

Real Estate

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LUXURY LIVING

Creating art with landscaping

Artist uses soil as his canvas, plants as his medium **R2**



Jay Petrow

A home near the Long Island Sound in Greenwich features Jay Petrow's landscaping work, including lush sea grasses. As an abstract artist, Petrow uses groups of plants to create color and texture.

THE LIST

Highest-priced listings of the week

Page R2



Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage

HOT PROPERTY

'Nature's Paradise' has pool, spa

Page R5

KEN EDWARDS



Summer home sales continue trend of slowing

down in August

Page R3

REAL ESTATE

LUXURY LIVING

Artist designs landscapes using soil as his canvas

By Meg Barone

Jay Petrow does with paints and plants what musical masters do with notes on a staff. The Westport artist and landscape designer arranges colors, textures and shapes — whether they originate from a tube of paint or the earth or he applies them with a brush and palette knife or a trowel and spade — to create works of art.

Petrow is an award-winning artist whose landscape designs appear in a far-flung gallery of properties in Fairfield and Westchester counties and the Hamptons on Long Island. The former art director, senior art director and international art director for Business Week Magazine, and layout designer for Time and Sports Illustrated magazines, is the owner and chief landscape designer of PetrowGardens Landscape Design based in Westport.

Petrow gravitated to painting abstract expressionist works three years ago after many years of painting representative landscapes, still lifes and portraiture. He said he finds inspiration “in (Wassily) Kandinsky’s vibrant use of color and the expressive brushstrokes of Hans Hoffman, Franz Kline and Robert Motherwell.”

The artist doesn’t think about landscaping when he paints abstracts and he doesn’t think about abstract painting when he does landscape design. “But the way that I visualize landscapes and the way that I visualize the paintings is similar in that I am thinking about color and texture and contrasting shapes,” said Petrow, who studied painting at the Silvermine School of Art in New Canaan, landscape design at the New York Botanical Gardens and advertising at the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan. He received a bachelor’s degree in fine arts and biology from Middlebury College in Vermont.

Designing landscapes and painting abstract art have more similarities than one would expect.

“When you look at nature, there are so many details in the landscape,” he said. “As a landscape



Jay Petrow

Above: Jay Petrow is an abstract painter, who is often influenced by nature, like in this piece titled “Waterfall.” Right: A Greenwich home on Keofferam Road features landscaping from Jay Petrow.

designer, I’m inspired by my natural surroundings, but I abstract it to its core essence in my designs. When a garden is designed, groups of plants are used to compose areas of color and texture that interplay with each other.”

Alison Cox, one of Petrow’s Greenwich clients, said the viewer can actually get lost in his work.

“There’s a lot there aesthetically to look at,” she said about his painting. “It’s very rich and deep. I’m really impressed.”

She said Petrow’s artwork is organic and moves around on a canvas, much as plants move in a garden, perhaps nudged by a whisper of a breeze or blown by a gust of wind. Cox is equally moved by the artwork he created in her yard.

“As a (landscape) designer he is incredibly talented,” she said.

The Cox family has a rain garden on its property. A rain garden takes advantage of rainfall and runoff from a storm and after Superstorm Sandy in October 2012 town officials tightened regulations on what can and cannot be planted in a rain garden. Cox said Petrow was knowledgeable of the rules and the specific plantings



Nancy E. Clarke

Jay Petrow

allowed.

“It’s just beautiful, and it’s been blooming basically since June. It’s gorgeous, it’s unique,” she said.

It’s not the typical landscaping, which can be cookie-cutter. Petrow is, in effect, painting on a property using the soil as his canvas and the flowers and shrubbery as his medium.

“It’s that special. Everyone comments on it, too,” she said.

In Cox’s rain garden, he combined agastache, a purple-plumed flower also known as hyssop or hummingbird mint, with orange helenium, also called obedient plant, because he knew they would bloom at the same time and he liked the idea of the contrasting color palette and shapes. Agas-



Details

To see Jay Petrow’s landscape work visit www.petrowgardens.com. To view his fine art, visit www.jaypetrowfineart.com. To view his graphic design and art direction work visit www.jpetrowdesign.com.

tache grows vertically while the daisy-like helenium grows horizontally.

In another garden, he has planted variegated, broad-leaved chartreuse-colored hostas with reddish-purple heuchera.

“They all seem to work together as a painting,” Petrow said. He also experiments with combinations of refined or cultivated pe-

rennial flowers with wild plantings.

Unlike his paints, which he can mix to create whatever color he desires, in the garden Petrow’s creativity is limited to what Mother Nature allows. The flowers and shrubbery are dictated by the regional weather, growing zone, sun, shade and whether certain plants are drought-resistant or need frequent watering.

He plays with depth in his paintings and the same with his landscape design. In his mind, he’s trying to visualize how the various elements will integrate themselves into the landscape not just in warm weather months but throughout the year.