

INSIDE OUT: For his Orlean, Virginia, home and garden, landscape architect Richard Arentz envisioned a marriage of structure and texture. Local materials, like Elk River stone, and native plantings bring an organic balance to a property where indoors and outdoors flow seamlessly together.



Organic Compound

Modern and wild merge in the country escape of local landscape ace Richard Arentz

| By Scott Sowers | Portrait by Patrick King |

When you design outdoor spaces for a group of power brokers that includes Empress Farah Pahlavi, basketball star Patrick Ewing and too many top-tier politicians to count, you need to show up with the green—and it's gotta rock. That's no problem for Richard Arentz. When the budding landscape architect was a kid in Pennsylvania, he spent days constructing tiny brick villages in his backyard, complete with sculpted landscapes and carefully placed tree twigs. This precocious start led to fruitful career. Before going solo, the demigod of exterior space honed his chops at top environmental architecture firm EDAW. "They sent me around the world, from an island off Tunisia to studying sod roofs in Iceland," he says.

This global immersion exposed Arentz to international trends in green design. As principal of Arentz Landscape Architects, he brings this sensibility to his work projects and his garden home in Orlean, Virginia, which recently won an American Institute of Architects residential design award. "It's a collaboration between myself, the architect Richard Williams and Jose Solis of Solis Betancourt," says Arentz. "The house represents what we're doing in our practice, which is to have the entire environment, inside and out, raised to the same aesthetic level."

This successful collaboration has produced a signature style based on Arentz's brilliant ability to bring the outdoors in (and vice versa). As a

landscape architect, Arentz is brought to a house project to imagine the possibilities. Siting—figuring out how and where a home will sit on a piece of land—is a primary function. "You take fairly basic information, like what are the key rooms and when are you going to be sitting in them, and go from there," says Arentz.

For casa de Arentz, this translates to a north-and-south orientation with a breakfast bay on the east wall to catch the morning rays and a dining room on the west to chase the looming twilight. In order to create a complementary balance between the house and the landscape, the design team studied regional influences to determine the shape of the structures.

"We used a tall, attenuated, vernacular form of Virginia architecture and covered the exterior with stucco," says Arentz. A wall of locally found stone known as Elk River ties together the two separate structures of the guest house and the main house. "We wanted a village of buildings," says Arentz, "because that provides an opportunity to create outdoor spaces." The outdoor expanses include a courtyard with fountain, a swimming pool and a screened-in porch that becomes the summer living room.

The same stone was used inside the house in the form of a massive fireplace that integrates the interior and exterior. A water feature near the front doorway softens the

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When it came time to pick the plantings for the new digs, Arentz first took note of what was there and gave the house a name. "Roughly eighty acres were covered with running cedar, and it just looked like a green carpet," he says.

The house, thus christened "Running Cedar," features an outdoor element that you might not expect from a man who defines his work with carefully selected plants—two vast expanses of lawn. "I use the lawn as a foil for the massive amounts of native plants," he says. The indigenous greenery was preserved wherever possible and becomes part of the overall essence of the property. "It was a completely wooded

first fully green hotel. "It's eleven stories, LEED certified, about 150 rooms and located near the Ritz-Carlton," Arentz says. Similar projects are slated for Seattle, Scottsdale and New York.

In the meantime, Arentz races between the country and the city and is planning an office addition for Running Cedar. He's also been running Ironwood, a landscape construction management firm that installs highly detailed gardens. Being talented and in high demand is all well and good, but the results are the big payoff for Arentz. "There's a level of satisfaction that comes from a client who talks about how an outdoor space has changed the way they live," he says. "That is a very gratifying thing." ■

Green Tips

When rethinking an outdoor space, it's smart to plan ahead for natural occurrences like droughts. "Make intelligent decisions about picking the plants with regard to water usage. One of the best approaches is to choose native plants," Arentz says.

If you're planning new construction, consider using groundwater as your heating and cooling source. "Most of my new projects are using geothermal-based HVAC systems, which have become much more cost-effective recently," says Arentz.

When it comes to joining the home's exterior and interior spaces, Arentz advises: "Set a theme and repeat it to create an overall environment."



VIEW WITH A ROOM: Running Cedar takes "Virginia vernacular" to a whole new level, with clean, modern lines defining both the structures and gardens. The result is a landscape that frames the estate in green—and a house that offers picture-perfect vignettes of the verdant world looming beyond.



site, so when I was doing the siting I started off by cutting small, individual branches to frame the views I wanted," he says.

Arentz likes to use simple hedges as borders and lines of perennials as architectural elements to define the outdoor space. The walkway out the back door leads to a garden and is lined by an alley of Winter King hawthorns, which produce red berries during the winter for the birds and white flowers in spring for him.

Being in an evergreen business, Arentz is keenly aware of the movement towards sustainable design, both in the home and in the garden. "Green has become much more of a buzzword in most of our projects," he says. "The pendulum has swung, and I think the idea of sustainable design has become part of the collective consciousness."

Arentz is now applying some of his inner green musings on 1 Hotel and Residences, a new project for Starwood Hotels, located in the West End and set to open in 2010. It'll be DC's



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