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Sam Allen's Home

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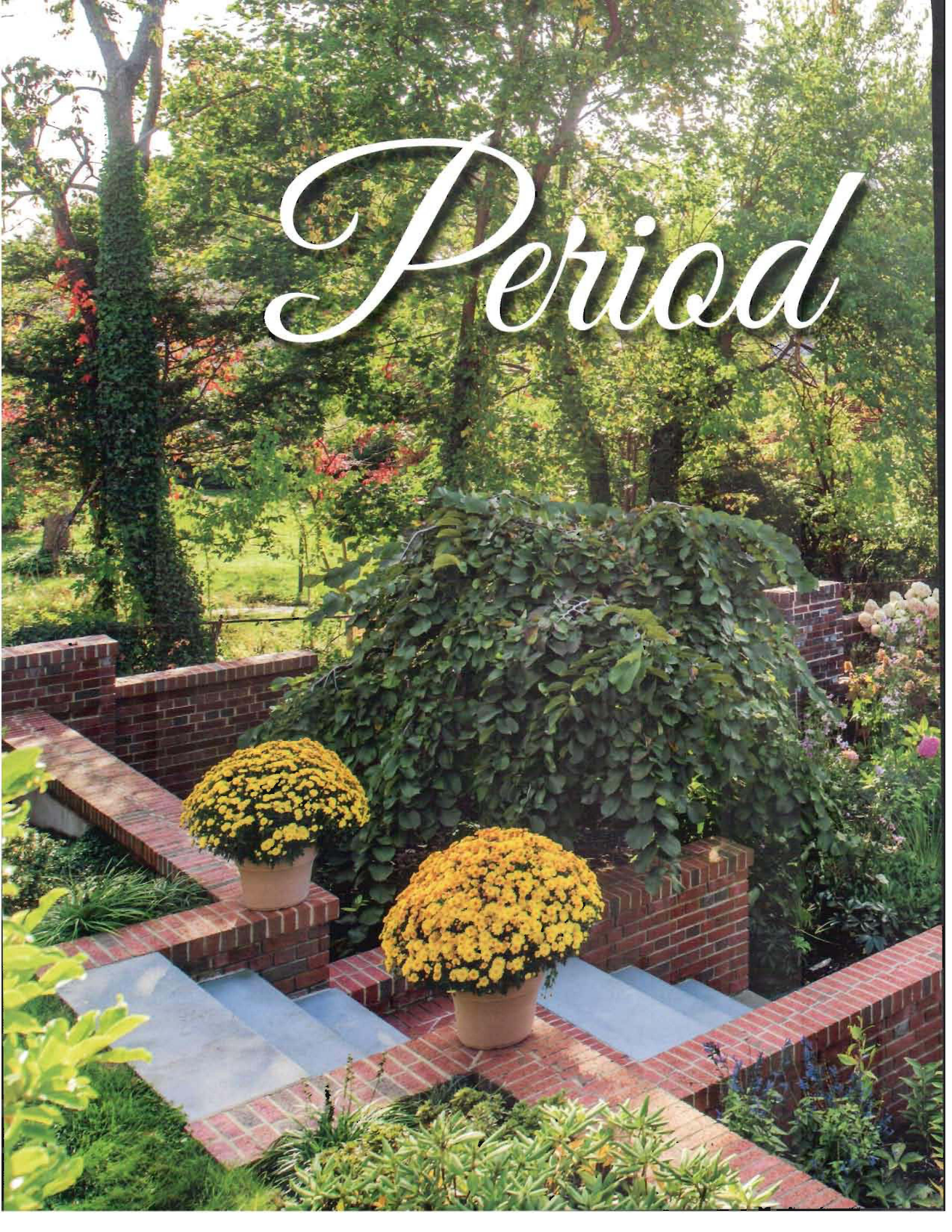
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Period





Perfect

A property once slated for demolition gets a new life, complete with billowing hydrangeas and a parade of mums lining the walkway.

By Tovah Martin
Photography By Rob Cardillo



This page above: Down a series of steps from the house, a promenade area/pet romping lawn is surrounded by deep beds of shrubs and perennials. Below, clockwise: Japanese anemones, Salvia guaranitica 'Black & Blue', blushing hydrangea blossoms, and red-twigged dogwood. Opposite page: In keeping with the nature-focused arts-and-crafts style, a bank of windows looks outward on the backyard garden. In autumn, a parade of chrysanthemums line the side walkway, leading the way to the lower garden.

No wonder neighbors stop to thank James Trosino and Robert Alan. Given a major facelift and surrounded by a befitting garden, their house, designed by Wilson Eyre Jr., looks decidedly swank nowadays. When the weeping willow in back blanches yellow and the London plane tree in front begins to go russet, the property is a head-turner. But most of the neighborhood can remember when the property looked like it was destined for a very different ending.

Although the house had fallen into disrepair, when word spread that plans were being made to demolish the Yonkers work of Philadelphia-based Wilson Eyre Jr. (1855–1944), one of the country's more prominent shingle-style architects, the neighborhood rallied to save the corner mansion. Apparently, ownership of the English manor-style house and its 0.7 acres had fallen to the State of New York. A developer was planning to take down what had become a crumbling eyesore and build four new homes on the site when the neighborhood swung into action. Preservation good Samaritans started the process of securing historic landmark status for the home originally built



in 1910. Eventually, they achieved their goal, and the house was declared an official landmark.

Meanwhile, Trosino and Alan were living in San Francisco and missing their native East Coast. When a friend suggested Yonkers, they began talking to Realtors and the seemingly ill-fated house came across their radar.

Worse than a fixer-upper, the property was a wreck. "It was like walking through a jungle," Trosino says. "But the house had tremendous character, and bones were intact." They made an offer. They closed on the house in January 2008, and renovation began later the same year. But that was just the beginning of the saga.

What followed was a lot of scurrying to render the structure livable. Then, with the interior restored, they were ready to look outward. In the fall of their first year in residence, Trosino and Alan contacted Robert Welsch of Westover Landscape Design.

The house came with "a staggering number of trees," Trosino recalls. "Our goal was to save as many as we could." But when they called tree



experts onto the scene, the trees were declared unsalvageable. That diagnosis was corroborated by the Yonkers Landmark Preservation Board, which gave permission for their removal. For better or worse, that left Welsch with a blank canvas.

Their goal was to give back to their neighborhood with a proud planting that would look prime 365 days a year. They wanted winter interest, and Welsch answered that request with the installation of a cryptomeria, Leyland cypress, and Norway spruces—fast-growing conifers that add bulk. They asked for a major spring explosion of flowers in the front yard, and Welsch planted a battalion of daffodils and alliums for color. And they wanted billowing trees and shrubs that could be seen above the fence line that would add greenery in summer and then turn fiery shades by fall, so Welsch furnished a heaping helping of hydrangeas, weeping willow, dogwoods, and magnolias. Their other request was a personal one—they wanted a pet-friendly backyard for their dogs. "We wanted a place where dogs could be dogs." And ditto for their own comfort—the backyard needed to be user-friendly, not just pretty to look at.

The solution was a tidy front presentation with a driveway/parking area, walkways neatly edged in brick, and a stretching flat lawn surrounded by planting beds with a promenade walkway in the back.

There was another major rule—the landscape needed to feel authentic to the original era of the house. That translates into simple perennials with historic roots such as daphne, lady's mantle, asters, salvias, and lilies. Shrubs and trees were installed three years later because of a necessary drainage installation and the rebuilding of crumbling stone walls. Welsch chose a prevalence of recently improved updates on the old-fashioned hydrangea theme. *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Limelight' has easier upkeep, denser canopies, and blossoms from midsummer to autumn. Rapidly gaining a dense mass of leaves and quickly producing a crowning cap of flowers, hydrangeas are like instant padded walls for street noise reduction. Similarly, the Camperdown elm, magnolias, weeping willows, and dogwoods were obtained as sizeable plants, but they also gain girth rapidly for instant gratification.

"It's magical," Trosino says. "Whenever you see it, you see something new. The backyard is the quietest part of the property. When you're down there, you can escape from the world." To complete the escape, they asked Welsch to take a formerly closed-sided shed and turn it into an arts-and-crafts-style pavilion large enough to host lounging chairs and side tables. That's where they spend their spare time, watching the dogs romp.

The result is just the right ratio to complement but not overwhelm the house with plants. Rampant vines will probably never be allowed on the premises again. Meanwhile, the fascination continues throughout the seasons. This restoration is built for today as well as tomorrow. 