

Wicked Abandon

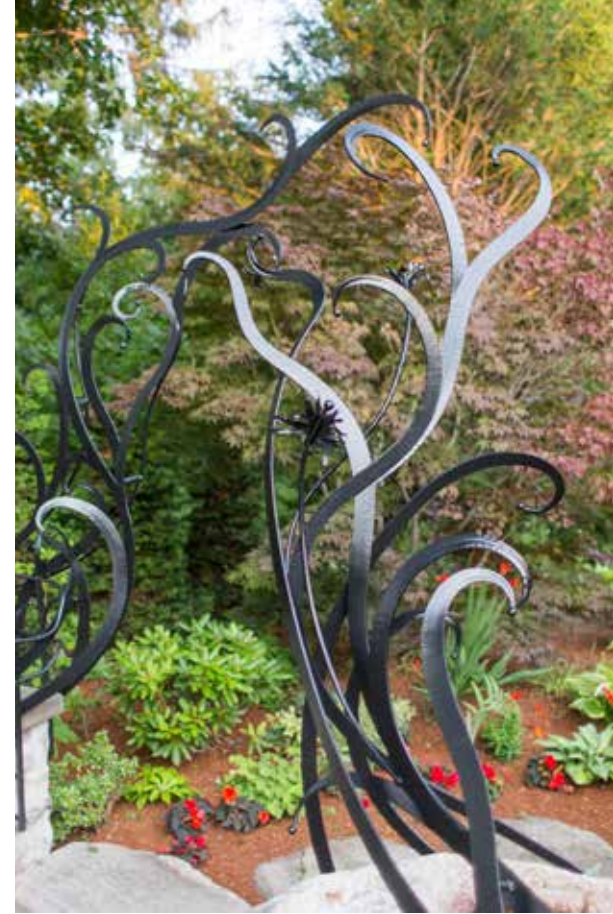
Frantic and fantastic, an iron work of art defines the garden of novelist Gregory Maguire

WRITTEN BY JOE-ANN HART • PHOTOGRAPHED BY ERIC ROTH

Every garden tells a story, but in Gregory Maguire's garden, even the fence has narrative drive. "I wanted unusual, something you wouldn't expect," he says. Author of the 1995 novel *Wicked*, on which the Broadway musical is based, Maguire lives with his husband, artist Andy Newman, and their three children in Concord, Massachusetts, in a single-story house bought the year of the book's release. A second floor was added in 2002 by builder Halsey Platt of Platt Builders in Groton, Massachusetts, packed with two more gables than the House of the Seven Gables. That done, Maguire cast a dreamy eye upon the staid suburban plot and began to question the universal themes of lawn and patio. "I'm not a gardener," he says, "but I love to play with color, shape, form, and movement in my surroundings."

He turned to landscape architect Greg Bilowz of Bilowz Associates in Sterling, Massachusetts, accompanied by Ray Ciemny, iron-worker extraordinaire, whose firm, Artisan Iron, is in Groton. Led by Maguire's imagination, they began a multiyear journey of discovery. Their first project was a small, fenced-in seating area by the front door. Crafted by Ciemny with granite posts and iron, the work reveals its magic in the details, with rods that punch through twisted and irregularly spaced spindles. Nearby, a brick path disappears around the house to the second project, an alleyway gate with similar bones and a goblin face carved into the top of the cane bolt. "Ray responded to the

A CAULDRON USED for maple sugaring was re-purposed as a fire pit. Behind it, the stone-and-iron fence begins in a traditional manner, then starts to deconstruct, freeing itself from convention before morphing into a bench back. The fence culminates in cresting waves of gates.



NOVELIST GREGORY MAGUIRE stands under his gateway (LEFT) with a stone bench to his right. The cracked granite post (BELOW LEFT) symbolizes the near complete destruction of the fence's former world. Bright red impatiens, cannas, lilies, and crocosmia add fiery color to the yard (ABOVE). Small flying figures (FACING PAGE) are part of the ambiguous iron flora and fauna that populate the fence.



impish in my work," says Maguire.

In the front yard it is all sunshine and flowers, with steppingstones leading to the other side of the house, where a double Ciemny gate beckons visitors to enter. As the latch clicks shut, a fence begins to define the narrow space, and it is here that things begin to get strange — though not at first. The fence initially appears almost Victorian in its probity, but a few feet in “something happens,” says Ciemny, “perhaps to the DNA of the fence itself.” Beginning with a sketch by Maguire and drawing inspiration from 18th-century botanical prints, Ciemny’s design warps the flora into fantastical beings not entirely plant, not quite animal. Iron bars start to swirl and contort, while ribbons of metal slice through the granite posts. As the path continues, the fence devolves and a frantic dialogue begins. Flying primates and withered spores reach out on mutated spindles to spread news of some unspeakable drama.



Bilowz worked closely with Ciemny, placing boulders as landing zones for a fence that has abandoned physical laws and conventional footings. “I had to create a base for Ray to dance his work off of,” says Bilowz. Just as it all seems about to fall apart, with the final granite post left deconstructed with a crack through the middle, a clenched spike rises up from the chaos in the victorious spirit of Excalibur.

Then, as suddenly as the crisis began, it is over. The situation calms down and the fence flows gently, free of the constraints of posts and form, as it transforms into the back of the stone bench Bilowz designed for outdoor entertaining. The existing fieldstone patio, shaped like a turtle, was bumped out a bit to accommodate a large maple-sugaring cauldron used as a fire pit, where Newman and Maguire’s family and friends gather in the darkening hours. To enhance the atmosphere, Ciemny made holders for colored votive candles that Maguire hangs on the fence for parties.

The fence — if it can even be called that anymore — begins to rise at the end of the bench to become a cresting wave, hovering midair over an exit to the backyard, where Bilowz cut an opening in a stone wall original to the property. It is a happy, exultant finish, complete with a metal hummingbird sipping from a flower. And all

DESIGN FOCUS



THE PATH FROM the front yard leads through a deceptively normal garden gate. Off in the distance, a whimsical structure built as a writing studio gives the backyard focus and destination.

the time Ciemny was working on this black iron opus, “Gregory never once asked to see what I was doing.”

At this point everyone thought the story was over, so they packed up their shovels and rivets and went home. Then Maguire spent a winter considering the new work as viewed from the living room and realized that the gateway to the backyard needed another side. Bilowz had already positioned a hollowed-out stone across from the wave, as if it might drip into the basin, and it was here that Maguire posed for Ciemny, demonstrating the “yearning” the new side should have for the other. With this coda completed in 2015, the fence now reads from every angle.

Beyond the known world of the patio, the yard opens up to the emerald-green lawn, where a loop of granite and brick,

more of a delineator than a path, leads to a studio built from an English greenhouse kit. “I thought I’d write here, but that didn’t exactly hap-

pen,” Maguire says. However, the whimsical structure serves a purpose as it pulls the eye back and gives the property a destination. In the writer’s mind, the giant white pines rise behind it “like mountains,” he muses, but that would be another story. ■

FOR MORE
DETAILS,
SEE
RESOURCES