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# ANNAPOLIS HOME



*History*  
IN  
BLOOM

DIVINE KITCHENS  
LAID-BACK LUXURY  
RESTAURANT REVIEW

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## History in Full Bloom on the Eastern Shore

With the help of ground-penetrating radar, a professional team recreated the magnificent 18th-century garden owned by Revolutionary War Colonel William Hemsley.

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On the Cover: A "Divine Kitchen." Photography by Jill Ockhardt Blaufuss.

The ambitious project had two parts. It began in 2017 with the meticulous restoration of the manor by Lynbrook of Annapolis and culminated with the restoration of its gardens, finished in 2020 by Kimmel Studio Architects.

HISTORY IN  
*Full Bloom*  
ON THE EASTERN SHORE

By Kymberly Taylor  
Photography by Pete Albert and Jennifer Hughes

Kimmel and his team chose period-specific plants or similar hybrids to establish a sense of historical accuracy as well as beauty.



*“In Europe in the late 1700s, French and English gardens were mainly formal, though the English Landscape garden was starting to emerge in England. But here, it was still wild in the country, so there was the notion of maintaining control over the landscape and control of nature.”*

*–Devin Kimmel*

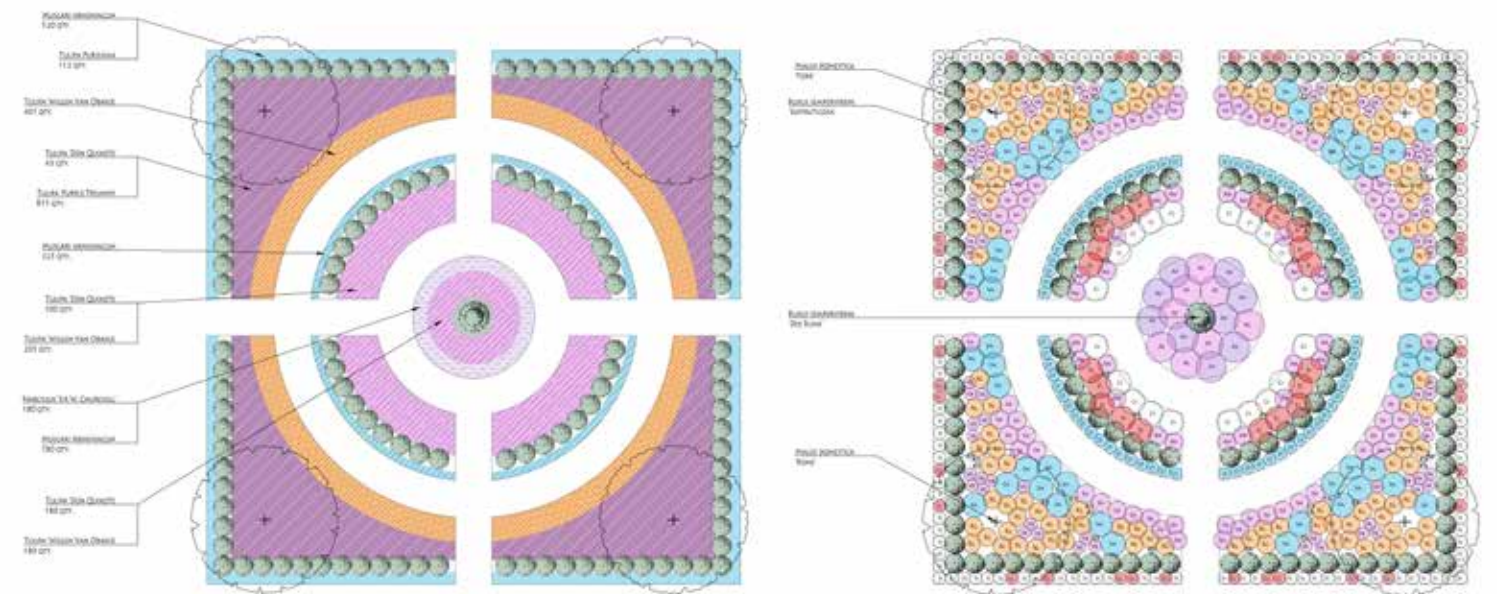
*I*t’s 1784 on the Eastern Shore. A horse-drawn carriage rattles up to the front door of this two-story double-pile gentry house foregrounded by English/French-style formal gardens, resplendent in the spring sunshine. Greeting guests is the wealthy planter and statesman Col. William Hemsley (1736-1812), owner of his ancestral estate, Cloverfields.

The garden we see today is very similar to that 18th-century masterpiece. Almost miraculously, a professional team composed of Kimmel Studio Architects, Lynbrook of Annapolis, McHale Landscape Design, and the Cloverfields Preservation Foundation used ground-penetrating radar to discern its invisible geometry hidden by centuries of weeds. After mining archival material from the 17th and 18th centuries and analyzing archeological findings, they have recreated its formal design, providing not just a period garden with colonial specimen plantings but a glimpse of 18th-century life and values.

“It is an interpretive garden placed on top of what was there in 1784; beneath that is a garden from 1705,” notes Devin Kimmel, founder of Kimmel Studio Architects and lead member of the gardens’ restoration. The classical design is exact; the plantings are a spirited interpretation based on historical research. The mix includes 600 boxwoods, 85,000 bulbs, and 6,000 perennials, along with topiary fruit trees and medicinal flowers and herbs.

The gardens reflect the year 1784 because that is when the estate was at its finest, explains Kimmel. At this time, Col. Hemsley had 1500 acres, 85 slaves, indentured servants, 28 outbuildings, an ice house, and a mill that supplied neighbors with flour. According to the Maryland State Archives, one such neighbor was William Paca, who owned a neighboring plantation and residence at Wye Hall. During the Revolutionary War, Hemsley led the Queen Anne’s County Militia’s Twentieth Battalion in 1777 and provided the Continental Army with flour and other supplies. He later served in the Maryland Senate and in the Continental Congress from 1782 to 1783.

After declining a second term in the Maryland senate in 1784, Hemsley “refashioned his estate into the power-house that his position and fortune demanded,” according to historian Willie Graham of the Cloverfields Preservation Foundation. During the 1700s, the wealthiest colonial Americans copied European garden styles when establishing their own grand estates, explains Kimmel. “In Europe in the late 1700s, French and English gardens were mainly formal, though the English Landscape style was starting to emerge in England. But here, it’s wild in the country, so there was the notion of maintaining control over the landscape and control of nature.” Wild is not an overstatement; during the 1700s, just beyond the plantation, black bear, bobcat, and timber wolf roamed the unbroken canopy of old-growth forests filled with oak and hickory.



Some squares are outlined in rows of boxwood; other quadrants have boxwood placed at each corner, variations on the same design. Colonial hollies were shaped like sugar cones, duplicated here.



Restoring the Cloverfields mansion and gardens seems like a project specially created for Kimmel, who is both an architect and landscape architect. He integrates both disciplines during the design process. “I have a fascination with American architecture in general... and, being a landscape architect, I got into understanding the design of the parterres in the garden and axial relationships, how the architecture radiates out into the landscape and creates the parterres and the garden rooms,” he reflects. “The house has these long axes, and the garden is symmetrical, centered, and very formal. The terraces get lower as you get farther away from the house, and there were bowling greens on either side.”

He explains that a wealthy 18th-century family often used the gardens for active and passive entertainment. For this reason, they created a four-season garden composed of eight quadrants, six on one side of the home and two on the other. Each quadrant is planted with boxwoods and other evergreens to establish a basic structure, much like bones in a skeleton. The upright boxwoods and holly trees shaped like sugar cones give height to the garden, whereas the low hedges and perennials create patterns within each parterre. They are filled in with plants of the era, including primroses, bluebells, and larkspur, as well as English roses grown by William Farris in Annapolis in 1792, European plum trees planted by pilgrims in Massachusetts in 1629, and ‘Queen Victoria’ cardinal flowers, cultivated in European gardens and native to Maryland.

Everything in this garden, including the benches built by artisans, reflects 18th-century practices and materials. What is especially unique, says Kimmel, are the fruit trees that have been pleached or sculpted into fruit-bearing and blossoming topiaries that also provide

superb winter interest. Even the pathways have been re-created based on archeological findings, with gravel, crushed oyster shells, and materials from leftover bricks fired on-site during the restoration by Lynbrook of Annapolis. In the 18th century, enslaved African Americans and indentured servants would have hand-fired the bricks used to build and expand Cloverfields. “We mixed the materials and laid them down in such a way that the bricks would show through,” says Kimmel.

The steps on the property were sourced authentically and created from Purbeck and Portland limestone quarries and then shipped over from England. “Those stones were available then. We used what they would have used,” says Kimmel.

The evergreens and boxwoods are Kimmel’s favorite things. “I like the boxwoods... they give it a dynamic that is really crucial to creating the garden for me,” he reflects. Brian Hjemvik, landscape architect at Kimmel Studio Architects, appreciates the garden’s classical dimensions, “how the central line of the ellipse is a cross axis that ties the garden rooms together.” His favorite time is the spring. “I love the bulbs... the geometry of the garden and looseness of the borders planted with salvia.”

It was important to get it all right, reflects Hjemvik. “The garden had to live up to the same expectations as the house. It had to be responsibly designed and sustainable as a garden.” Bloom times, textures, colors, quantities, and spacing were all important factors.

Matt Rhoderick, a landscape architect with McHale Landscape Design, was responsible for converting verbal discussions and



The pathways are lined with fragrant sages from 1597: *Salvia* ‘Mystic Spires Blue,’ *Salvia nemorosa* ‘Amethyst,’ *Salvia x sylvestris* ‘Mainacht,’ and *Salvia x sylvestris* ‘Snow Hill’.



The upright boxwoods and holly trees give height to the garden, whereas the low hedges and perennials create patterns within each parterre.

drawings from Kimmel’s office into reality. He notes that out of the thousands of gardens his firm has installed over the past 42 years, for him, Cloverfields is the most ambitious and perhaps one of the most meaningful. “It was actually about preserving the history and preserving the past. I mean, that’s just something that is so incredible about this,” he reflects.

He shares that the garden’s flawless layout is the product of hundreds of hours of manual labor, team meetings, and something unexpected: plotting to acquire rare tulips from the Netherlands, which have exquisite layers and unusual petals. Because there is worldwide competition for certain cultivars, orders had to be placed the moment they went on sale.

Then there was the installation. “We measured the distance between every single bulb we put in the ground,” says Rhoderick, adding that it took about two weeks to plant over 50,000 bulbs, with 10 to 20 people tackling a single quadrant before moving on to the next. They worked feverishly “in the planting window” and had to finish before the ground froze. “Creating an 18th-century garden is especially demanding,” he notes. “Today, gardening is a little more natural and creative and flowing. To bring it to a more regimented formal space like this requires discipline. We’re essentially creating an indoor space outside when you take something to this amount of level of detail.”

Symmetrical gardens have a special way of calming the spirit, with flowers neatly contained, like old-fashioned handwriting in loose sentences. The blooms that effloresce before our eyes exude a dependable beauty despite turmoil happening in the very air around them. Cloverfields has had its share. In fact, history suggests that its first owners, Philemon and Mary Hemsley, were eccentric and feisty. Inventory records reveal they owned a horse named Murderer and, according to The Maryland House

of Delegates Assembly of 1715, the couple was charged with embezzling gunpowder, pistols, and muskets “delivered out of the publick store at Annapolis” in 1706.

Correspondence from Cloverfields’ archives point to happy occasions, such as Col. Hemsley’s daughter Polly’s marriage in 1782, and others of severe suffering: on his deathbed, Col. William Hemsley had violent seizures “which has reduced him to a deplorable state of imbecility and almost total deprivation of his intellect” says an 1812 letter by ‘Thomas Earle at Clover Field to William Tilghman in Philadelphia.’ After Col. Hemsley’s death in 1812, the estate was divided, and parcels gradually sold. Nature exerted its long-lost control, and the exquisite contours of the garden vanished. In the 1900s, the once-grand estate faded into a farmstead owned by the Callahan family.

Luckily, all that is in the past. On a sunny day on the Shore, the garden’s crisp lines seem etched into the world itself. The fragrance of ‘Hidcote’ lavender released by the sun drifts into our minds, communicating every garden’s true gift: hope. All that seems to be missing is the Colonel himself. In fact, he actually is there, buried in the family cemetery just beyond the tulips, surely resting in peace now that his gardens have been restored. **AH**

*To learn how to tour Cloverfields home and gardens, visit the Cloverfields Preservation Foundation online at [cloverfieldspreservationfoundation.org](http://cloverfieldspreservationfoundation.org)*

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