

Metropolitan Home

QUICK TIPS
FOR TOWN
OR COUNTRY
ROOMS

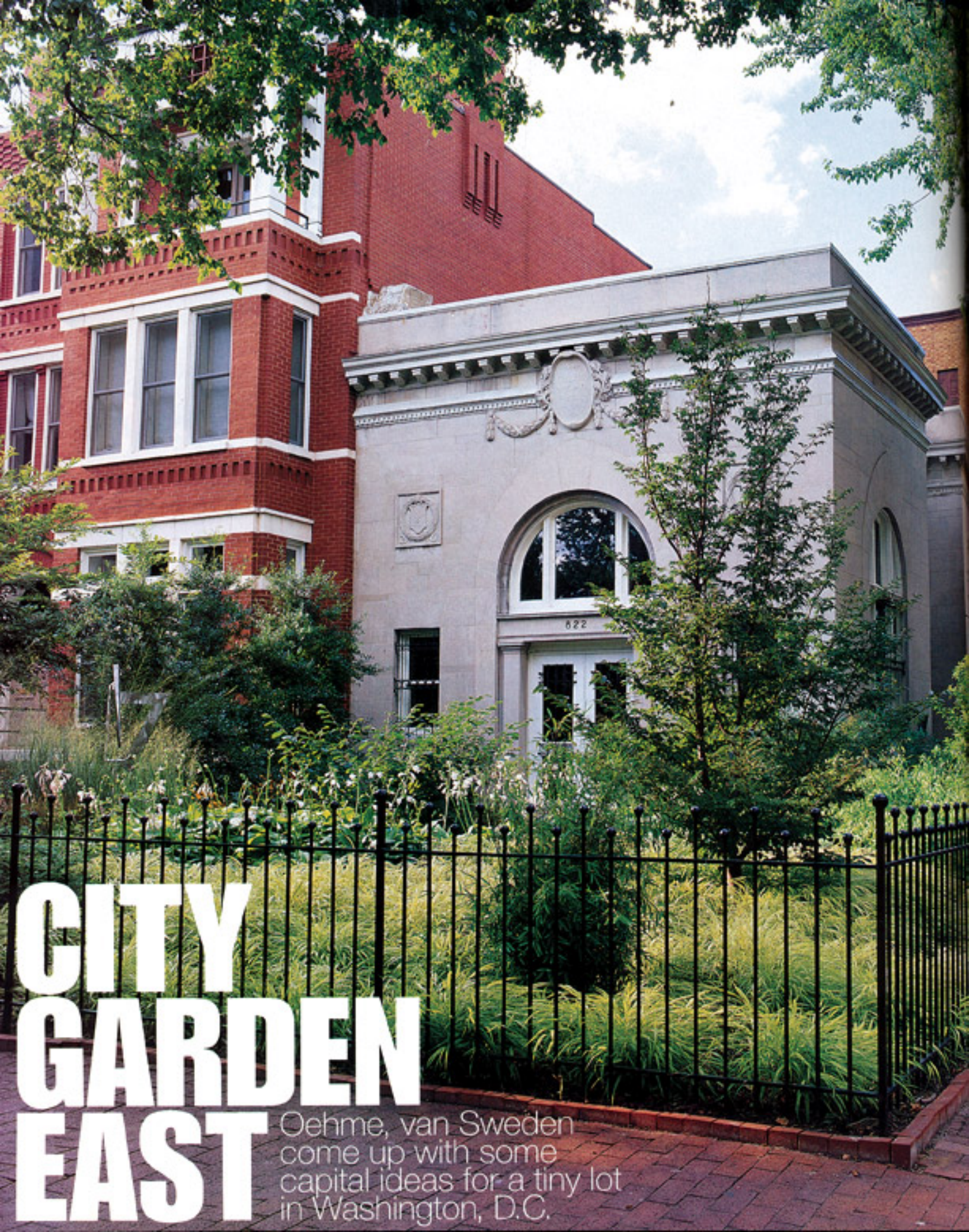
INSTANT
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STYLE

3 BLOOMIN'
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SPA FOOD



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CITY GARDEN EAST

Oehme, van Sweden
come up with some
capital ideas for a tiny lot
in Washington, D.C.



It was kismet on Capitol Hill. When Gary Mintz, a Washington, D.C., cardiologist, began converting a former bank into a house, he knew that his small corner lot demanded a garden with a strong presence. "I had always liked the gardens designed by Wolfgang Oehme and James van Sweden, so when I discovered that their offices were eight blocks away in a former bank building that was a sister to mine, it just seemed that we were destined to work together," he says.

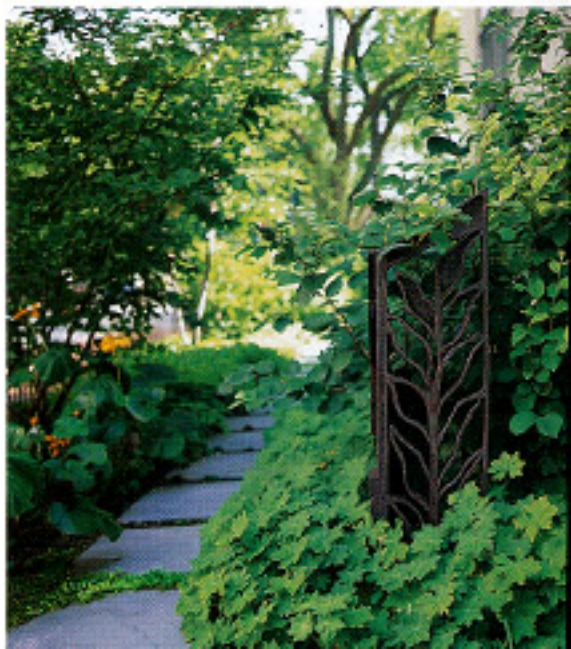
Today this city garden looks mature beyond its four years, with the clean, naturalistic design characteristic of Oehme, van Sweden gardens making a statement as stalwart as the bank's architecture. On this 3,500-square-foot lot, the footprint of the house takes up 1,400 square feet, requiring meticulous garden plotting.

The first move was to enclose the entire space with an iron fence that looks as if it had been installed when the bank was built. The fence allowed for a brilliant stroke of design genius: The entry path from the street to the front door of the house was eliminated. This left the front garden unbroken and created enough space for a peaceful terrace. Now one enters the property from the side. The long narrow space along the house has become an inviting garden corridor—paved with rectangular stones—that leads around the corner of the building to the front terrace.

In another bold design stroke, the terrace is not square with the house. "We decided to skew it about twenty degrees to make a surprise," van Sweden says. "It creates a tension that complements Mintz's collection of modern art."

Opposite: The front walk was removed to allow room for a terrace. From top: Blue clump bamboo (*Fargesia nitida*) towers above *Hakonechloa macra*; a mobile rises beyond *Rudbeckia fulgida* 'Goldstrum'; the garden corridor is underplanted with *Geranium macrorrhizum*.

Produced by Barbara Bohl.
Photographs by Richard Felber.
Written by Katherine Whiteside.





Van Sweden positioned four major sculptures from Mintz's collection throughout the garden. "We designed lighting for them," van Sweden says, "so there is a sense of mystery at night." Additionally, there are lights that can be moved around in the garden to accent different plants as they come into bloom. The theme of light and shadow carries over to the daytime garden. Tall, dark-leaved Foster hollies play against golden grasses, black seed heads, and the light-and-dark mottled bark of the *Stewartia pseudocamellia*.

The sculptural quality of plant material is emphasized by the fat, starlike leaves of *Gemium macrorrhizum* and the wide fuzzy leaves of a special, nonblooming lamb's ears (*Stachys byzantina* 'Helene von Stein'). The rectangular stones that pave the garden corridor are softened with the lush growth of *Mazus reptans*, a beautiful but tough ground cover originally from the Himalayas.

Mintz is very happy with the juxtaposition of architecture, hard landscaping, sculpture and plant material in his tiny urban garden. "Gardening is taken very seriously here on the Hill. I wanted great, natural style—no azaleas—and to have the garden be interesting all year around.

"I don't cut the garden back in the fall," he continues. "In winter there are tall, beige grasses rustling in the wind and lots of beautiful seed heads on the astilbe and rudbeckia. In February, when the daffodils start coming out, I just shear all the perennial material right to the ground. Then everything is soft green and yellow. Jim's design is perfect—it has given me plenty of privacy on a busy street, and it just seems like the right garden for this spot." ■

See Resources, last pages.

Opposite: Astilbe glow in the late afternoon sun.
From top: One of three lighting bollards surrounded with *Stachys byzantina* 'Helene von Stein'; detail of its richly textured leaves; a ceramic sculpture rests at the corner of the front terrace.



