

Finding Peace On Skaneateles Lake



story and photos by K.C. Fahy-Harvick

A California couple discovers the perfect landing spot

I have been a dyed-in-the-wool New Yorker most of my life, but the deal was sealed during my college years. My Midwestern classmates, who had never been to New York State, often made disparaging remarks about my home being “one big slab of cement.” So, no shock that I thoroughly enjoy hearing about visitors from out of state who are soon in awe of the unspoiled beauty of the Finger Lakes Region. In fact, I’m thrilled to see that in 2019, over 77 million visitors (a new record) came to our state parks, trails, and campgrounds, according to auburnpub.com.

Last year I was contacted by a couple of out-of-state visitors, Ted and Nancy, from Southern California. They found me through my garden articles in Life in the Finger Lakes magazine, but long before becoming

avid readers, they were already researching Skaneateles and the Finger Lakes.

Inspired by an article in a 2013 Architectural Digest that calls Skaneateles a “postcard town,” Ted convinced Nancy to fly out, hunt for this beautiful place, and see if it fit their vision for a vacation home. It is a tiny town on the north end of a little long lake, impossible to spell, even harder to pronounce, but once found, it steals your heart. Perfectly nestled on the water, the town of Skaneateles is exactly where Currier and Ives meets Norman Rockwell, and Frank Capra directs the meeting.

The exploratory mission in the Skaneateles area was like finding the “X” on a treasure map. No travel brochure sales pitch was needed, as big beautiful trees, gently rolling pastoral fields, hillside vineyards, and lots of peace and quiet surpassed all expectations. Months later, the perfect perch was found for their lake home, and the dream began to come to fruition.

Landscape design work started in the fall of 2018, when the new house construction was almost completed. We started the process with a walk-and-talk on the property. The bucolic qualities of the land were undeniable, and the only sounds came from a series of waterfalls that steer a brook through the property to join the waves of the lake. The gently sloping west lake frontage delivered the perfect exposure for morning sun with coffee and cool shade with evening cocktails. Conditions were also perfect for perennial gardens. Our walk concluded as a cool breeze tempered the warmth of the sun, and feelings of serenity surrounded us like a cozy blanket.



For me, a successful garden design always includes a great deal of input from the homeowner, to establish personal design style and level of expertise. Of course, there is also some education involved to help them visualize the plan and imagine themselves living with the plants. Ted and Nancy have a landscape business in California, so they have more knowledge of the process than

most, but I still needed to familiarize them with the plants that grow in the Northeast. This East Coast/West Coast collaboration was an interesting challenge.



My Four Season Garden design principles fit the bill for this plan (see sidebar on last page). For now, this is a vacation home, so the first consideration was to design gardens that would peak during their visits. Perennials bring a bounty of color and vitality during summer and fall, but the real trick was to create winter interest for their holiday stay. Evergreens with various forms and colors combined with stone structures to make the stark winter landscape more appealing.

Start to finish, the landscape project took several months to complete, and included nearly 40 new trees, 25 varieties of shrubs, and 80 varieties of perennials. Some of the tree selections were rarely seen specimens that, because of their unique characteristics, became focal points in the



landscape. The perennials added texture and all-season color to the semi-formal foundation plantings.

Spring blooming trees, shrubs, and native wildflowers were included in the design for future enjoyment, as these New York converts plan to make this a permanent home. Ted and Nancy's unique style is evident in the home, and now the landscape will enhance that style and their vision for the entire property. Their love affair with the Finger Lakes has grown immensely since that first journey over hill and dale. Peace and quiet here enraptures those who visit, but in time, New York fosters feelings of home and heartland.

K.C. Fahy-Harvick, a landscape designer, is a sought-after lecturer. Her workshops feature her love of perennials, bird gardening, and water features. More about Fahy-Harvick can be found at www.gardeningmatters.com, the ***Gardening Matters Facebook*** page, or by email kcfh60@gmail.com.

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Plants Used

TREES – unique characteristics

- Paper Bark Maple (*Acer griseum*)
- Dawn Redwood 'Miss Grace' (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*)
- Weeping White Spruce (*Picea glauca pendula*)

SHRUBS – evergreen

- Dwarf Boxwood 'Franklin's Gem' (*Buxus*)
- Dwarf Serbian Spruce (*Picea omorika nana*)
- Dwarf Weeping Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis* 'Jeddeloh')

SHRUBS – flowering

- Lilac 'Miss Kim' (*Syringa patula*)
- Hydrangea m. 'Tokyo Delight'
- Weigela 'Ghost'

PERENNIALS – highlights

- Geranium 'Roseanne'
- Coneflower Sombrero hybrids (*Echinacea*)
- Phlox 'Mt Fuji' , 'Purple Flame'

KC's Four Season Garden Design Principles

- 1) Select a mix with one-half evergreen and one-half deciduous trees and shrubs in the design, especially in the front of the house.
- 2) Know the complete life cycle of plants for all four seasons. Many plants have different features unique to each season.
- 3) Extend color by using perennials with evergreen or sustaining foliage. Spring or fall blooming perennials will bring out color earlier and later than annual plants because of frost issues.
- 4) For year-round accents, use frost-proof containers that won't crack during the winter.
- 5) Stone structures, sculptures, seating, and garden art provide all-season interest.

