



The LandArt Garden Studio Story

Some people prefer not to blend in. Some people choose not to settle for what's available. Some people like to avoid the commonplace. I'm one of those people. I'm creative and enjoy reimagining the ordinary. Perhaps you can relate. If you are observant and find the uniform sameness of the marketplace unappealing, you clearly look at the world a little differently than most people.

As a child, people commented about the creativity and detail of my coloring books. I didn't realize then that my personal characteristics included being artistic, particular and thorough. Traits that would serve me well. After graduation I had the good fortune to start a career in the graphic arts field. I worked closely with very creative and demanding people. I paid attention, climbed the corporate ladder and became very good at account management: the key to meeting deadlines, staying on budget and making clients happy.

In 2005 my wife and I built a new home. The builder's landscaping was quite typical. Being creative and industrious, I designed a new plan that would blend better with the home's architecture and natural surroundings. During the project a vacation to Italy and Greece was illuminating. The stunning scenery and historic art and architecture that has influenced the course of human events for thousands of years was inspiring and made a very strong impression. The genesis for LandArt Garden Studio had begun.

On our return home I felt compelled to learn all I could about garden design. I became a NJ Master Gardener and joined the Pennsylvania Horticulture Society. I enrolled in landscape design courses, attended garden workshops and horticultural seminars at five of the area's most visited and well known public gardens and arboretums. One was the Morris Arboretum of the University of Pennsylvania where I earned a Landscape Design Certificate. I also attended a number of "green industry" conferences to observe the business practices of landscape design/build firms and to experience their point of view. The concept of LandArt Garden Studio was taking root.

The classes and seminars were insightful. The more I participated in these academic pursuits the more apparent it was that good taste and a talent for design was in my DNA. I seemed to know instinctively how to create designs people enjoyed and talked about.

During this period our garden evolved into an oasis of originality and became an elegant diversion from life's distractions. The garden had different design vignettes throughout. Each one was rich in details and delightfully surprising. Family and friends were amazed at how a small suburban property could be transformed into a scene from the coast of the Mediterranean.

In 2012 we were invited to participate in a well known garden tour event. Visitors loved the garden, especially the many exuberant and vibrant containers. It was exciting to share gardening insights and experiences and to be able to answer questions about the plants we chose and our planting compositions. We also talked about the garden embellishments, they take a little extra thought but add a special touch. Some people wanted to know if I did this professionally and some asked for my business card. Horticulture was moving from just a hobby to a calling.

Over time it became obvious there is a small group of people with a particular sense of style. Individuals who care how they present themselves and their homes to the world. Nonconformists looking for imaginative garden containers and curb appeal that makes a statement. They just may not have the time, patience or green thumb to do it themselves. Finding someone who understands and can accomplish what they envision is a challenge. This is a task well beyond what most lawn care businesses are able to provide. I knew, based on my business background, horticultural expertise and travel observations, LandArt could fill this niche in a way that no one else could.

LandArt Garden Studio is a custom residential garden design studio. Specialists in unique garden containers and bespoke gardens. Horticultural artistry that exists somewhere between nature and art. This is our story and who it's for. If you look at the world a little differently you may want to commission an artist rather than hire a landscaper to tell your story. After all, no one else is exactly like you.

"Why fit in when you were born to stand out?" Dr. Seuss

John Drexel

An Interview with John Drexel, Horticultural Artist

"Gardens are just large coloring books waiting for an artist to bring them to life."

by Beardsford S. Dreschler – Freelance writer

I first saw John Drexel in March at opening day of the 2018 Pennsylvania Horticultural Society Philadelphia Flower Show. PHS invited John to be one of three contestants in the Subaru sponsored Gardener's Studio Container Challenge event.



John's container composition was elegant. He turned common nursery plants into a visual delight. His good natured banter with the emcee and knowledgeable container tips was a hit with the standing room only audience. After seeing John on stage I thought he would be interesting to interview. I wanted to learn more about his background and his container design business, LandArt Garden Studio, Ilc.

John and his wife Grace agreed to an interview in July. Our appointment day was picture perfect. Their home's curb appeal and front entrance was very nice, simple but with panache, definitely not your garden variety garden. The couple greeted me at their front door and we walked through their well-appointed home to their back porch. The view outside looked like a five star resort from a travel magazine.

A large swimming pool took center stage. Beyond the pool was a sea of cobalt blue containers with a scattering of contrasting bright chartreuse containers. Each container brimmed with leaves in various sizes, shapes and shades of green, some with silver-blue evergreens and some with tall swaying grasses. Many of the plants were punctuated with vividly colored flowers. Mixed here and there were exotic spiny succulents and a sprinkling of unique garden embellishments: hand-blown glass globes, wrought iron art and whimsical statuary. Large matching gazebos, one with a u-shaped seating arrangement and the other with a long dining table with seating for ten, flanked each side of the pool. Tomato plants and other vegetables were growing in two galvanized livestock troughs. Steel drum island sounds softly filled the air from discrete outdoor speakers. Large trees in the background and a blue sky framed the scene. The enclosed porch with its wall of windows provided an elevated point of view. We sat at a glass-topped table sipping lemonade looking out at the terrain. My initial impression was that the entire scene was thoughtfully and intentionally considered down to the smallest detail.



John how did this all start?

"It started with crayons. When I was a young child people were amazed at the detail of my coloring books and how I stayed inside the lines. My inner artist started early. When I was twelve I became fascinated with custom cars. The design and and crafting of custom cars is an art form. I really enjoyed reimagining how cars could look and spent many hours drawing. It's hard to explain. I have always had a creative sensibility. If things aren't pleasing to my eye I have a strong urge to make 'refinements.' Some people have said that I am persnickety. It's probably true. If you are particular, and don't compromise your sense of aesthetics, you can set your own standard of good taste."

"When I was ready to start a career in business I was fortunate to land a job in the graphic arts field. It was an entry level position. I was observant and inquisitive. I worked with very imaginative and particular people. Over a period of years, I climbed the corporate ladder. I became very good at managing people, projects and schedules. I learned how to stay on budget and most important, made clients happy."

You mentioned being observant and inquisitive, can you elaborate?

"Grace and I are both observant and inquisitive. Being open-minded leads to new ideas. We like to travel and are quick to notice things, even the smallest of details. We always come home inspired and with great ideas that we try to incorporate into our life or home. We have visited much of the US, from the southern most tip of Key West to the Continental Divide in the Rocky Mountains to Catalina Island off the coast of California and beyond to Kauai and Maui. We have been to Bermuda, the Bahamas and US Virgin Islands. Exploring gardens has always been an essential part of our itinerary. One of my very favorite quotes is by St. Augustine: "The world is a book and he who does not travel reads only one page." Insightful advice that has given our family unforgettable memories and a wellspring of ideas."

When did you develop an interest in garden design?

"In 2005, we built a new home, our '686 home'. The builder's plant choices were predictable and unexceptional. The front lawn had typical foundation plants and a small tree. The remaining three sides were covered with wood chips. We wanted the view to blend better with the home's architecture and surrounding environment. Over the course of several seasons I killed a lot of plants. I persevered and learned to discern the difference between good and dubious gardening advice and practices in books, magazines and the internet."

So you were self-taught?

"Honestly most of it came quite naturally. In the middle of the transformation, we went on a vacation to Italy and Greece. We toured Rome, the Amalfi Coast and some of Sicily. We stood on the steps of the Parthenon in Athens. We explored Santorini, Mykonos and Rhodes in the Southern Aegean Sea. We visited gardens wherever we went. The trip made an impression and was a life changing event. I knew I have talent, good taste and the ability to visualize. I am an artist and gardens are my canvas. The seeds for LandArt Garden Studio were planted."

When we returned home, I was determined to learn all I could about garden design. I became a Rutgers University Master Gardener, joined the Pennsylvania Horticulture Society and attended many garden classes, workshops and seminars. I made a point to meet and learn from a number of well known luminaries in the horticultural world. Eventually earning a Landscape Design Certificate from the Morris Arboretum of the University of Pennsylvania. The gardening bar was raised."

In 2012 we were invited to participate in a local garden tour with the proceeds going to charity. We were told an unbelievable 250 plus visitors came through. People particularly loved the numerous garden containers spread throughout our property. We turned a typical builder's landscape into a beautiful garden that accentuated the architecture of the home and expressed our individuality."

Did that garden have the same tropical resort theme as this home?

"No, our '686 home' had a Tuscan-style architecture. We chose that design because our dream was to create a Mediterranean inspired garden. We wanted to have a classic pergola surrounded by a garden as the centerpiece of our outside entertainment area. We built the pergola before the vacation to Italy and Greece. The trip confirmed that our pergola idea was well-founded. Our pergola just wasn't surrounded by olive and lemon groves or built on a cliff overlooking the Mediterranean."

Tell me a little about LandArt Garden Studio?

"Many people gladly buy garden containers from big box stores, supermarkets, produce stands and so on. There is a much smaller group of people with higher expectations. People who would rather have something a little less ordinary. Individualist who prefer something created by hand rather than mass-produced in greenhouse factories, something exuberant, something that says 'ta-da' when you see it. I'm in this group. LandArt was started not to make a fortune but to create horticultural art for people who believe and value what I believe."

LandArt Garden Studio is a custom residential garden design studio. Specialists in utterly unique garden containers and bespoke gardens. Nature has given us a big box of crayons and I believe gardens are just large coloring books waiting for an artist to bring them to life. I'm fortunate to be creative and know what a privilege it is to help people tell their story. LandArt exist to offer these tastemakers exactly what they want—a departure from the ordinary and something uniquely theirs—something that makes a statement."

I realize we're just having a conversation—but—even with a thousand words you won't get the picture. Showing is better than telling. Scan our website, landartgardenstudio.com. Look through our portfolio, see why our clients receive much more than they pay for."

It must have been hard to leave your '686 home' and garden. What made you decide to move?

"We had several reasons including a desire to be closer to the coast. In a difficult real estate market we were able to sell the '686 home' for the listing price in just ten days. Our home was very nice, the curb appeal attracted the buyers and the landscape sealed the deal."

Grace found this home. We liked the location and the property, we also liked the idea of having a pool. There was a large front lawn with unattractive concrete edging and some overgrown foundation shrubs. There also was a lot of pavement around the pool. We saw past the shortcomings and visualized what the property could be. And, I was ready to design a new and completely different style garden."

Has this home been on any garden tours?

"In the summer of 2017 we entered the PHS Garden & Greening Contest in the container category. We won a blue ribbon. It was shortly afterwards that PHS invited us to take part in a September 2018 garden tour. We're looking forward to participating."

John this has been a great interview, I have a lot of material to work with. Thank you for your hospitality. You have a meticulously unique design sense and created an imaginative and stylish sanctuary. I'd like to come back when you have the PHS tour to see people's reactions."

Beardsford S. Dreschler

Beardsford S. Dreschler writes about art and artists – beardsfordwrites@gmail.com – This interview has been edited to fit this website format.







LandArt Garden Studio, llc - Noteworthy Events

PHS Gardening & Greening Contest 2017
Container Category - Blue Ribbon Winner



Ocean City, NJ Annual Fall Block Party
Participant October 2017



PHS Private Garden Tour
Participant September 2018



PHS Grow Magazine Winter 2018 Issue
Meet Your Match - article contributor



PHS Phila. Flower Show - Subaru Gardener's Studio
Container Challenge - Participant March 2018



PHS Gardening and Greening Contest

THE PENNSYLVANIA HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY
recognizes

John Drexel

For motivating people to improve the quality of life and create a sense
of community through horticulture in the category of:

Container Garden

Matt Rader, PHS President

