

Written and produced by Ellen Ecker Ogden
Photography by Rich Pomerantz



The Art of *the* Garden

A Vermont couple incorporate sculpture to define garden areas and enchant visitors.

Giant jacks made of rusted steel add a playful element to a grassy patch at the top of the meadow in front of the guesthouse.





1. Sylvia Stroup grew up on a farm, yet she readily admits that she avoided helping her mother in the garden because she did not want to go out and get dirty. "That's all changed!" Sylvia says. 2. 3. The original gardens were planted in 1930. In the old sections, many of the original old-fashioned varieties such as yellow trumpet lilies, peach daylilies, phlox, and Rudbeckia continue to grow under the shade of old maple trees. 4. Flocks of wild turkeys know where to find drops from the apple, cherry, pear, and plum trees, thus the name of the farm. At the entrance, an old corncrib was converted into a guest house cottage when Petty and Nelson Doubleday owned the farm in 1924. 5. 6.



The best advice to any new gardener is to start small and grow big.

That's what Sylvia and Stanley Stroup did 40 years ago, when their first garden was a typical city plot in Geneva, Illinois, comprising less than a quarter acre. They planted the ubiquitous perennial garden with a border of fruit trees to block the road. Stanley's job required them to move frequently, so they left that garden behind and started another.

At each new house, their gardens expanded. When Stanley retired in 2004, they moved to 68-acre farm in southern Vermont. That's when their vision really began to grow. They purchased

an 1849 farmhouse surrounded by a mature garden designed in 1930, which included a classic sunken rose garden, a cutting garden for flowers, and a well-established kitchen garden with berries. They named their place Turkey Hill Farm, after the flock of wild turkeys that greeted them upon their arrival. The view from the kitchen featured a scrubby pasture, where neighbor's cows peered through the split-rail fence into their front yard.



Most people would be content with this bucolic view, and Sylvia's plan was to simply renovate the existing gardens to make them her own. "Yet Stanley is a dreamer," she says. The first summer, while Sylvia focused on building a guesthouse for family and friends to visit, Stanley directed a bulldozer to push out the rocks, pruned old apple trees, cut brush, and rebuilt stone walls along



Two robust bronze sheep, titled Large Sheep Pair and created by sculptor Peter Woytuck, interplay the cultivated field with the wild landscape beyond. The sculptures are a tribute to the original purpose of the field, which was once a grazing ground for cows.



Traveler, with her uplifted arms and serene expression, has a backdrop of hydrangeas, astilbes, and ornamental grasses. This bronze sculpture, by artist Curt Brill, depicts the search for the hidden human spirit.



7. A narrow brick path leads the eye to Gabriel, a bronze sculpture by New York sculptor Hans Van de Bovenkamp, described in Stanley Stroup's sculpture map as "an artist mystic whose work heightens the viewer's sense of fantasy, imagination and discovery." 8. 9. 10. Continuum, one of three bronzes by Vermont sculptor Richard Erdman, was the second sculpture to arrive at The Hill Farm. A wood bridge leads over the stone swale, bordered by tall ornamental grasses to add drama and form to the enclosed space. 11.

the far edge of the property. Sylvia says Stanley's primary goal was to create a grassy lawn to tend. "But the end result was too urban-looking," she says. She tried to soften the expansive green area by planting a dozen ornamental trees and masses of perennials, yet it was not enough to create the intimacy or charm she sought.

The two began to brainstorm, tapping into their shared love of art (Sylvia is avid about quilting, rug hooking, and needlepoint, while Stanley is board president of the Southern Vermont Art Center in Manchester, Vermont). The art lovers came up with an idea to define the property and reflect their own aesthetics by incorporating sculpture. They started by dividing the property into garden rooms, and the first of their garden sculptures arrived the following summer. Created by Canadian sculptor

Royden Mills and titled Inner Key, this steel artwork made such a profound impact on the wide-open space that it was soon followed by Continuum, a bronze sculpture by Vermont sculptor Richard Erdman, which brings a Zenlike quiet crescendo of unending and perpetual motion into view.

They discovered a robust pair of bronze sheep at a gallery in Woodstock and brought them to graze in the far field, as a tribute to the original livestock flock.

Placing large sculptures on their property involves bringing in heavy equipment on a tractor-trailer truck, and placing sculptures using a crane, so it's key to get the placement right from the start. There is also prep work to be done, using a backhoe to build a foundation of stone or poured cement that will hold the sculpture securely in place.



12. 13. The entrance to the kitchen garden offers a view of the Green Mountains beyond. Sylvia prefers raised beds for growing her favorite crops: strawberries, broccoli, peppers, and plenty of tomatoes for a year-round supply of sauce. Colorful annuals, ornamental artichokes, and fronds of blue Tuscan kale interspersed with zinnias give the kitchen garden a sense of fun. 14. 15. 16.

There are currently 12 sculptures on the property, each made of weather-resistant materials such as copper, steel, bronze, or heavily fired ceramic to withstand the harsh Zone 3 winters. Sylvia oversees the planting on the property as well as the general maintenance performed by a longtime gardening couple, Jeannette Morrison and Ernie Dibble. The Stroups seek professional design advice from a variety of landscape designers for each of the garden areas. The gardens at Turkey Hill Farm are regularly included on Garden Conservancy tours, and visitors are given a map of the sculptures, with details about each artist and the concepts behind their art.

Today, the couple can look out from the kitchen table at the 10-plus acres of grassy fields dotted with artful sculptures, ornamental pergolas, a stone-lined arroyo, and mowed walking paths leading the eye

through tall grass, over foot bridges, and through the woods into themed garden rooms. Three miles of winding footpaths tie together a pond with an orchard and an upper field and woodlands. “Four generations have lived at this farm,” Sylvia says, marveling at the changes the landscape has seen over the years and picturing changes yet to come.

“Each year, we either start a new garden area or bring a new sculpture onto the property,” she says. While no one can pinpoint the moment that art took on as much importance as ornamental plants and trees in the garden, sculpture has given this couple more than just a hobby. It has transformed every corner of this idyllic garden in a dramatic and artful way.



The entrance to the 1849 farmhouse remains relatively the same, with ancient stone walls and stone steps covered in moss, lichen, and fern, that lead toward the garden and guesthouse.