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the color purple

Or how a Rumson homeowner's favorite hue inspires a waterside landscape

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On six acres along the Shrewsbury River in Rumson, purple became the driving force of design

for seriously beautiful gardens around a contemporary five-bedroom, five-bath shingle-style cottage.

If a plant's flowers, leaves, or berries come in one of the many shades of the color of royalty, **Diane Guidone of Diane Guidone Garden Design** likely considered it as a player in the purple plan. She splashed in spectrum neighbors red and blue to grant the homeowner's wish to see something wonderful out any window no matter what time of year.

To pass muster, the purple plants had to register as highly tolerant of hostile conditions — wind, salt spray, tidal surges, and full-sun exposures on the

south and west (harsh during summer) — as well as be especially unattractive to the unchecked deer population and be low-maintenance.

Plants with both wild and formal natures were chosen to enhance the clean lines of the coastal architecture of the house and its native marshy setting. Side by side as part of Guidone's three-tiered plan — evergreens for structure, woody ornamentals and grasses, and perennials — they bring out the best in each other.

Rhythm & Purples

The gateway to the property is a Pennsylvania bluestone-chip driveway and

a border of repeating grasses, bushes, trees and shrub-y herbs — in purple — whose rhythm creates a colorful welcome that owners Barbara and Mark Halsband love coming home to: among them smoke bush, artemisia, boxwood, catmint, switchgrass, and chaste tree.

A garden under stately river birch trees where the driveway splits announces in an understated way the design mandate Guidone put in place, a vision in green, purple, pink, and white. Plantings have included catmint, butterfly bush, peonies, clematis, phlox, Russian sage, digitalis, crape myrtle, salvia, Chelone, geraniums, and Siberian iris in summer; monk's hood



Opposite: Formal-looking hydrangea clusters inside demur box hedge echo the shape of the Oriental fountain grass but have a controlled elegance that contrasts with the grass's wild nature. **Top:** Columnar blue spruces mark the front entrance to the contemporary cottage. Across the lawn, near a Japanese maple in fiery bloom, birch trees provide dappled shade in summer and feature bark that sheds in salmon-tan-white curls during the winter. **Bottom:** The interior pots in the tops of three sizes of copper containers (each weighted with bricks) bloom on the back deck with hardy plantings designed symmetrically but adjusted for each size. Small: pink verbena, dusty miller, and Oriental fountain grass; medium: pink and purple verbena, calamagrostis, and feather reed grass; large: purple sweet potato vine, New Zealand flax, Rosa Double Knockout rose and dark fountain grass.

in the fall; holly in winter; and dwarf lilac and baptisia in the spring.

Barbara Halsband likes evergreen in the driveway island so there's a place for holiday lights, but she goes with whatever Guidone envisions. "Diane had plans from the first day she got here," Halsband says. "She's the best."

Fifteen years ago, the Halsbands found the 2-to-3-year-old house at the end of a cul-de-sac, complete with a river-view back deck and two conservatory-style rooms from which they can observe sailing in summer and ice-boating in winter. They loved the bright white house; the lawn and hedges and other plantings, not so much.

Enter Guidone, who photographed the property that day, heard the plea for more visual interest and the color purple, and immediately started a garden design plan,

to be fulfilled by her crew and the wholesale and local nurseries she uses. Barbara Halsband says she and her husband can't decide on a favorite part; "all of it really," she says.

It all got done in time to become a stop on the 2007 Two Rivers Antiques Show & Garden Tour, a fund-raiser to benefit the Jacqueline M. Wilentz Comprehensive Breast Center at nearby Monmouth Medical Center. Hundreds of visitors walked the property during a June weekend, mostly asking about the plethora of purple plants, plants whose names anyone but the designer would be hard-pressed to remember.

In the future there are plans for a rock garden with sculptures between the south end of the deck and the well-worn path through the marsh to the shore.

Meanwhile, daffodils and hyacinth (purple Peter Stuyvesant, white L'innocence, and blue camassia) will greet spring, followed by ornamental onions, or alliums, planted among the upright blade-leaved, flowering grasses — all blooming right outside the window. **DNJ**

SOURCES: design and plantings, Diane Guidone Garden Design LLC in Rumson

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