

LANDSCAPE

LANDSCAPE DESIGN: Greg Bilowz of Bilowz Associates

The goal for landscape architect Greg Bilowz was to make this Falmouth summer home feel old-fashioned; the expansive lawn paints a pastoral picture.

STATELY *Seaside*

Landscape architect Greg Bilowz designs an understated yet elegant landscape for a summer home enjoyed by three generations.

The best landscape design

takes into consideration two major factors: the setting and how to maximize the property's best features. But it's equally important to consider the needs and desires of the family who will be living on the property. Landscape designer Greg Bilowz of Bilowz Associates in Sterling, Mass., did both, and so much more, when he was hired to design the Laverty family's property at their second home in Falmouth.

By Laurie Higgins • Photography by Eric Roth



There is an elliptical motif throughout the property, beginning with the shape of the white seashell driveway. The back of the house continues the theme with the fire pit area and portico stonework.

“The objective was to make this home look like an old-fashioned summer home for a big, extended family,” Bilowz says. “It’s kind of pastoral, and the lawn is a really important element. We tried to keep it simple and not clutter it up.”

Large expanses of lawn broken up by perennial gardens create a bucolic setting that is in harmony with the seaside location. Bilowz received his master’s degree in landscape architecture from the University of Sheffield, England; the two years spent learning from European horticulturists influenced Bilowz’s Old-World sense of craftsmanship and choice of plant materials.

Purposeful Plantings

One example is the choice of fescue grass instead of bluegrass for the entire property. Fescue requires a third less water and fertilizer. His choice of perennial flowers was equally deliberate.

“This home has an element of understated elegance, and the landscaping and plant material were chosen carefully to be very low maintenance, fairly drought resistant and very appropriate for the coastal location,” Bilowz says.

Flowers include an abundance of day lilies, sedum, perennial geraniums, blue sea holly, Russian sage and a wide variety of sturdy roses. Bilowz likes to weave plants together like a tapestry rather than planting clumps of a single species.

Below and right: Copper statues with a worn verdigris add to the “old-fashioned” look created for the seaside property.



“If you plant an autumn joy sedum that blooms in the later part of the season and you put one geranium Roseanne in the middle of the pack, it holds it up like a truss because the flowers continue to bloom all season. A really nice crescendo is when the autumn joy sedum blooms and the perennial geranium is still blooming too,” he says.

Homeowner Charles Lavery loves to tinker in the garden, so Bilowz left space for Lavery to personalize the gardens with his own choice of plantings.

“We just put in a putting green area and 200 day lilies and hostas that are going to accent one side,” Lavery says. “I did an inventory of how many trees and perennials and bushes are on that property, and we’re up around 2,100. Greg has such a knack for design and he knows his flowers and can match them up so that things don’t look all the same.”

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A Well-Rounded Hardscape

The way Bilowz treats exterior spaces like an interior designer would a room is most apparent in the hardscaping. There is an elliptical motif throughout the property, beginning with the shape of the white seashell driveway. It bisects an elliptical detail of the front entrance and continues through the house to the back, which overlooks the ocean. He also did a lot of work with the engineer, architect, builder and site contractor to create subtle elevations on the back side of the property so the covered terrace is like a sunken living room.

Four massive stone steps lead down to an ocean terrace that is both intimate and able to accommodate up to 30 people when the homeowners entertain. For day-to-day living, a minimum of furniture is arranged around the compass rose-themed gas fire pit. The top of a stone wall surrounding the terrace provides additional seating.

Bilowz used stone from a special quarry in China known for its exceptional craftsmanship. All of the edges were hammered by hand to make them rounded and soft to the touch. Two different runs of stone from the same quarry create a complementary, but dynamic effect. All the accent edging pieces for the stairs, walls and fire pit are made of a monochromatic stone. All the squares and rectangles for the main fields were done with stone that has ion inclusions that give it a sense of movement and variation for a natural appearance.

The top to the stone wall surrounding the ocean terrace is made of monochromatic stone with hand-hammered edging to provide a smooth surface for extra seating around the fire pit.





The ocean view from the fire pit.

Left: Iron artisan Ray Ciemny created a custom bronze railing that leads to the beach.

A Walk to the Beach

The steps down to the beach are also a natural transition. They peeled apart the existing boulder embankment and then used the same stone source as the patio to weave in the steps. Bilowz brought in iron artisan Ray Ciemny from Groton to create a custom bronze railing down to the beach.

“It has a really nice, hammered finish so it looks like it’s been outside for a hundred years, and it’s got a really thin profile so when you’re sitting on the gazebo or the terrace looking out, it’s very discreet,” Bilowz explains.

Bilowz gives credit for the successful project to all the people involved, including architect Denise Bonoli, engineers Holmes and McGrath, site manager Francisco Tavares and Cataldo Builders.

“Projects like this work with teamwork,” he says. “You can’t pull it off solo. It takes a lot of cooperation and for everyone to tuck their egos in their pocket and work as a team.” 🏠