

HCG & G

Hamptons Cottages and Gardens

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DIVE INTO SUMMER!

Chris's World

A famous painting captures the eye of landscape architect Christopher LaGuardia

Art Imitates Life
 The soaring grassy landscape depicted in Andrew Wyeth's 1948 work *Christina's World* (THIS IMAGE) has inspired the sweeping vision of Water Mill-based landscape architect Christopher LaGuardia (INSET). See Resources.



BOTTOM: LAURIE LAMBRECT

Editors' note: This season, HC&G's gardening column will explore the ideas and inspiration behind the work of our region's best-known landscape designers.

HC&G: You've said that *Christina's World*, a 1948 tempera on panel by Andrew Wyeth, has greatly informed your landscape designs.

CHRISTOPHER LAGUARDIA, founder, LaGuardia Design Group: The painting is a minimalist work of art. It's sky, meadow, house, and, of course, Wyeth's depiction of Christina, who has overcome a disability to inhabit her world with her own dignity. The simplicity of the piece honors the landscape it occupies: a property with an enclosed area near the house, a mown swath, and a meadow that's sensitively rendered by Wyeth. Having worked as an architect, I have a reverence for built environments alongside landscapes. I find them inseparable—just as they are in this painting.





“The simplicity of the artwork honors the landscape it occupies”



How do you determine an optimal site plan?

It’s a sculptural proposition. We are always looking to enhance, not hide. It often takes a lot of subtle grading to integrate and blanket a house in a meadow, creating an appropriate setting that happens to be sustainable as well.

How do today’s large-scale houses figure into the equation?

We typically sculpt the land to create a platform for a house to sit on. And that always includes the approach, the drive, and all service and recreational facilities so frequently requested by clients. The bombastic mansions that people are quick to criticize are often positioned on sites that have been destroyed, so the houses stand like monoliths—something further amplified by FEMA regulations for properties near the water, which require that houses need to be raised on fill. But I’m good with dirt!

You specialize in meadows. How do you make them interesting?

We plant a mixture of grasses specifically chosen for each site. Fescues are nice, but they are cool season and of limited interest, so we’ll interplant them with warm-season grasses



Grass Acts (TOP LEFT, MIDDLE, AND BOTTOM) Mown paths and swaths of red fescue and little bluestem amplify limned shadbush on a property in Sagaponack. (TOP RIGHT) Salvias, asters, and other perennials in a Bridgehampton meadow. (ABOVE) Red fescue anchors an apple orchard in Sagaponack. See *Resources*.

such as bluestem, switchgrass, and *Panicum*. And then there are perennial meadows, studded with wildflowers, which have their own charm. In the Hamptons, meadows can be difficult because the soil is rich and plants thrive to a fault, especially invasive species. Meadows simply can’t happen overnight, and New Yorkers can be impatient. But on the plus side, meadows don’t require irrigation or fertilizers, and deer aren’t into them, either. All our work pushes environmental sensitivity, and I’m happy that people are really starting to embrace meadows.

How does the meadow in *Christina’s World* compare with your worldview?

Privacy is important, but the painting shows no boundary: It is open. Having sky and seeing the horizon is crucial—these are limitless properties. Our work is pretty simple. You come out east, and you want quiet. —Alejandro Saralegui