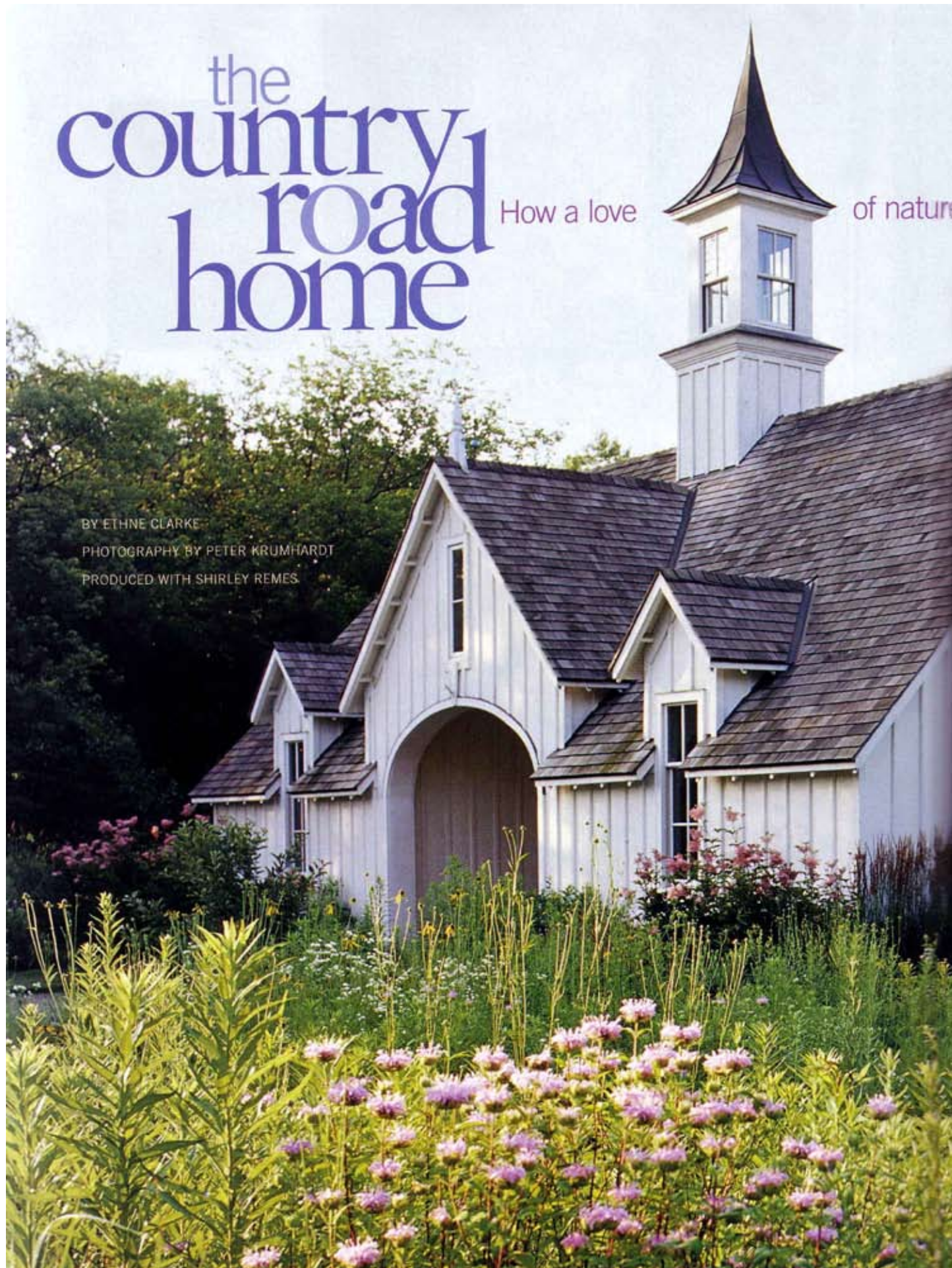


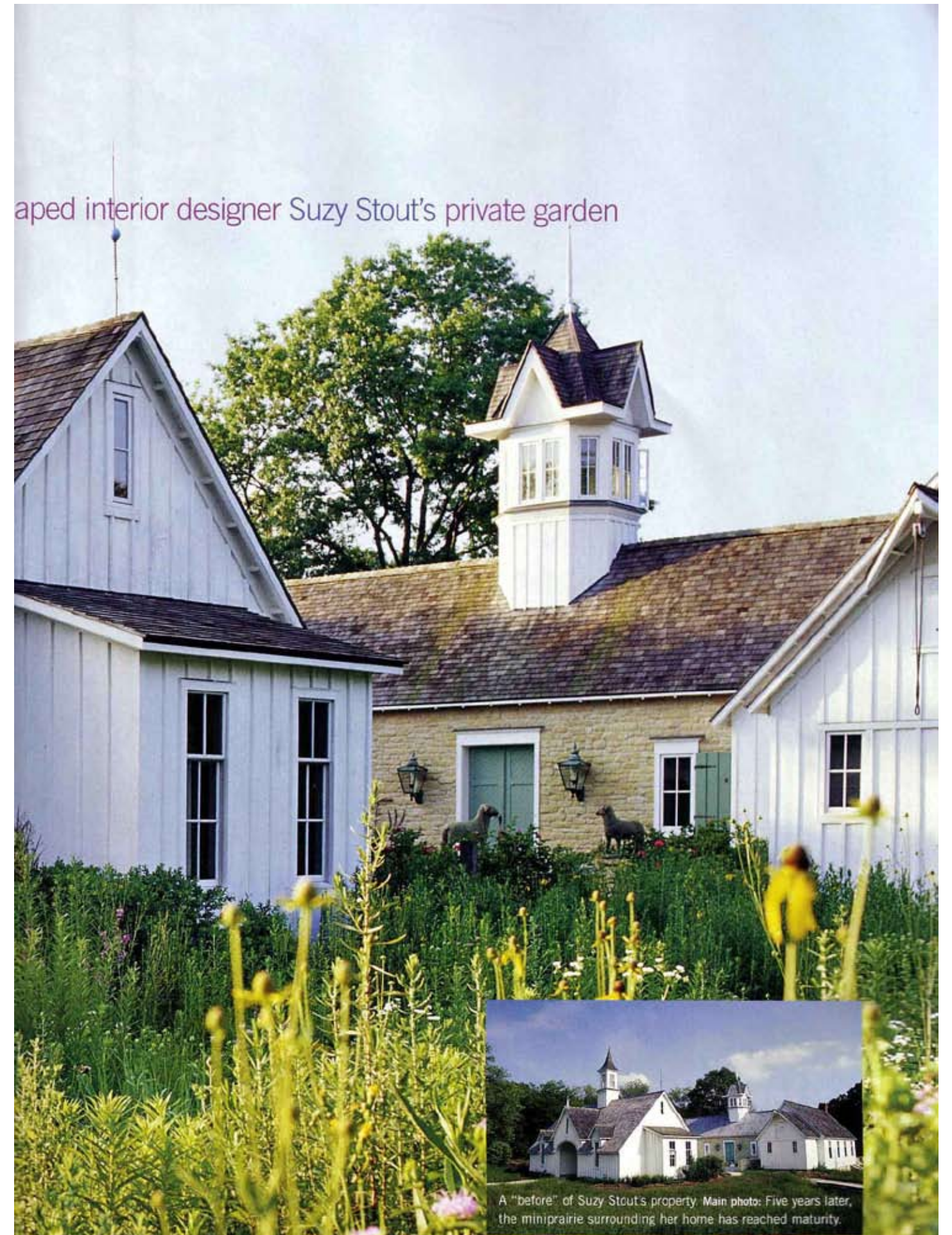
the country road home

How a love of nature

BY ETHNE CLARKE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER KRUMHARDT
PRODUCED WITH SHIRLEY REMES



aped interior designer Suzy Stout's private garden



A "before" of Suzy Stout's property. Main photo: Five years later, the miniprairie surrounding her home has reached maturity.



nothing says rural like car wheels on a gravel road

exclaims interior designer Suzy Stout, describing the thinking behind the design of her sublimely country garden. Located in an unmistakably suburban environment, this small aural detail is hugely important.

"Turning off the public street onto our gravel drive sets the tone for the whole property. The way it winds through the tall grasses makes you think you've been transported to another country, or even another era," she says.

The simple farmhouse architecture, the sculptures of lambs and roosters, the antique garden tools, and modest garden furnishings are not the only characteristics that give the property its country air. The first thing a visitor to the Stout home sees is the vibrant prairie garden enfolding the street-front aspect, placing this garden squarely in the Midwestern heartland.

"My grandmother had a cottage in northern Wisconsin, and as a child I spent my summers there, wandering across the fields and through the woodland fringe," Suzy reminisces. "My father was an amateur naturalist who gave me a love for birds, butterflies, and the small, wondrous creatures that keep our world alive." Thus, five years ago, when it came time to landscape the ground around their newly built home, the Stouts turned to landscape architect Anthony Tyznik, an expert in prairie landscaping, for help in creating a miniprairie.

As prairie gardens become more popular, the techniques for managing them in suburban settings are becoming more user-friendly. Suzy explains, "The annual spring burning to clear a prairie for the new season's growth is probably the trickiest aspect, so we use a specialist landscape maintenance team to



Filipendula rubra



The cottage garden border, filled with simple perennial flowers, is decorated with a miniature wheelbarrow and an antique basketry bee skep (artificial hive). Far right, top: *Hydrangea anomala* blooms in back of the house.

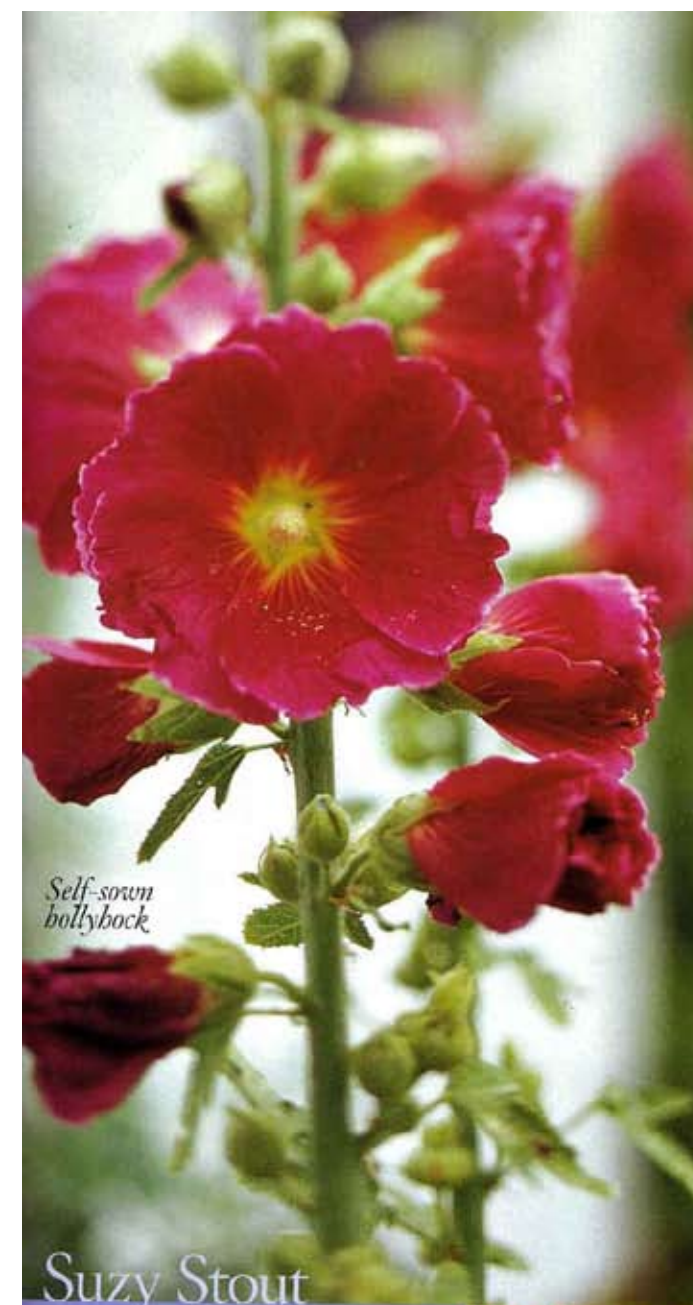
handle this chore. It may look like we're burning the house down, but it's turned into a local event with neighbors dropping by. We're hoping it will encourage others in the community to give up some of their lawn for a patch of prairie flowers."

Moving deeper into the garden, the appearance of rural rusticity extends around the house. Along the west-facing side there is a wide cottage-garden border filled with roses, pinks, hollyhocks, and phlox. It is adjacent to a mown grass path that comes to a stop at the edge of a large, informal pond. The soil excavated in making the pond was banked up along the pond edge opposite the house and then planted with a variety of ornamental grasses and shrubs to provide local wildlife with seeds and berries during fall and winter. A small bubble fountain in its center prevents the pond from icing over solidly and

allows water birds and other creatures access even in the depths of winter, further evidence of the Stouts' consideration for all the critters that populate their garden. There are also numerous birdhouses dotting the garden, and most days, says Suzy, a small squadron of ducks arrives with noisy comment to float contentedly across the pond.

Beyond the pond is a forest of mature oak, maple, and evergreen trees. "We were so fortunate with our neighbors, who valued the trees as much as we did and conserved them in their own landscape plans. So we've been able to 'borrow' this natural feature to give a woodland feel to the garden," Suzy explains.

A broad stone terrace provides plenty of outdoor living space and frames the house's south aspect overlooking the pond. It is decorated with a variety of country garden furniture on which



Self-sown hollyhock

Suzy Stout

You might say Suzy Stout was bitten by the design bug when she was just a young sprout. "My mother did interior design—not professionally, but she was always bringing home fabric, furniture, and accessories for people she knew." Now in her 25th year as a designer, Suzy and her homes have appeared in several issues of the magazine; she was named a *Traditional Home* Design Award winner for one house (May 1993), and another was on the cover of our March 2000 issue, above. "With its many colors and textures, my garden is an extension of my interior design; however, nature doesn't always cooperate—as when something doesn't grow as tall as it was supposed to or the color is not the shade I thought it would be."



Lythrum virgatum





Rudbeckia hirta



Suzy has exercised a free hand with the paintbrush. What was peacock blue one year may well be brilliant white the next. Marry these whimsical treatments with her collection of vintage floral tablecloths, and a party-ready terrace at the Stouts' is especially welcoming. The fun continues on a platform at the water's edge, the perfect venue for the Stouts and their grandchildren to indulge in a little fishing.

In her work as an interior designer, Suzy is constantly on the lookout for unusual decorative pieces as well as textiles and furnishings that will express her clients' dreams. When it came to the design of her own home, Suzy compiled a reference folder filled with photos and pages torn from design magazines that showed stonework details, window and door designs, and architectural details to describe to the architect precisely the look she was after. "I've been in love with rural France for such

a long time! And that is what I wanted to express here, using the limestone walls and Mediterranean blue paint colors. It took me at least five attempts to get exactly the right tint!"

The same was true for the garden; photos of English garden borders stuffed with bright perennials and roses, herb gardens filled with scented foliage, and meadows carpeted with wildflowers were handed to Tyznik to help describe the sort of flower garden Suzy wanted to complement the prairie. "Our dream was to live immersed in the beauty of nature, to have a shelter from the complexities of modern life. I wanted the drive to be like a winding road, so that when we come in off the street, we enter our own little world." Which, if we are honest, is all any gardener ever wants. ■

Landscape architect: Anthony Tyznik

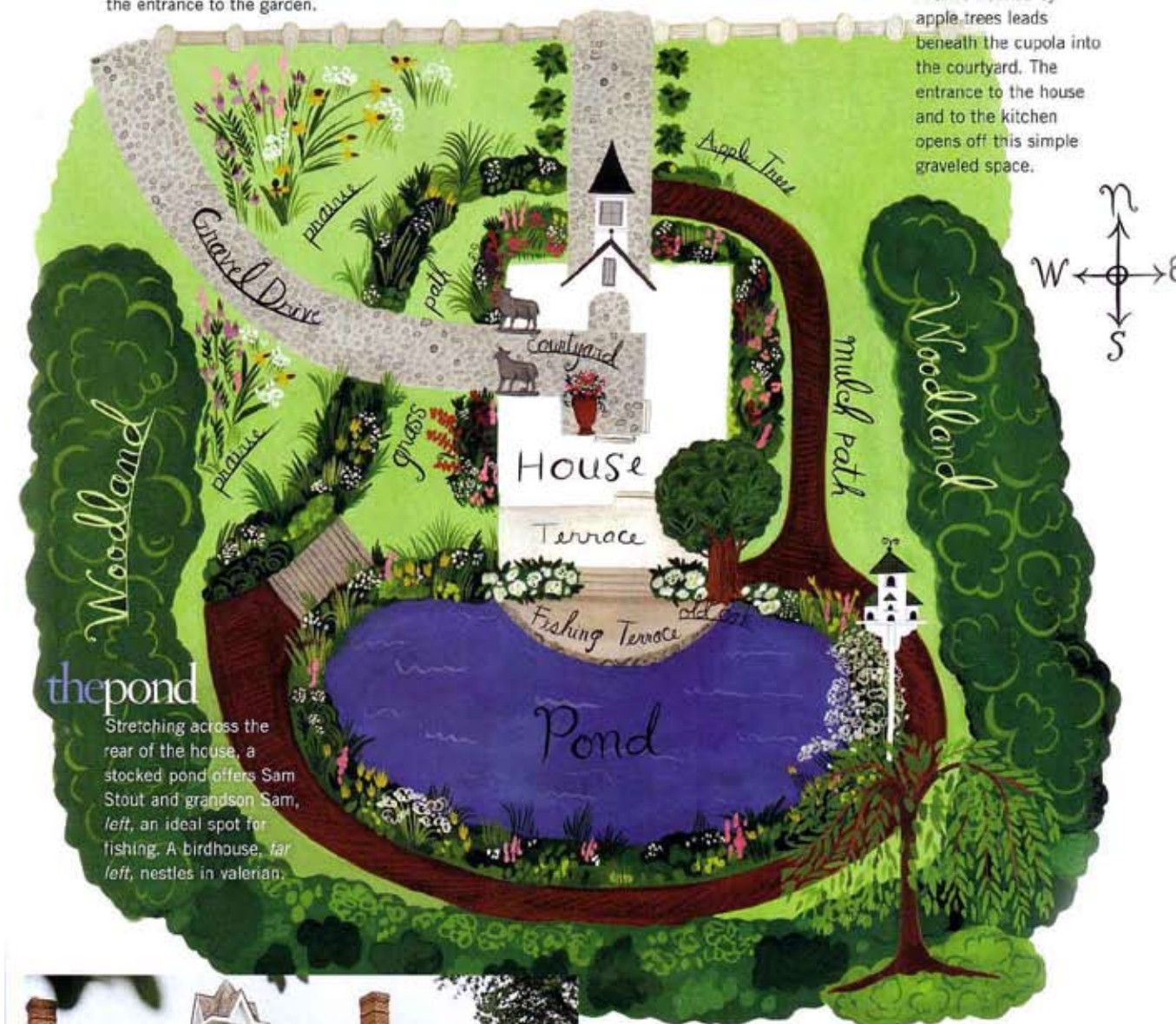
For more information, see sources on page 230.

the prairie gardens

Black-eyed Susans mingle with echinacea, bergamot, solidago, and numerous native grasses at the entrance to the garden.

courtyard area

A drive flanked by apple trees leads beneath the cupola into the courtyard. The entrance to the house and to the kitchen opens off this simple graveled space.



the pond

Stretching across the rear of the house, a stocked pond offers Sam Stout and grandson Sam, left, an ideal spot for fishing. A birdhouse, far left, nestles in valerian.



landscapedesigner

"Native plant gardens are habitats for local fauna, and provide year-round food and shelter," notes landscape architect Anthony Tyznik, a design descendant of renowned Danish-American landscape architect Jens Jensen and famous conservationist-author Aldo Leopold. Formerly the landscape architect at the Morton Arboretum, Hinsdale, Illinois, he has turned to advising homeowners on the conversion of mow-and-blow landscapes into thriving communities of native flora and fauna, aiming to counteract some of the rampant development across the United States. In his expert opinion, gardens like Suzy's—part of the prairie revival occurring in urban and suburban areas—help ensure the survival of regional systems. As Tyznik sees it, "Residential landscapes like this are a lifeline for displaced wildlife."