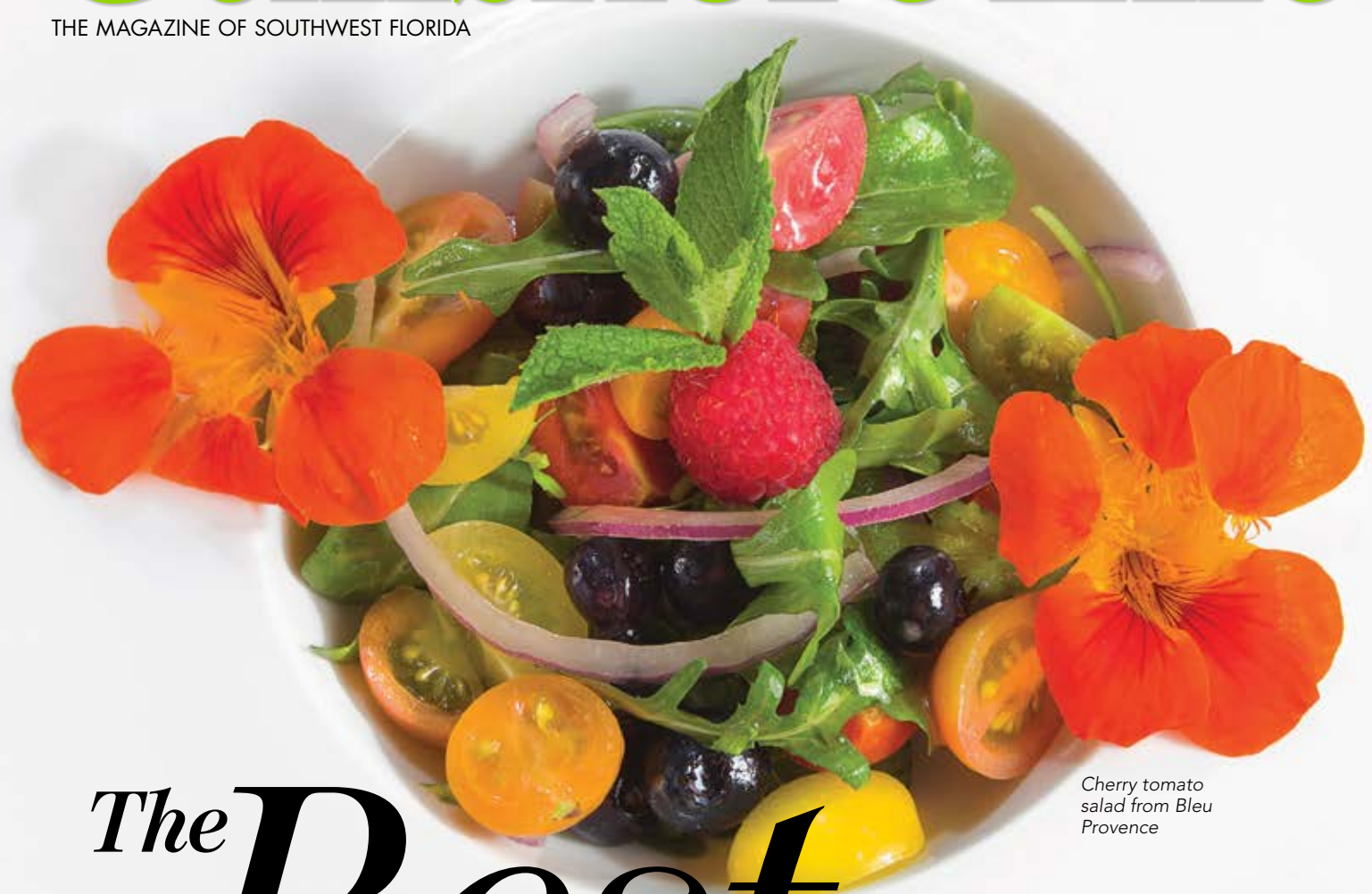


LOSING MILES: A WAR WIDOW'S
POIGNANT STORY

MEET THE GO-TO SAGE
OF LEE COUNTY

Gulfshore Life

THE MAGAZINE OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA



Cherry tomato
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**"PEOPLE WANT VERSAILLES
ON A POSTAGE STAMP"
A LANDSCAPE ARTIST TELLS ALL**



HAVE YOU

ever really stopped to look at a well-designed yard? Do you see the layers of plants, the textures, the way things move in the wind? Do you notice the canopy of branches or the way that everything is scaled so that the trees don't stick out, gangly, like awkward teenagers? Are your eyes drawn to certain things? Are they diverted from others? At night, do the lights illuminate the trees and play off the pools? Does the entryway invite you in?

These are the things that celebrated Naples landscape architect W. Christian Busk considers when he transforms yards from bland, builders-grade plantings into places of wonderment. It's no easy task in Southwest Florida, where towering homes often stretch to the lines of undersized lots. "People want Versailles on a postage stamp," Busk is fond of saying. Still, he manages to craft landscapes that look as if they come straight out of paintings: regal fountains, golf course-perfect lawns, ambling walkways, conversation-provoking furniture arrangements.

Busk, owner of the Naples-based W. Christian Busk Landscape Architect Inc., started designing 30 years ago. Here, we learn a little bit about what makes his mind work and discover that there's a lot more that goes into his craft than a homeowner might ever expect.

Finding passion

Busk initially pursued a career in golf course management. As a teenager in the Palm Beach area,

“People Want Versailles on a Postage Stamp”

HOW LANDSCAPE ARTIST W. CHRISTIAN BUSK MEETS HIS CREATIVE CHALLENGES IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA **BY JENNIFER REED**

he'd gotten part-time work at Lost Tree Village, an up-and-coming golf course community, and then helped build the course at the Eastpointe Country Club in Palm Beach Gardens. He enrolled in the University of Florida's School of Agriculture, where he studied for two years until an unexpected summer trip forced a reconsidering of his future.

I had an opportunity to go on a summer trip with all these architecture and interior design and contracting students. We went all over the place—Georgia, New Orleans, Houston, Boston, New York. I got so excited about architecture and interior design that I went to my parents and said, "I want to change majors." Of course, here I am going into my third year of college, but I went ahead and changed colleges right away. I guess I was just yearning for something that wasn't in the (golf management) program. It was exciting to talk about architecture and building and doing beautiful things. It just turned on this engine inside me.

My dad said, "You can't become a professional student. You have to tell me when you are going to graduate, and you have to finish both degrees." It was a smart thing to do.

I thought I was going to design buildings, but it was just too much "in the box" for me. I loved creating the landscape outside, the magic of it. But I appreciate architecture, and I do a lot of it in my business.

The challenge of the Florida plat

These houses are built as tall as they can be right up to the lot line. There you go—now make it wonderful. You have to make them as beautiful as they can be and work within our restrictions. You are creating these privacy walls, privacy gardens, water gardens. We are pulling every rabbit out of the hat. You know the architects get their way with the houses and all that. We get the leftovers, and we have to take the leftover pieces and make that sing. It's just like an orchestra doing a musical score. It's the musical score of the property.

Existing homes provide an additional set of challenges.

So many people buy a model, and in model landscapes, everyone crams everything right



up front so it looks more finished, but those things aren't going to last over time. You have to tear out all that stuff and use the things that are good and the backgrounds and then just layer everything else in. So it's a process of weeding out the bad stuff. I try to re-use everything that is salvageable.

Busk with his dog, Lola, at the Nutting house, one of several historical homes he has renovated and relocated in the community.

Creating beauty

Most of the work is creating memory points. We are creating a focal point or vista. We sometimes do that by adding a number of trees that are the same type and maybe then showing up with a texture change ... and then we add color for emphasis.

It's like creating an illusion. It's like creating those old panels that were the 18th or 19th century art forms that (the French) would paint.

I draw everything. Some projects get over 1,000 pages of scratch paper, layer after layer, making the most of these sites. Where do we get height? Where do we create the layers underneath?

Much of our focus is on where the views are from the inside of the house. These homes will have a kitchen garden. You look out the kitchen window, and there's nothing there, so you are creating a vista garden there. Then there's the master bath, and, more times than not, we are creating a privacy garden off the master bath.

I love creating hardscapes (inanimate elements of landscaping such as brickwork) that allow people to move through their gardens. That's the most fun for me—getting the grading

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Lush landscaping frames an eclectic sculpture collection on Marco Island; palm trees add visual layers to a poolside retreat at Miromar Lakes; landscaping helps create separate spaces and privacy at a home in Pelican Bay.





Bringing joy to homeowners

Busk works to understand owners' tastes and intentions for their yards. He remembers in particular trying to discover a client's style when he happened to see movers bringing ornate furniture to the house.

It was over-the-top Renaissance. So I created a garden that was really, really tight. Allées (walkways) of palms and urns. Everything was styled. Everything had a center point. We created backgrounds. If you looked at every little piece, it had a reason to be in the garden. You just start working with people, and it's a discovery over time.

People can get a bigger joy out of their landscape than they ever thought (possible) because it's styled and organized to make the most of their landscape. They never thought the outdoors could have such a three-dimensional excitement for them.

On historic preservation

Busk has had a fascination with old buildings

since childhood. About 20 years ago, he started saving old homes from demolition. He moves them to a piece of property in old Bonita, where he's created a virtual village of rescued and restored homes. They include the Williams-Packard house, built in 1915; a caretaker's cottage from Koreshan State Park; and the home of Naples developer and former Louisville Courier-Journal publisher Walter Haldeman, in which Busk now lives.

I love taking something that a lot of people wouldn't mess with and making it something. These structures, they were built to last the test of time. ... You want it to last another 100 years. The challenge is you want to make it practical for today's living without losing the spirit of the home. I just think it's fun.

I like figuring out the little intricacies of things—figuring out, “How am I going to get a bathroom in here? How do we make this work?” It's working from concept all the way through to completion. That's what I do every day. That's what I do for people. ✦

This disappearing edge swimming pool seamlessly blends into its surroundings, making for one gorgeous, uninterrupted view.