



Forest wilderness to English classic

This romantic Old World garden fits comfortably into Pinawa's rock and woodland.

by Jo Simon with staff photos

Perhaps the children's book she loved when she was four years old — *Over the Rainbow* it was called — left its imprint on Sylvia Reid's psyche, the seeds of an attachment to gardening that would flower when her own kids had grown up. "The book was very, very large, maybe 11 inches by 18, and every page was filled with flowers and fairies," Sylvia remembers. She remembers the fairies' skirts and caps, formed by daisies and violets, and a swan named Pender that took all the fairies for a flight into the sky.

The birch tree, hostas and heuchera will spend most of the day in the shade.

Maybe, though, the seed was somehow planted by her mother. "My Mom was a very good gardener, a different kind of gardening from mine but she was a hard worker. She knew the name of every flower." Sylvia wasn't paying much attention then and her mother never got to see Sylvia's own garden when it truly came to life a decade ago.

Whatever the inspiration, the large Reid garden in Pinawa, with its vast assemblage of plants, its long curved sweep of lawn, its seemingly effortless merging of a romantic, Old World setting with a backdrop of rocks and woodland, is the handiwork of an able and focused gardener. It's a garden that would in large part be as much at





Sylvia uses height, colour and texture to achieve a harmonious, English garden effect.



home surrounding an English manor house as in its Pinawa setting.

A dozen years ago, though, half this impressive 100-foot back garden was solid forest. The cleared area near the house had some minor beds, including a small foundation bed behind the family room. But that year, in 1992, the Reids had to remove the two enormous pine trees which faced the house from across the small back lawn. The pines had rotted and died, and Sylvia had wanted to seize the opportunity to have all the trees taken out and do some serious gardening.

"I had to do a tremendous sell job on my husband," she says. "I drew on paper what I envisaged for the back yard and the funny thing to me is that the lines that I drew, the basic sweeping curve, never changed." The basic drawing showed the lawn as two large circles – a figure eight – the softly curving perennial borders giving this figure its shape.

She didn't know that within the year she would be accepting a teaching job in Tyndall – ending her long period as a stay-at-home Mom.

An arbour leads to a shady area in the garden.



"Oh well," she says matter of factly. "I'm a bit of a workaholic so I teach hard and then I work hard."

Running down the east side of Sylvia's curving garden are classic, English style flower beds, a careful, tiered massing of a multitude of plants, assembled to offer a parade of blooms through the seasons: lilies, delphiniums, roses, scabiosa, evening primrose

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There's shape and texture in sun drenched beds.

(*Oenothera*) and so much more.

Opposite, Sylvia's favourite side, is where the shade plants grow, some of them in the shadow of a lovely old birch. "Often," she says, "I think the shade is a prettier area because you don't have the sun bleaching things out.

"There's very little colour in it. It's all shapes and textures. It's hostas and the leaves of all sorts of different plants: bleeding heart and astilbe, globe flower (*Trollius*), a giant lady slipper, a trillium, deep red-leafed coral bells," the latter, a Purple Palace cultivar, passed down three generations from her great grandparents' home in the Okanagan.

Much of the romance and many memories are tucked in behind the sundrenched flower bed, down a long, shady woodland pathway out of sight of the main garden, where a bench sits facing a pond, concealed by towering delphiniums; where a little bridge runs over a wandering creek – dug by husband Keith – and two little benches, hidden by a lilac bush, offer family members a preferred perch for watching the birdlife.

Just beyond, at the back of the yard is the rock garden, a man-made arrangement of imported rocks and soil laid out atop a very large rock, a *batolith*, which sits just above and sometimes just below the earth's surface in many parts of Pinawa. The Reids brought in soil to create a flat garden where the batholith rock protruded above ground. Later, Sylvia and her two boys destroyed three wheelbarrows as they carried in smaller

rocks from a nearby excavated site where workers were installing underground pipes.

With that, Sylvia could at last have the colour she wanted at the back of her garden.

It's been a huge job, but Sylvia is matter-of-fact on that point. She'd rather talk about the enjoyment the garden brings, about the serenity she has tried to achieve there.

There was a time, she says, when her attention was focused on the plants, and making the right choices. She wanted specific types of plants and colours. Because hers is a perennial garden, she wanted a succession of colours that would keep it interesting through the seasons. Today, those choices have been made – although the garden keeps changing as Sylvia divides her plants and then divides them again, to achieve recurrent themes of colour and texture in the planted areas.

Yet most of all, she says, it's the lines of the garden that matter to her now: the flow, the shape, the curves. These lines make the garden feel serene not busy, making the overall view feel right. "I need the lines to be pleasing. As I stand and look at my garden today, I realize that is the overpowering thing that guides me."

You don't bother to ask if Sylvia, like her mother, knows the name of every flower in her garden. It really doesn't matter: in the business of planning and executing a lovely garden, she's set the bar high for herself and gone on to clear it with flair. 🌿



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