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GARDENING

Farm Fresh

ABBY CLOUGH LAWLESS'S DESIGNS GIVE BACK TO THE LAND *by Alejandro Saralegui*



Q&A with garden designer Abby Clough Lawless of Farm Design in Sag Harbor

When did you start gardening?

Abby Clough Lawless: When I was about 14, I helped maintain a 200-foot-long flower border at Spring Ledge Farm in New London, New Hampshire, where my parents had a nursery and farm stand. But my actual training, after studying art history at Middlebury College, was an internship at the New York Botanical Garden. I worked in the perennial herb garden and maintained the daylily collection—lots of deadheading!

How did you get involved in gardening with landscape designer Edwina von Gal?

ACL: My supervisor at the NYBG, Sarah Price, recommended me. As Edwina's horticultural



manager, I took projects that were three-quarters done and completed them. A lot of the clients at the time had great cut-flower gardens, and we grew material for them—I really liked that. After a few years with Edwina, I went to Cornell for a master's degree in landscape architecture. And then I went back to work for Edwina again. She has an incredible

True To Form | A patio garden in the Springs (ABOVE) features different widths of bluestone coping. A pergola made of cedar and mountain laurel stands behind a cutting garden (LEFT). See Resources.

eye for detail, and she gave me a real sensitivity to the landscape and how plants evolve. She'll create a great master plan for a property, but then she has this wonderful knack for letting it all go and creating something whimsical.

When did you start designing on your own?

ACL: Around 2005, when I worked on a friend's property in New Paltz.

What inspires you most?

ACL: The natural landscape. Yes, it's a cliché, but the dunes in Napeague and the beech grove near Cow's Neck in Southampton are



Abundant Beauty | (CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT) Russian olives arc over stepping stones in a Sagaponack garden. An English cast-iron trough enveloped in Boston ivy. *Coreopsis tinctoria* in an Amagansett meadow garden. See Resources.

incredible—it's nature; it's what's here. One reason I named my company Farm Design is the concept of growing things with nature. When you farm, you're taking a landscape and nurturing something; combine that with design, and you have a wonderful garden.

What's your biggest obstacle in designing a garden?

ACL: Integrating a client's house into the natural landscape. Time and again I find myself dealing with alienated houses that are oddly

placed on the lot, or something strange along those lines. People move here to enjoy the outdoors, but usually when I arrive at a new property I find a piece of New Jersey in the middle of a field! While there is space for more diversity in gardening in the Hamptons, you still have to honor the light and the lushness of the region, and also create some fun and whimsy. I like to keep the front of the house "quiet" and the gardens close to the house, and then make sure that the farther-out parts of the property are more in tune with the indigenous landscape.

What's essential for a garden belonging to a family with kids?

ACL: It needs berries! Fruits and berries. Kids love to gather; it's a natural instinct. We all love to harvest. I like to add a birdbath and a place to sit, too.

What do you want to pass on to your children?

ACL: A love of being outdoors. At 18 months, my daughter points at flowers and says, "Flowers, Mama!"