by exploring further playgrounds. In addition to her Falls Village triumph, Ms. Williams has added a garden around her Dominican Republic home to her list of accomplishments.

The creation of her gardens has been a gradual series of lessons. Like most gardeners, Ms. Williams readily admits, "My first love was flowers." So she was a collector, which can run interference with savvy design. Beyond that, "I liked the physical act of gardening—getting my hands dirty. My hobby is my garden and my home." The trick lay in indulging all of her passions, while discovering how to make them do her bidding, and please her eye.

For example, when she first started gardening, Ms. Williams fell into the same foxhole that swallows up most beginners in the field. "So much of design is getting scale right," she discovered. By her own standards, her initial attempt at herbaceous borders, "looked dinky" and required a couple of expansions before their heft played out properly to offset the house.

Now, at 40 feet long and six feet deep, the borders feel right. But as a result, she also had to rethink her plant palette. As much as she loves dianthus, that plant did not make a loud

Above and below, more scenes from the garden.

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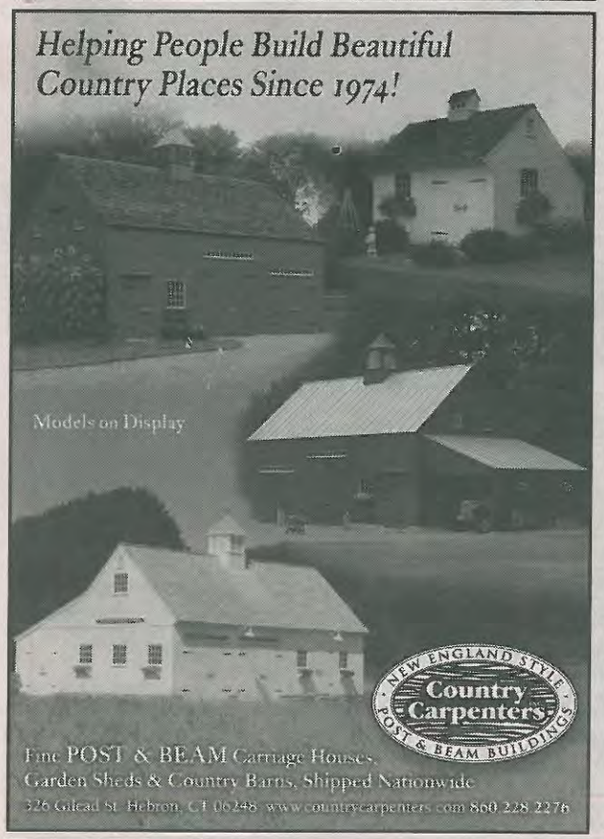

enough statement for her border. Instead, she had to go large. A few perennials grow sufficiently buxom (Joe Pye weeds come to mind) to balance out the equation, but for the most part, she found herself working with fast-growing tropicals such as bananas and colocasias to do the heavy lifting.

Professionally, Ms. Williams can mesh with any style her clients want her to assume inside their homes. But personally (and the Williams/Rosselli garden is very personal), she's not a minimalist. Her gardens are highly complex; they embrace anyone who enters into the domain and the dialogue. That said, architecture has everything to do with the equation. Although she learned a lot by trial and error in her own landscapes, she also gathered input. For that, she cast a broad net. "You want to look at Italian gardens," she suggests. "They're totally about architectural moments." But then, you might consult French designs, "We learned about parterres from the French," she says, explaining that parterres are all about blocks and squares—critical concepts for configuring a scene. Combine those catalysts with British gardens—which are notoriously lush and quirky—and you have a sturdy jumping off point.

Another error commonly committed with the rush to cover ground is the lack of quiet space between visual events. "Gardens need voids," Ms. Williams discovered. And the eye isn't the only part of the body that requires rest. "Furniture allows you to stay there. That's the way you spend time in a garden." But it's not just about benches. "An intimate object draws you through a garden. I love to look at a sculpture garden. It enhances the landscape."

Ms. Williams also firmly believes in the strength of serenity. Dramatic isn't necessarily the right mood for an outdoor space, "Sometimes, it's best not to make a statement," Ms. Williams discovered.

Put it all together (or as Ms. Williams puts it, "knit them together"), add personality, and you come up with an outdoor room. With gardening, it isn't always instant gratification. Sometimes it takes time and chemistry to grow into the garden of your dreams. But, it always helps to have a great coach. And who better than Bunny Williams to lead the way?

'You want to look at Italian gardens. They're totally about architectural moments.'

Your garden needs for you to attend this lecture. Where else would you ever find this sort of transformational wisdom for only $40? That's the ticket price for the Litchfield Garden Club's Bunny Williams lecture and reception. It takes place at 2 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 19, at the Litchfield Inn, located at 432 Bantam Road in Litchfield. Seating is limited and the deadline to register is Oct. 12. To register, contact Joan Burgess at joangyorburgess@gmail.com or call 860-567-2270. The proceeds will benefit the Litchfield Garden Club Centennial Fund. ■

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