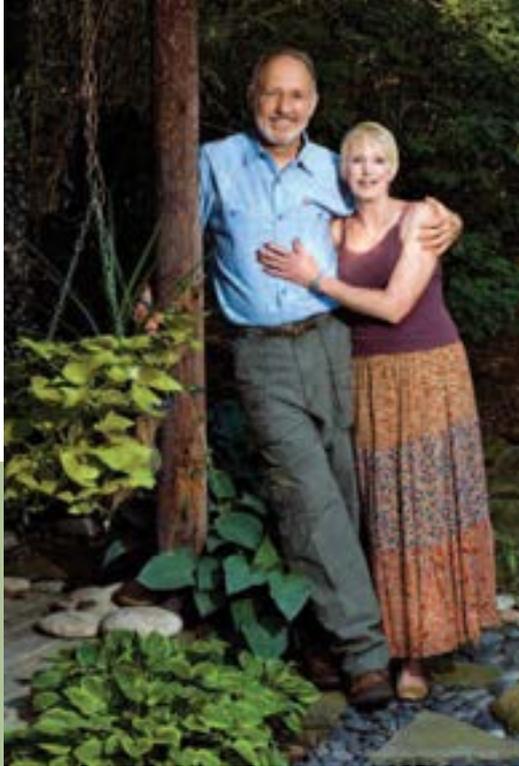




PEACEFUL PATHWAY | A Japanese garden was the first design element created in the back yard of Dr. Frank and Nancy Emert. The couple, who've each earned the title of Advanced Master Gardener, commissioned a Japanese tea house for the garden. Staghorn sumac trees and mossy boulders create the perimeter for the garden's goldfish pond. The bamboo "deer scare" is strategically placed to ward off trespassers. At right is a section of a stone terrace, built from salvaged architectural material.



For 34 years, Dr. Frank and Nancy Emert
have cultivated many hidden

Paths of Least Resistance

BY KATIE HALE • PHOTOS BY PAUL VAN HOY & LORRIE FOSTER



While completing his ophthalmology residency at the University of Missouri, Dr. Frank Emert Jr. took a leap of faith and asked a young surgical nurse on a date. Inviting her to his home, he told her he'd likely be in the back yard working until she arrived.

When she pulled up to his house, she found him hauling heavy railroad ties, arranging them to make raised flowerbeds. "Frank invited me to help," Nancy Emert recalls 34 years later. "I couldn't resist." It was the beginning of a great love affair, with each other and with gardening.

For three decades, the Emerts have designed, built and nurtured a series of backyard gardens, making each one bigger and better. It's culminated in their present "backyard" garden – nearly six acres of lushly landscaped lawn, divided into a series of smaller gardens, ranging from an intricately arranged Japanese garden laden with symbolism, to an inviting expanse of well-manicured grass affectionately dubbed "Dixie Land" in honor of a long-time neighbor, Dixie Davis, whose back yard they purchased after Davis died.



TOP PHOTO BY LORRIE FOSTER. BOTTOM PHOTOS BY PAUL VAN HOY.



HOW THE GARDEN GROWS | On nearly six-acres of land, the Emerts' garden includes winding walking paths, including one, at right, that begins near the back deck of the home. At bottom far left, a cypress-mulch path winds through the garden's "rooms." At bottom left is an "island" of cactus. Above, the path is broken into pieces, symbolizing the belief that life's path is often difficult, while the carefully manicured path of white rocks, at left, symbolizes a smiting by the gods.

The design of the Emerts' home and garden fascinates, thanks to a series of purchases of property they've made through the years. After moving to Vincennes in 1974, where Emert set up his medical practice, the ophthalmologist and his wife found an old dilapidated house in a neighborhood they loved. They discovered the house was beyond repair, tore it down and built in its place a new home set far back from the street. The home came with two acres of land, which they began to landscape, beginning at first with the Japanese garden. Through the years, they bought surrounding property, expanding the garden as they went, working closely with Dallas Foster, a professional landscaper with offices in Evansville and Vincennes.

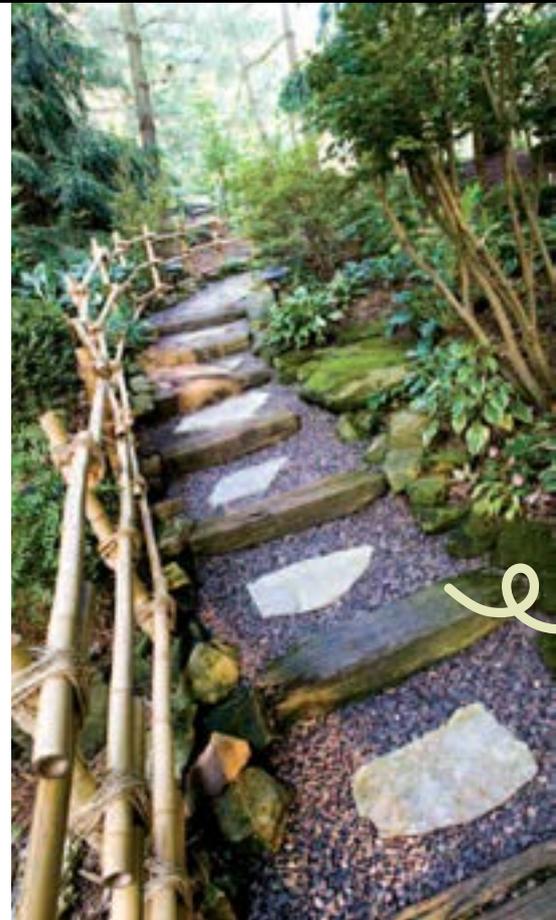
The Emerts' garden now touches upon 15 neighboring pieces of property. In essence, all of their neighbors have the Emerts' garden in their own back yards.

"Our neighbors do love it," Nancy says. Especially since the Emerts also enjoy engaging in the work it takes to maintain the garden, designed so that it's blooming

TOP PHOTO BY PAUL VAN HOY. LEFT PHOTO BY LORRIE FOSTER



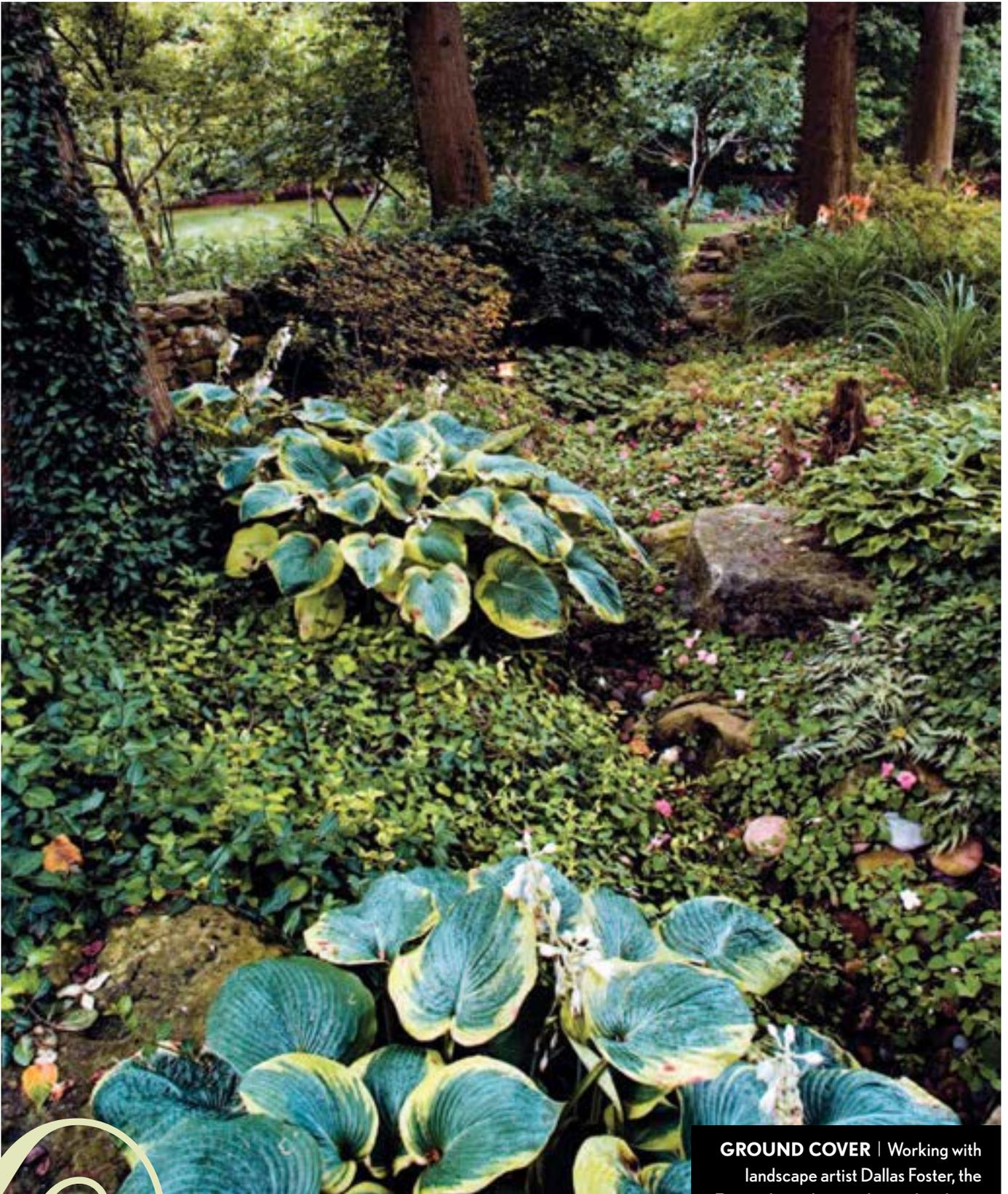
HIDEAWAY | Sandstone stepping stones, at top left, lead to a deck at the back of the home. Above is a sundial, set amidst the perennial and rose gardens. Left, a cedar arbor creates a welcoming entrance to “Dixie Land.” Below, are the winding steps in the Japanese garden that lead to an abundant vegetable garden which provides ingredients used in the Emerts’ private-label salsa, dubbed “Emert’s Own.”



from spring to fall. “Preening and pruning your garden makes you appreciate it even more,” Frank says.

The couple, both born into and raised by families that loved gardening, have taught themselves much through the years about horticulture, but they’ve also been given much guidance by Foster, who’s worked closely with the couple to design a garden that reflects their personalities and passions. Foster has traveled with Frank Emert to find an array of interesting and unusual plants for the garden; and whenever the Emerts travel, they keep an

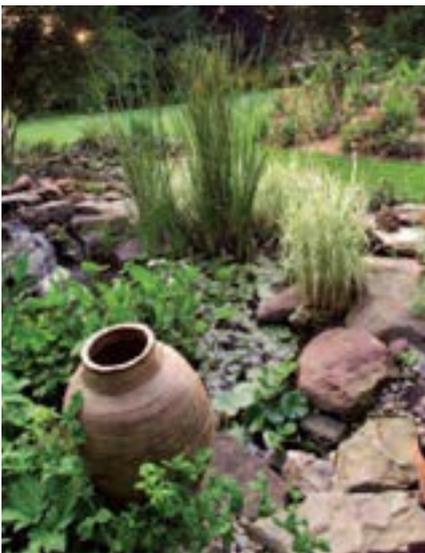
PHOTOS BY PAUL VAN HOY



“I go turkey hunting every year and I may not get a turkey, but I don’t come back empty-handed. I almost always bring back a plant.”

— Dr. Frank Emert Jr.

GROUND COVER | Working with landscape artist Dallas Foster, the Emerts have designed a garden that is eclectic and deeply personal, while maximizing every inch of space. A freestanding English stone fence, located in a dry stream bed, is fronted with hosta and ferns.



LONG-TERM GROWTH

Landscape professional Dallas Foster has helped the Emerts with their garden for more than 30 years.

For professional landscaper Dallas Foster, designing a great garden is about more than developing a landscape plan. It's about developing a relationship with the client. The relationship he's developed with Frank and Nancy Emert began more than 30 years ago and, like the Emerts' garden, it's still going strong.

Foster began working with the Emerts as they were tearing down an old house they'd purchased in a neighborhood they liked in Vincennes. As the old house was coming down and the new house going up, Foster spent hours talking to the couple about their passion for gardening and how to make their landscape fit into their busy lives. It was standard operating procedure for Foster, a Purdue University graduate who opened his own landscaping business in 1979.

"I try to express my client's personality in their landscape," Foster says. "I like to get to know my clients and get a feel for them and then design their landscape to reach all five senses."

That was appealing to the Emerts, who like an eclectic look to their garden, and have their own sense of whimsy when it comes to plants and flowers.

In Frank Emert, Foster found a fellow devotee of horticulture; Frank is a dedicated plant collector who uses

every opportunity to advance his knowledge of plants. Foster has made sure the Emerts' garden is designed to accommodate that interest.

"I try to satisfy all the elements of design while still allowing them room to expand," Foster says. "The greatest challenge was that the garden is so large and we wanted to have themed areas. We had to find a way to have different themes and yet still be able to transition one into the other."

The Emerts' garden is one of the longest lasting projects Foster has undertaken, but it's not the only long-term project he has underway. He also has clients in Evansville, Louisville, Indianapolis, Terre Haute, Jasper and throughout Illinois, many of whom depend on Foster to guide them through their gardening adventures.

"The best part of my job is being able to work with living plants and be outdoors while still being able to be creative," Foster says.

The Emerts feel the same way. They're hands-on gardeners, interested in putting in the time and effort needed to make their garden grow in the most appealing way.

"It's been a joy working with the Emerts because they have such a passion and love for plants and gardening," Foster says. "It's nice to work with people who have that same passion as I do." ●