

Garden Conservancy Open Day: Shobha's Vanchiswar's gem-of-a-garden on view Sat., May 8



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by Ron Kirkwood

Where would you expect to find a garden that includes an allee of espaliered fruit trees, a cottage garden featuring season-long perennials and spring blooming bulbs; and a formal brick parterre planted with herbs and vegetables? An English manor house, perhaps?

What about if it also had a greenhouse; a highly-engineered tree house; a collection of potted Mediterranean, sub-tropical trees and flowering plants; and a meadow with naturalizing narcissus, native and herbaceous plants? Ahh, yes, you're thinking, Italian castle, with that tree house designed by Da Vinci?

And if you added a private outdoor dining area featuring a collection of *terra cotta* and Anduze glazed pottery planted with seasonal and over-wintered tender plants, and a checkerboard garden? You'd be in a sultan's palace, right?

No, you would be right in the heart of Chappaqua standing in the midst of Shobha Vanchiswar's and Murali Mani's village garden. All aspects of the garden, including training fruit tree whips into the espalier wall, have been designed and planted and are maintained organically by the owners. Their garden is a synthesis of formal and casual features. A neatly trimmed and edged front lawn forms the framework for the perennial garden planted at the front of the house, while the meadow at the property's lower level forms a transition to the woodland behind the property.

Gardens in small spaces require planning, imagination, forethought and, most of all, restraint. These

qualities are evident in Shobha's and Murali's garden. As with many gardens and gardeners, their plants have particular histories and relationships, a literal 'six degrees of separation,' as plants have not only been acquired through purchase, but have accumulated through trade and gift. And some of that Anduze glazed pottery has been spirited home from overseas swathed in protective clothing in suitcases.

Owner-designed gardens are naturally a reflection of the gardener – and both Murali and Shobha are evident in theirs. Apart from their professional credentials, both are accomplished artists who paint, write and publish poetry, and both are passionate about giving back to their communities, near and far.

On Saturday, May 8, to benefit the Garden Conservancy, Shobha and Murali will welcome visitors into the gem of a garden they share with friends, neighbors and family. Admission to the garden is \$5, which goes through the Conservancy to fund Rocky Hills, another well-kept-secret garden, whose Open Day occurs on May 29.

Ron Kirkwood, a member of the steering committee of The Friends of Rocky Hills, is a lifelong resident of Mount Pleasant (Thornwood) and works in a family-owned insurance agency in Pleasantville. He enjoys gardening and its microcosmic links to much more in life, and finds the successes of gardens such as Shobha's and Rocky Hills inspiring, if not a little daunting.