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Within sight of the New York City skyline, a couple enjoys a backyard garden where



THE ACCENT'S ON Ancient

BY GEORGE HENDRIX PHOTOGRAPHER: MATTHEW BENSON

ILLUSTRATOR: TRAVIS RICE FIELD EDITOR: LOIS DE VRIES

Congestion. It's a synonym for Hoboken, New Jersey.

"There's maybe 40,000-50,000 people. There's a project, an old Italian neighborhood, 153 bars, lots of Wall Street money—a two-bedroom apartment just sold for \$2 million," Bo Dziman says. "We are completely surrounded by everything that is urban."

With the crush of the city weighing heavy, Bo says, "outdoor space is like a drug that you have to have." He and wife Adrienne Choma found that space in an

unlikely place—their 22x50-foot backyard, and in an even more unlikely form—a secret garden wrapped in the serene embrace of ancient Gothic church ruins seemingly transported intact from the Irish countryside. In truth, however, the setting was constructed mere months ago under the guiding hand of Adam Hoppe, a transplanted Australian who works as a landscape architect for the Port Authority.

Making Much Out of Little

The genesis of the garden dates back to 1995, when Bo and Adrienne bought their Hoboken brownstone. Native son Frank Sinatra is said to have had his tonsils removed in an office that's now the dining room of the narrow 1880s Italianate building. The home's empty backyard drew Adrienne. Although pinched

ABOVE: The striking foliage of *Perilla 'Magilla'* is often mistaken for coleus. In Adrienne Choma and Bo Dziman's garden it makes a dramatic statement in a patch of predominantly green hues. **OPPOSITE:** Towering canna foliage rises through a profusion of Japanese bloodgrass, hostas, *Euphorbia*, sweet potato vines, and other foliage plants in a deck planter.





ABOVE: Seeking light, a Kwanzan cherry from the original garden branches outward over the ipé deck. The tree provides a cool, shady dining umbrella on hot city afternoons. **OPPOSITE:** The area around the cocktail pool is a favorite spot for Adrienne and Bo's outdoor parties. Lush layers of tropical plants give it the feel of an exotic getaway.

between high-rises and a church—and not much bigger than a Midwestern vegetable patch—the yard seemed rich with potential.

For a time, the couple lived happily with their new garden, bolstering the soil and adding perennials. But on a blistering July afternoon, they took a dip in the pond to cool off. Bad idea. The pond was filled with stagnant, unfiltered water. "It was disgusting," Bo recalls.

They decided they wanted a real pool, even if it had to be small. Moreover, Adrienne and Bo concluded, if they were going to add a pool, they might as well

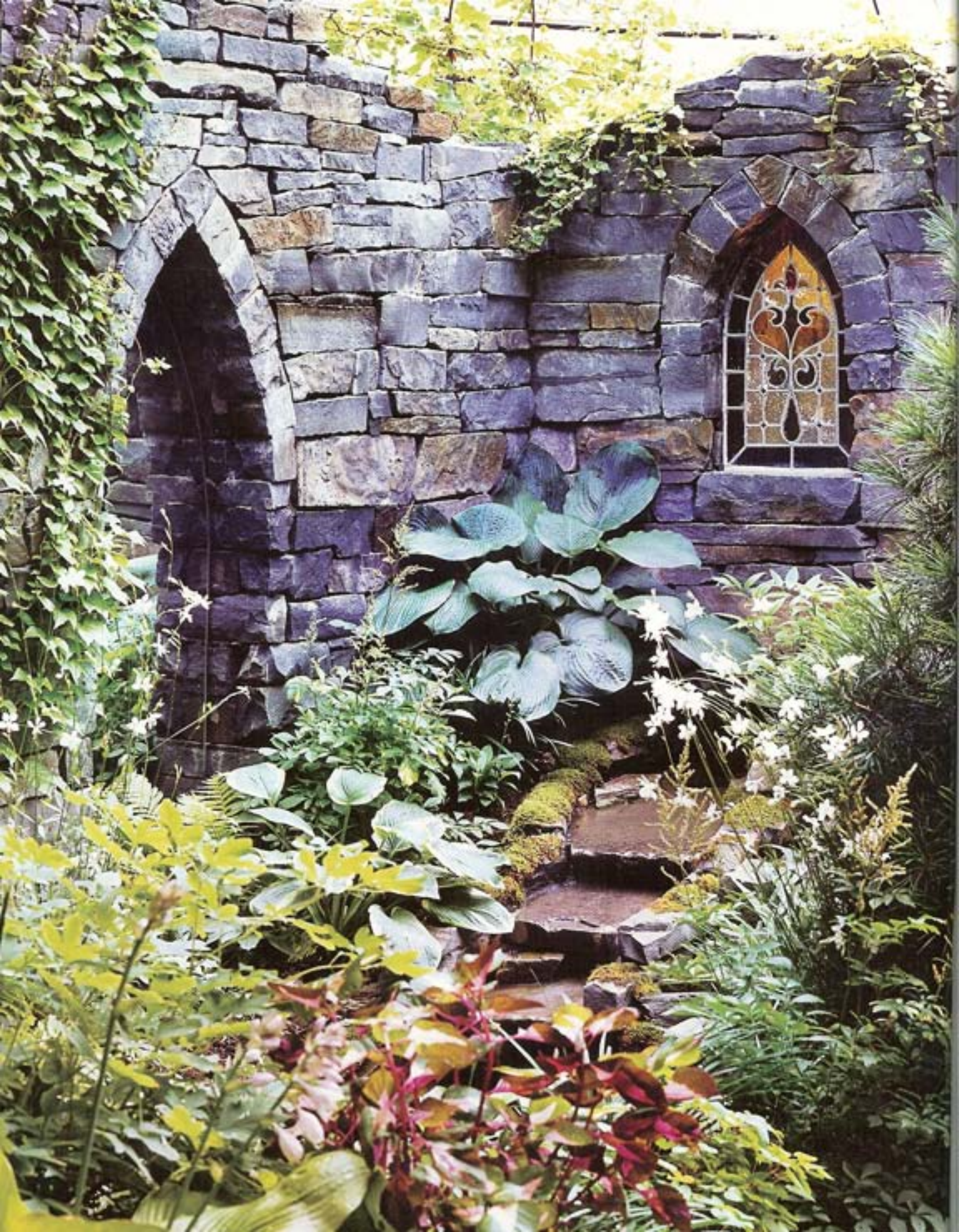
redo the entire backyard so they could step out their back door and escape the city.

They took their wish list to landscape whiz Hoppe. "We wanted a feel more than a look," Adrienne explains, "something inviting, soothing, embracing." The main requirements were a cocktail pool, a water feature to provide relaxing sounds, and a theme that would pull it all together to create a quiet retreat.

Let the Ruins Begin

The theme was unlike anything Hoboken had seen, inspired by ruins that Hoppe remembered from Europe. He also drew inspiration from the church next door. As Hoppe fleshed out the idea, he even created a whimsical story. The "ruins," he imagines, were left







Coleus



Clematis



Persian shield



'Heritage' river birch

from an old church that had been destroyed, then rebuilt next door.

While Hoppe planned, Bo spent more than seven months shuttling back and forth to city departments on his motor scooter to gain the necessary permits. "This was the biggest garden project Hoboken had ever seen, and officials were just stumped as to what decisions to make," he says.

In the end, Bo won his battle, and the outdoor getaway took shape. The largest segment of the ruins helps disguise a towering brick wall along one side of the garden. The other portion, an arch just beyond the patio, creates a window into the garden.

Hoppe used the arch, along with various plantings and crooks in the garden path, to break up sight lines through the backyard. That trick divides the garden into a series of interesting views while lending it an illusion of expansiveness. A few small trees provide solace from high-rise neighbors. Bo gained more privacy and further softened the lines of surrounding walls and fences by stringing wires in strategic spots and allowing Boston ivy to clamber up the wires.

Plantings also crowd the borders of the irregular-shape pool, which has soaked up to 10 guests at a time during the couple's parties. Hoppe selected the pool area's dominant plant, a red-leaf banana tree, which has turned out to be Adrienne's favorite plant.



OPPOSITE: A striking stained-glass window in the side-wall ruin mimics those of a neighboring church. A small water feature below the window provides a constant, relaxing murmur that soothes the spirit.





'Tropicanna' Canna

The deck, made of plantation-grown ipé, adds to the setting. The wood is extremely hard, virtually impervious to the ravages of weather and time, and ages to a mellow silver-gray. Rounding out the look, stained glass fittingly fills one of the ruins' arched windows, where a small waterfall murmurs below.

The sounds and sights seem a continent apart from the congested city streets just outside the walls. And Bo and Adrienne couldn't be more pleased. "The best surprise of all was that the finished garden was even more beautiful than we thought it could be," Adrienne says. "Now we use the garden constantly, happily, for entertaining, and generously, so that our friends can enjoy it, too."

FOR RESOURCES, SEE PAGE 119.



OPPOSITE: A paperbark maple (left foreground) and river birch (left rear) frame the heated cocktail pool. Adrienne has to replace the banana tree (right) each spring. **ABOVE:** Adrienne sited this trio of century-old Ethiopian milking stools at pool's edge. "They have a wonderful organicness to them," landscape architect Adam Hoppe says.

Planning Your Urban Oasis

Creating a city garden can be an exercise in determination. Expect to be challenged by issues such as bureaucratic roadblocks, bad soil, and unsupportive neighbors. Bo Dziman offers this advice: "Don't be afraid of barriers, whether at city hall or in the design, because there's always a solution." Consider the following as you plan your project:

Keep it legal. Make sure you know what permits you need. Urban property is heavily regulated, and if you fail to heed the rules, you could be subject to fines and/or the prospect of tearing out your new garden. Your city hall staff can provide a checklist of steps you need to take.

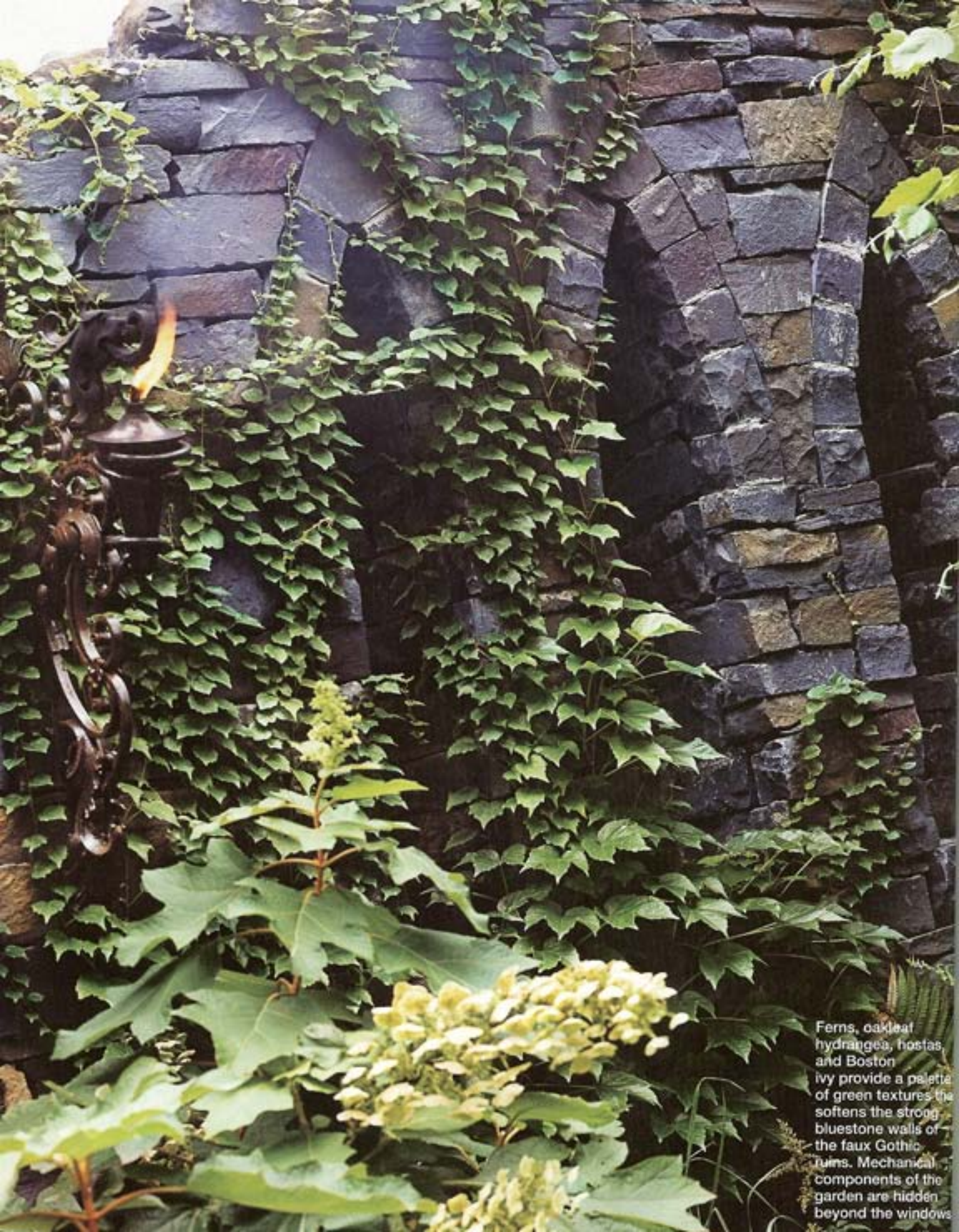
Ask a pro. A landscape designer or landscape architect can translate your inspiration and ideas into a workable plan, then oversee construction. That sort of help can be particularly useful when you're working with multiple contractors. If you're on a limited budget, try to at least set aside money for a consultation with a landscape professional to get advice and a garden drawing.

Build on a good foundation. A soil test may tell you what you already suspect, that your soil is low on nutrients, heavily compacted, and laced with construction debris. Play it safe. Loosen soil where you're creating planting beds to the depth

of at least one shovel scoop, and get rid of any unnatural debris. Then add plenty of compost and a balanced, slow-release fertilizer.

Consider the views. Trees, vines, hedges, and fences can all provide privacy, but you don't want to block attractive views. A garden with a series of interrupted sight lines will add the illusion of depth and size to a small yard.

Be realistic. Consider how much time you want to devote to maintenance. To save on chores, consider low-maintenance foliage plants and an irrigation system with automated watering.



Ferns, oakleaf hydrangea, hostas, and Boston ivy provide a palette of green textures that softens the strong bluestone walls of the faux Gothic ruins. Mechanical components of the garden are hidden beyond the windows

How'd They do That?

Contractors followed these steps to make the Gothic wall.



STEP 1: After excavating a rectangle-shaped pit framed with plywood, contractors poured concrete footings reinforced with rebar. Local codes required that footings reach the frost line, 48 inches deep.



STEP 2: Cinder block walls were assembled using standard concrete blocks set in mortar. Local zoning regulations determined the wall height.



STEP 3: Wherever a window opening was desired, crews laid out a prostrate wall. Using a template and masonry saw, they cut an outline of the window, then reassembled the remaining block fragments and set them in mortar.



STEP 4: Bluestone veneer was attached to the concrete blocks by buttering the back of each stone with mortar, then pressing the veneer to the concrete blocks.



STEP 5: To give the fresh veneer a weathered appearance, crews painted portions of the stone with a mixture of buttermilk, yogurt, and moss. The surface was kept moist for several weeks to help the moss get established.