

Ornamental OUTLOOK

September 2004
A Meister Publication

FRESH
IDEAS

Maximizing
The Value Of
Landscaping

After Page 28

Stephen Pategas
Hortus Oasis

Krislin Pategas
Hortus Oasis

Design Dream Team

Page 10



Design Dream Team

Meet the minds behind the award-winning designs of Hortus Oasis.

By **Tacy Callies**,

Editor

tcallies@meistermedia.com

As a young girl growing up in Easton, CT, Kristin Gorenzel always wanted a horse. When she turned 16, her father decided the time was right. She'll be so busy with the horse that she won't have time for boys, he reasoned.

"Horses are expensive, and I had to get a job on the weekends," says Kristin. So she became a cashier in a retail sales barn at a busy apple orchard. "Once the harvest was in, the field manager began overseeing the sales barn and became my boss," recalls Kristin. Six years later, he also became her husband.

Little did the couple know at the time, that nearly three decades later — after following two different career paths in landscape design — they would once again find themselves working together.

Journeying South

After Stephen graduated from Fairfield University in Connecticut with a degree in sociology, he started his own one-man landscape maintenance and installation company. This prompted him to go back to school at the University of Massachusetts (where Kristin was completing a degree in plant pathology) to earn a master's degree in landscape architecture.

In completing his master's thesis on the restoration of a historic fortress in St. Kitts, Stephen's studies landed he and Kristin in the Caribbean for a three-month adventure. "It was incredible," Stephen recalls. "I had never been further south than Washington, D.C., at that point in my life."

Six months later, back in Connecticut, Disney offered Kristin a job in Florida as a plant pathologist at Epcot.

Hortus Oasis

Owners: Kristin and Stephen Pategas

Location: Winter Park, FL

Year Founded: 2001

Services: Residential and specialty garden design, commercial landscape architecture, garden photography, horticultural education and writing

Customers: Homeowners, architects, and engineers

Region Served: Central Florida

Member of: Association of Professional Landscape Designers, American Society of Landscape Architects, Garden Writers of America, and The Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association

Company Philosophy: To share our design knowledge and passion for plants.

"When we moved to Florida, we had no intention of staying," says Kristin. "But it ended up that my career really took off at Disney, and Florida's environment (year-round construction coupled with a year-round growing season) was perfect for Stephen's landscape architecture work."

So in the mid-1980s, he went into business for himself as Stephen G. Pategas, Landscape Architect. While Stephen was successfully building his home-based business, Kristin forged an 18-year career at Disney. She climbed the horticultural ladder, eventually ending up as gardening program manager for the Disney Institute.

But all good things must come to an end. The announcement was made that the Disney Institute was shutting down due to financial difficulties, and Kristin had 90 days to find another job.

"I realized that to stay with Disney I would have had to leave horticulture," says Kristin. "That was not appealing to me. At that point, I asked Stephen, 'What do you think? Can we do this?'"



Stephen and Kristin Pategas enjoy container gardening at their home-based business in Winter Park, FL.

Hortus Oasis Is Born

What she was proposing was joining her husband in his business.

Knowing how much she brought to the table with all of her Disney experience and training, Stephen embraced the idea and changed the company name to Hortus Oasis in 2001. The name was a tribute to the couple's previous home, which they affectionately referred to as "the oasis." Having just moved into a new home, they thought Hortus (Latin for "garden") Oasis was a fitting name.

The next steps were to figure out how to divvy up the work and how to bring in enough business to double the workload. As a registered landscape architect, Stephen would focus on the commercial work, while Kristin's Florida Certified Landscape Designer and Association of Professional Landscape Designers designations best suited her to handle the bulk of the residential projects. Teaching and writing would be a team effort.

With the division of labor established, Hortus Oasis was up and running. Then Sept. 11 struck. Commercial work began declining, and residential jobs came to a standstill.

"It was very difficult getting work," says Stephen. "It took a whole year before people wanted to spend money again." During the slow period,

Kristin and Stephen built their Web site (www.hortusoasis.com) and developed marketing strategies.

They also used the down time to retool the scope of their teaching programs to drive more business. One popular course they've taught at Harry P. Leu Gardens in Orlando is a hands-on workshop on home-garden design.

"We've had nothing but wonderful comments on this program," says Robert Bowden, executive director of Leu Gardens. "Stephen and Kristin are a terrific team of well-rounded, insightful horticulturists. They're gardeners in the true sense of the word."

The couple also gives garden club lectures and teaches classes at the Winter Park Library, as well as a weeklong annual workshop at the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, NC.

Community Involvement And Career Highlights

In addition to teaching, Stephen and Kristin are passionate about improving their local community. Stephen serves on the tree preservation board for the city of Winter Park, FL, and was previously parks and recreation chairper-

Hortus Oasis won a 2004 landscape design award from the Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association for this residential garden.



Photo by Stephen Pategas/Hortus Oasis

son for six years. Kristin was involved with the Keep Winter Park Beautiful board for a number of years.

Hortus Oasis recently donated landscape design services for the relocation of Casa Feliz, a historical home in Winter Park designed by the famous architect James Gamble Rogers II.

Stephen has also given his time as president of his voluntary homeowners association for more than 10 years.

In this role, Stephen was instrumental in getting the city to buy land in his neighborhood for a park. He designed The Park at Orwin Manor with fellow landscape architect Tom McMacken, the community pitched in to build it, and Kristin and Stephen ended up moving across the street from it. "We look out the window every day and see people using the park. It just doesn't get any better than that," Stephen says. For his work with the park, the Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association (FNGLA) and the American Society of Landscape Architects honored him with landscape design awards in 1994.

The couple was jointly recognized for their design of the teaching garden at the Disney Institute in 1997 when they won an FNGLA landscape design award and also the Roy Rood Award for best overall project. "I was working for Disney at the time and hired Stephen as the landscape architect to assist me on the project," says Kristin. Most recently, Hortus Oasis took home a

Photo by Stephen Pategas/Hortus Oasis



The teaching garden at the Disney Institute earned Kristin and Stephen two landscape design awards in 1997.

2004 FNGLA landscape design award for a Winter Park residence.

Another high point in Kristin's career was her first trip to Europe. "I was sent to EuroDisney for a month to assist the horticulture department in creating topiary," she says. "Being self-employed, Stephen was able to join me. We got our first taste of European culture, architecture, and gardens, which opened up a whole new world for us from a design standpoint."

Beyond The Business

What does the future hold for Hortus Oasis?

"We'd like to design more specialty gardens that have some public participation," says Stephen. "We are creating a display and idea garden at our home to show what we've seen in our travels and to share what we teach."

Kristin adds they would also like to write books.

When the couple isn't busy bettering their business or community, they enjoy several hobbies together aside from gardening and visiting gardens.

"Cooking is how we relax and make the separation at the end of the work day," says Kristin.

Watching movies is another popular pastime for them.

Their beautifully decorated home reveals that their design skills clearly aren't limited to landscapes. Kristin is an avid seamstress, crafting many of the home's draperies, and a talented painter. She attributes her artistic talent to her great-great-grandfather, William M. Davis, a famous Civil War artist.

When asked what it's like spending all of their time working and living together, Kristin says, "It's great!"

"It's fabulous," echoes Stephen. "Can we have a 25-hour day?"

If you didn't know better, you might just think these two — who this month are celebrating the 30th anniversary of when they met — were newlyweds! ■

Favorite Plants: Personal Picks

"What's my favorite plant? What day is it?" Stephen Pategas jokes. "I like plants that cause a reaction."

Plants that are fragrant, offer seasonal change, attract wildlife, or have fun foliage or flowers are features he likes. Succulents, rain lilies, 'Ang Yo' dwarf Asian jasmine, and multipurpose plants like herbs are a few of his favorites.

Passifloras, especially the 'Amethyst'

cultivar — a larval food for the gulf fritillary butterfly — are top picks for Kristin Pategas.

"*Ilex vomitoria* 'Pendula,' the weeping yaupon tree, is another one of our favorites," says Kristin. "It's very adaptable to different soil and light conditions and is a native and nesting tree."

Her other favorites include dwarf cultivars of Walters viburnum, hedge bamboo (excellent as a privacy screen), and the ZZ plant (works well indoors and in containers).