



# NEIGHBORING LANDSCAPES

Sharing the border instead of drawing the line

Story and Photos By Garry Menendez

As shown above, privacy can still be maintained without a yard becoming too fortress-like.

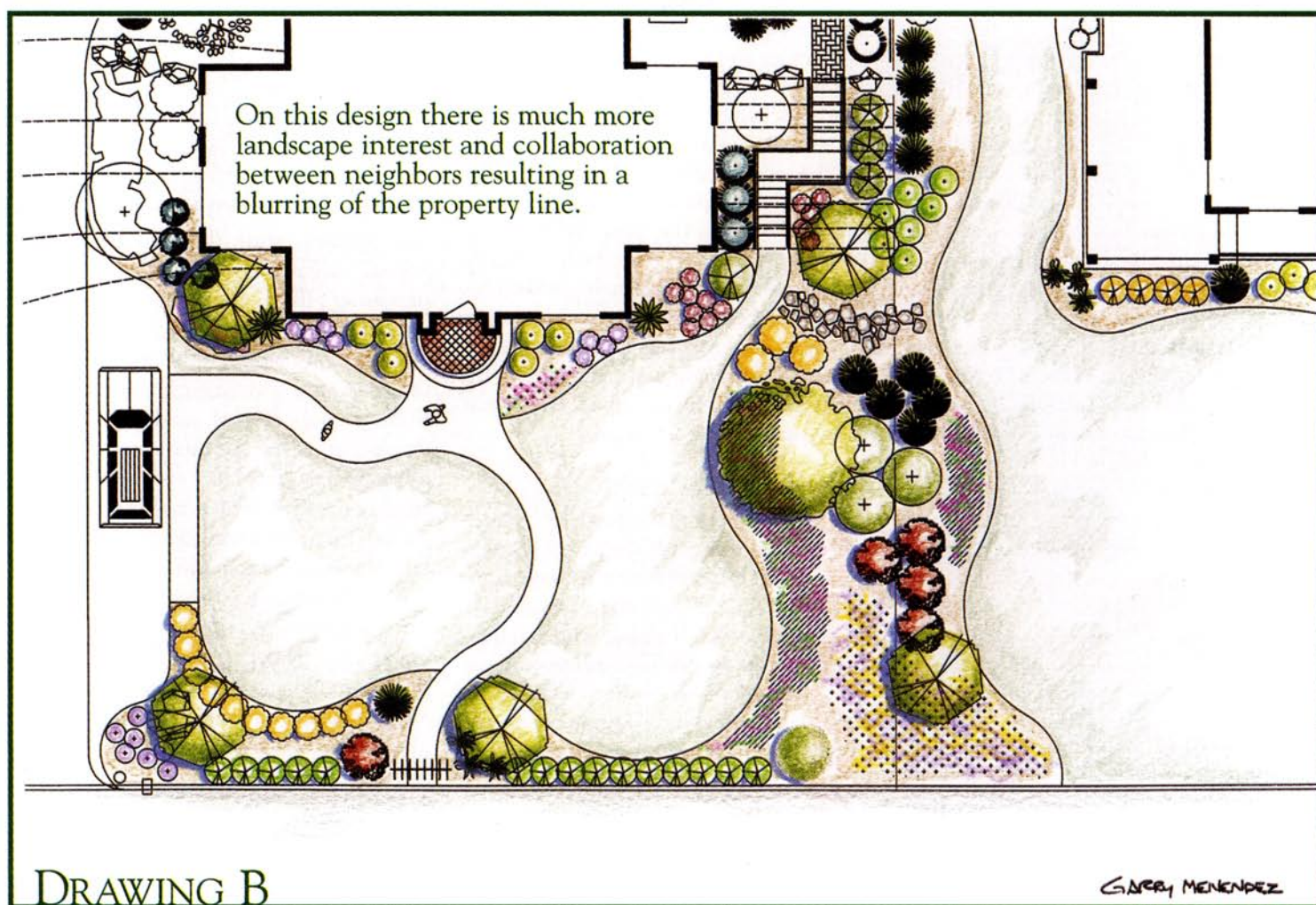
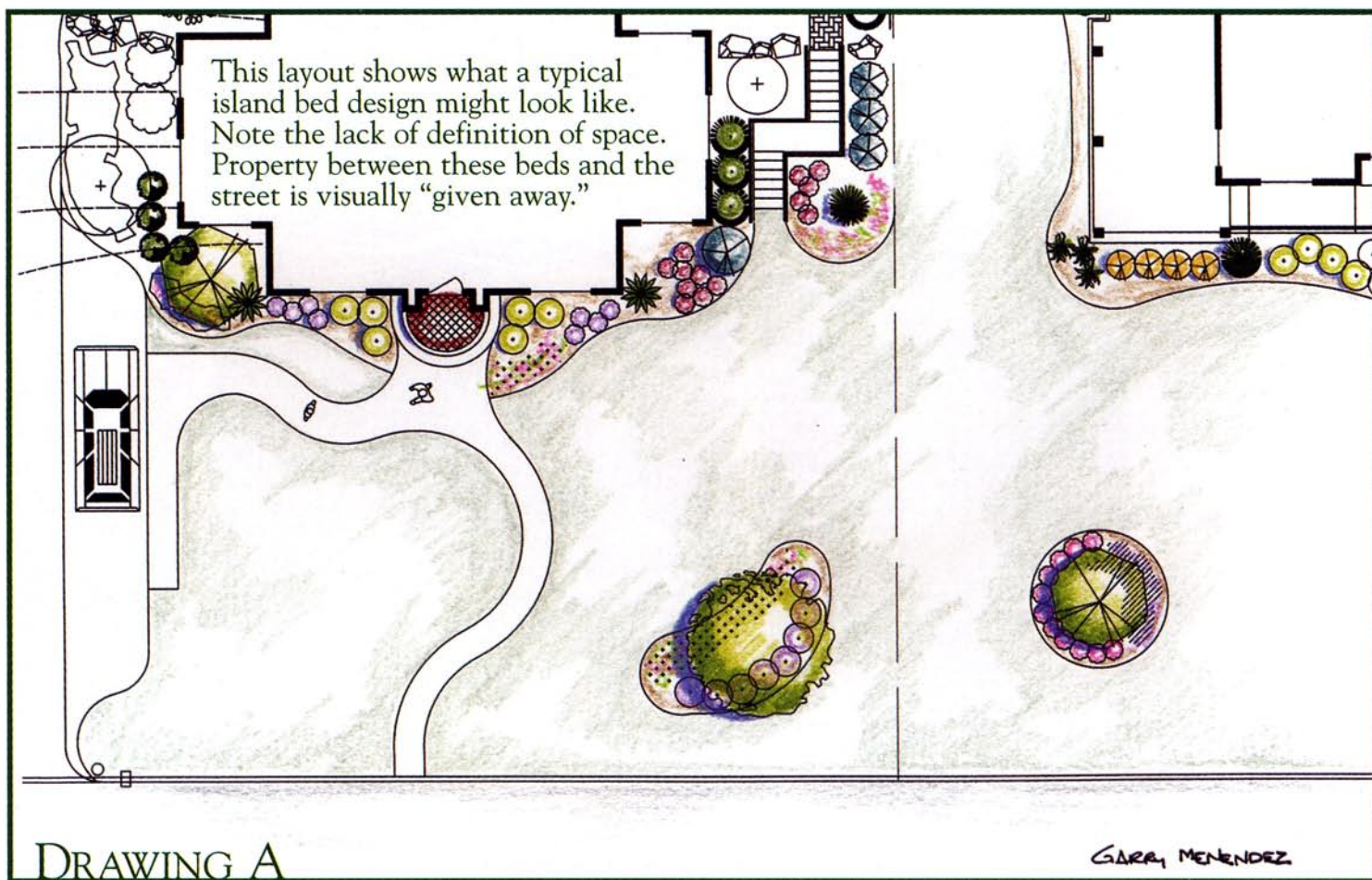
I've heard it said before that everyone has two property lines—there's the one you own and the one you mow. It's very hard to argue the fact that we are a territorial species. There exists at least one guy in every subdivision who has perfected the technique of exact lawn fertilization. We'll call him "Green Man". Green Man doesn't use a cyclone-type spreader to keep his lawn lush. He

carefully guides a drop spreader along his property line and applies just the right amount of lawn food to make his yard glow like a leprechaun on St. Patrick's day while his neighbor's lawn looks sick by comparison.

There is a better way to look at the landscape along property lines and it can be summed up in one word—collaboration. I not only feel that there is way

too much mown turfgrass in the American landscape, but there is also a lack of imagination on how to landscape along borders. Now please understand that the information that follows assumes you get along with your neighbor and that you both have at least a moderate interest in landscaping. With that being said, here are some thoughts to ponder.







This rustic arbor on the property line serves as a gateway from one front yard to another. ►



## DON'T GIVE IT AWAY

Aside from the standard landscaping along the front foundation, the plantings in many suburban landscapes look very similar. We tend to place a “decorative” tree\* or two in the front yard and plant some token shrubs or flowers beneath (\*decorative meaning flowering and short lived vs. legacy trees meaning they will outlast you and your grandchildren). You’ve no doubt seen these kidney bean beds. It’s not so much the shape of these islands that bugs me but the way they appear to visually give away part of the yard to the neighbor. A viewer’s eyes will take in these plantings, the space between them and the house as being one landscape, and see the area behind these beds to the property line or street as being another. When I design, I have a tendency to define a pleasing shape of lawn and then concentrate heavy plantings nearer the perimeter. This method maximizes the use of space and doesn’t visually give away any property (see drawings). Keep this in mind: often the shape of the lawn is more important than the shape of the beds. Smaller, high quality areas of turfgrass become a piece of art in themselves.

## AWKWARD ANGLES

I know what you’re saying. That’s all well and good but having beds that abruptly stop at the property line aren’t any friendlier than Green Man’s fertilization

practices. You’re right and this leads to the heart of this article. Rather than have beautifully curved beds slam into the property line resulting in some often very awkward angles and straight bed edges, talk to your neighbor about collaborating on some planting schemes. Ideally some of the same species being used on both lots will help to blur the separation. Just as we tend to layer our foundation plant material based on height (shorter in the front, taller toward the back) this same graduation of height may also work on these shared beds. I say “may” work because most of us desire more privacy in our backyards in which case the ultimate plant height will be taller than the border plantings in the front yard where privacy may not be as crucial.

## KEEPING THE ACCESS

“Good fences make good neighbors.” The same is true with regard to planting design. I am very fortunate to have some great neighbors. I hope many of you have the same situation. If you do, you will need to think about access. That is, how can you travel next door to borrow, let’s say an anvil, without having to walk out to the street and then up your neighbor’s drive or walk to get there. Simple stepping stones or a short crushed stone path will usually do the trick. I have actually built an arbor between my yard and my neighbor’s (my dentist, who knows a lot more about peren-

nials than I do by the way). Being able to move comfortably between spaces is crucial in any landscape design. What if you don’t quite get along with your neighbor? Plant for versatility. One day some folks you really enjoy may move into that house, in which case hopefully both of you will want a shortcut to next door.

## THE BUNNIES WILL THANK YOU

An interesting thing happens when enough folks in your community start designing their properties as I have described here. You will begin to enjoy the benefits of miniature wildlife corridors. The disappearance of so many little critters and birds in suburbia is attributed to the destruction of habitat (and cats). By recreating green “ribbons” throughout your neighborhood you will not only provide the shelter these creatures need, but will also have created safe zones in which they may travel without being threatened by mowers, weed whackers or other destructive noise-makers. Neighboring landscapes can be both beautiful and ecologically beneficial. I feel the same way about diversity in my plantings as I do about cheese, the more the merrier. Now go talk to your neighbor. 🐰

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