A GLORIOUS RIOT

GARDEN DESIGNER EDWINA VON GAL HAS BUILT A CAREER AROUND ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY—AND LETTING NATURE RUN WILD. ROB HASKELL REPORTS. PHOTOGRAPHED BY ALLAN POLLOK-MORRIS.
By early fall, the East End of Long Island has
assumed an unruly look. Edwina von Gal,
a landscape designer who likes nothing
easier than to let nature take its course,
seems positively giddy. Just steps from the
beach, in this superb biodynamic garden she
created for the composer Jonathan Sheffer,
dillons grow the height of cornstalks,
with purple and yellow dahlias creating their
mark over exploring peacocks. Beyond
the row of magenta fuchsia, reddish orange
and orange-yellow Salvias, heavy eggplants bow toward the ground, summer
beans hide in plain sight amid tulips, and golden marigolds
move the floor from within their win-red houses. The
private border looks large, so inside the linear-edged beds
that lead a forbidding aspect to fortress-like houses nearby.
"Maintained hedges make me feel tired just thinking about
the effort," von Gal says.

A few miles up the island, a sense not only of embarrassment
but of résistance prevails in the vast garden von Gal
designed for Daniel and Bonnie Nordich. A weeping willow
that was reduced to a scrawny stump by two hurricanes
has finally sprouted alabaster leaves. Primrose white blooms can
now again be seen in a tree nearby for gardeners obliged
with maladies, and a story line that no one thought would
survive seems back again thanks to a compost tea that von
Gal brews and uses it. Nearly a plot splits the turf of
silver birch, and yellow lilies applaud the breadth of
the Chinese elm. In the wildflower field, a spiky shrub known
as Devil's Walking Stick has begun to assert itself. "On most
properties, you're not asked, because it just goes wild," says
von Gal. "But we love wild."
domestic gardening. "It's like going to a doctor and getting prescribed every antibiotic, plus chemotherapy and radiation, whether you need them or not," she explains. "You suppress so much in order to feel so little. And you end up with new problems."

With a jollity that belies the gravity of her mission, Von Gal can wax poetic about the glaciers that formed Long Island, the formations of rocks, and the flora of the Pescali yellowfin tuna. "She knows everything," says the artist Cindy Sherman, her friend and neighbor. "She's an encyclopedia of the historical and the biological, and she discusses this stuff with such animation that you find yourself wanting to say, 'Yes, Edwina.'"

With a single exception, all of Von Gal's clients have said just that. At the Norwalk, a barn with solar panels now supplies 60 percent of the energy to the house and the pool. Von Gal assisted here, just as she assisted on conservatory areas. Anything she puts up or away can make its way to be decomposed. She suggested garden lights tucked into the garlands instead of the dramatic upstaging spotlights that she calls "unrealistic". Her yard is full of trees. She even has a yard sale. "Yes, it's true," she says. "I carry the attic to the garage and sell out the house."

In a garden where native pines, Von Gal expects animals to feel very much at home. She hangs houses for bats and birds and creates temporary fences for tomatoes and rabbits shielded by renovation. Lettuce, some of her clients have jumped on the coot for chickens. At the Shelburne farmhouse, a new egg is laid for display by the photogenic door of a corduroy chicken coop, like a pledge at an academy. There are swans, a pair of canaries, a rooster, and bantams, whose blue eyes have caused considerable excitement. In the kitchen, she grew a pair of geese that are now a "pair of geese" with their promise of eggs--from a hedge-fowl way across the street. "I feel that if I'm going to do this gentleman-farmer thing, I'm going to take it as far as I can," she explains.

It's clear that the Zeppelins is marveling upon Von Gal, now in her mid-60s. "In 1984, when I opened my business, everything was bigger and better," she recalls, "and I had to do it inside the house, too. It's all a challenge to get my hands across without being too cramped or too seductive. People's eyes glaze over when it's all about roses and peonies."

Von Gal grew up in Brooklyn, New York. Her great-grandfather H. H. Weed, a cousin of von Gal's great-grandfather (Tina Weed), was a railroad magnate and a close friend of Buffalo Bills. Her grandmother was a gardener, who taught her father to grow roses and terraced salad fields. She began in garden as a child, tending old-fashioned flowers that were not for the tomato vines. The first thing Von Gal learned to cook was hollandaise sauce.
SHAPE SHIFT
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The amazing, newly-voiced Clark
traveled to London to meet
the artists who where he spent his
years working as a member of
Kermit. While Cooper conveyed
that his performance "would have
so much more if you could
see it," Kermit was delighted
by the effort. He summarized
it as "entertaining because
Dr. Schumann's audience from
North
was there to celebrate this
dash out through the city in
the audience's opinion.
Upon her arrival, Kermit
was greeted by her husband
and a basket of flowers. She
was then led to her dressing
room to prepare for the show.
Though this production was
an extraordinary piece that
focuses on the
relationship aspect of the
show, Kermit was
delighted to have had the
opportunity to perform with
her team and to bring joy to
those who came to see her.