The house sits high on this eleven-acre property overlooking Long Island Sound. Certain architectural features – beautiful onion storage barns and a stone balustrade with steps to the lower lawn – remain of the estate it once was and provided inspiration for reconfiguring gathering spaces in keeping with how the current owners live.

The landscape design was conceived in response to several directives: to collaborate with the architect in siting a new garage/studio, to address the failing terrace around the existing pool, and to develop a space on the west side of the house the clients wished to use throughout the year. As the designs for these spaces evolved, the scope of the project embraced other areas as well.

Stucco walls are used at the pool area and Birch Grove Garden, a nod to the property’s remnant stucco walls and outbuildings. At the pool area the walls serve several functions – pool enclosure, a bench for resting and playing, and a means of mediating the scale of the tall garage/studio.

Logical but unexpected moments were created. A compelling but previously unappreciated view toward the water now includes a group of pebble shaped concrete stones for sitting. The renovated large main terrace includes planting pockets to ameliorate the brightness and heat created by the stone. Paths mown through the wind-blown grass meadow (previously lawn) invite strolling and play.

A lyrical balance was established between materials and forms inherent to the site and new masonry details, patterns, structures and planting schemes that enliven the whole.
Plan view rendering
View from the entry courtyard toward the garage/studio building. In collaboration with the architect, the new building was sited and designed to ensure a logical hierarchy from the expansive and austere arrival space to the more intimate parking court at the mudroom entrance.
Reclaimed granite curbing is used to frame the gravel parking courtyard. Pieces of the rustic material are laid in a seemingly random yet purposeful composition to create a visual connection to the client’s studio door and invite movement across the space. Perennials and shrubs enliven pockets created between stones.
Looking down from the client’s studio, one sees the structure of the pool area, remnants of a beautiful old parapet wall, long grass meadow with mown paths, mature Beech trees, and Long Island Sound.
Toward the beginning of the project we suggested a large portion of the rear lawn be left to grow and mowed only twice a year. Paths through the longer grass are maintained weekly, allowing the client to access a favorite sitting area. The children run with friends through intersecting paths.
A long dining table beneath the new pergola, planted with shade-giving fragrant Wisteria, is sited to allow views of the pool and Long Island Sound beyond. Low stepable plantings are interspersed with taller perennials at carefully considered intervals, softening the masonry and allowing comfortable access to the pool area beyond.
Looking east toward the garage/studio. Stucco walls function as pool enclosure and a visual transition out from the architecture to the landscape beyond. The clients are fond of watching shadows from a young tree play across the tallest wall. Children play on and jump from the lowest wall.
A bluestone and reclaimed granite path leads toward a double gate and a grove beyond. Plants attractive to pollinators bring interest to the pool area and soften the façade of the garage/studio. Like the architecture, the plant palette is evocative of agricultural and rural forms and textures.
Dusk light enlivens the stucco walls. Narrow pieces of bluestone are used throughout the pool area, aligned with the movement of the tide at the property’s boundary and suggestive of the ebb and flow of waves as they meet the beach.
Looking across the perennial border toward the Birch Grove Garden at the west side of the main house.
A bluestone path leads through the Birch Grove Garden, connecting the front of the property with the spaces and views beyond. Paving stones cut into angular organic shapes and low growing perennials planted within the gravel add a playful sense of movement to the garden.
A stucco seating wall within the Birch Grove Garden is oriented toward a view of the Sound. The clients gather around the steel fire bowl throughout the year, even in snow. A blue gate incorporates a cut-out motif found on the house. Hornbeam, Holly, and Arborvitae hedges frame the space.
A view from the pool area up toward the main terrace at the back of the house. Butterfly bush, Hydrangea, and grasses anchor the gate and help obscure the mesh pool fence.
The main terrace is punctuated with one large and several small planting beds; plants include Lavender, Thyme, and stepable succulents. We sought out and acquired a selection of containers, arranged in harmonious groups at the terrace corners.
The original steps of the rear terrace previously ran uninterrupted for its entire length; the steps were replaced with full-depth granite with gracious tread widths. Three panels of low growing grass provide relief from the stone as they slope toward the wide lawn, integrating the architecture with the landscape.