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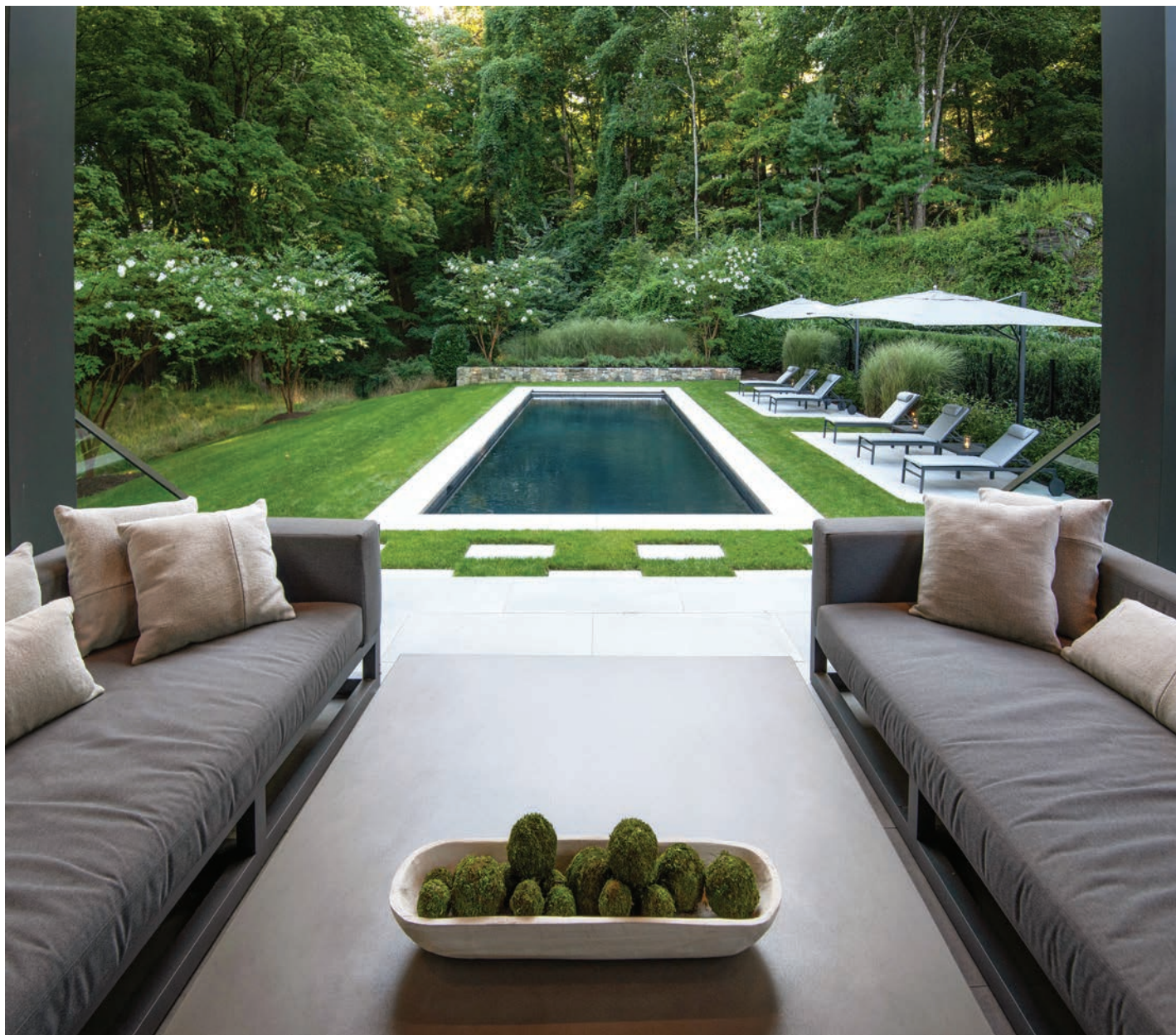
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Architects • Designers • Builders
The Stories That Changed Everything

ROSALIA SANNI
ROSALIA SANNI DESIGNS



THE
EXPERIENCE
OF PLACE



Before

Landscape design is often described through the lens of gardens, terraces, and outdoor living spaces. Yet its greatest influence is rarely found in any one feature. It is found in something far less tangible—the way a landscape is experienced.

It begins with anticipation: the quiet curve of a driveway, filtered light through a woodland canopy, and architecture that reveals itself gradually rather than all at once. These seemingly subtle moments shape our emotional connection to a place long before we ever cross a home's threshold. For landscape designers at Rosalia Sanni Design, those moments are never incidental. They are the very foundation of thoughtful landscape planning. That philosophy shaped every decision behind this remarkable three-acre riverfront property, where a contemporary residence rests within a landscape defined by towering sugar maples, dramatic ledge outcroppings, protected wetlands, and a river that has shaped the site for generations. At first glance, the property revealed very little of its potential. Years of neglect had allowed invasive vegetation to consume much of the site, making



it difficult to access and nearly impossible to fully appreciate. Mature woodland, exposed rock formations, and dramatic topographic changes remained hidden beneath the overgrowth. For many, the landscape concealed more than it revealed.

For Sanni's team, however, it was simply waiting to be understood. "The site was truly a diamond in the rough," Rosalia explains. "What initially appeared to be its greatest constraints ultimately became its greatest assets." That perspective fundamentally changed the project's direction.

Rather than beginning with the question, What should we build?, the design process started somewhere entirely different. How should this landscape be experienced? The answer required more than creativity. It required listening. Environmental regulations protecting the adjacent wetlands and river, an existing septic system, significant ledge, steep grades, irregular property boundaries, and extensive municipal approvals meant every intervention demanded careful consideration. Yet none of those conditions was viewed as an obstacle. Instead, they became the framework for the entire landscape. Native trees and shrubs were introduced to strengthen the site's ecological health and establish a natural buffer along the river's edge. A restored meadow softens the transition between cultivated landscape and surrounding woodland, reinforcing rather than competing with the site's existing ecology. The result feels neither imposed nor ornamental. It feels as though it has





always belonged there.

Perhaps the project's greatest design gesture, however, was knowing when not to intervene.

Great landscape architecture is often defined as much by restraint as intervention. Understanding what should remain untouched can be every bit as important as knowing what should change.

Every pathway, retaining wall, and terrace serves a purpose, but none competes with the site's natural character. Hardscape quietly supports the experience rather than dominating it. Existing ledge outcroppings are celebrated rather than concealed. Woodland remains woodland. The landscape retains its authenticity. "The experience begins at the street," Lina Cangrejo of Rosalia Sannie Design says.

Rather than revealing the architecture immediately, a gently curving driveway guides visitors through the trees, building anticipation with every turn. The sequence recalls the quiet rhythm of a mountain road, where discovery unfolds gradually instead of all at once. By the time the home finally comes into view, the landscape has already introduced it. Arrival, however, is only the beginning of the experience.

Drawing inspiration from the clean geometry of the home's contemporary architecture, Sanni organized the landscape into a carefully composed sequence of garden rooms.

Some extend naturally from adjacent interior spaces, encouraging everyday life to flow outdoors. Others invite exploration, revealing themselves gradually through subtle changes in elevation, framed views, and intuitive circulation.

Rather than dissolving the distinction between the designed landscape and the surrounding woodland, each retains its own identity. The transition between the two becomes one of the project's defining experiences, allowing architecture and nature to engage in a quiet dialogue rather than compete.

Every room within the home now maintains an ongoing conversation with the landscape beyond it. Expanses of glass frame woodland canopies, sculptural ledge outcroppings, native meadow plantings, and shifting seasonal light. The landscape becomes a living composition—constantly changing with the weather, the seasons, and the time of day. Even the pool, carefully nestled against an ancient rock formation, feels less like an inserted amenity than a quiet discovery within the terrain itself. Nothing feels accidental. Nothing feels overdesigned.

Instead, the landscape unfolds with remarkable clarity, inviting homeowners and guests alike to slow their pace, become more aware of their surroundings, and engage more deeply with the land beneath their feet. Perhaps that is the greatest lesson this project offers.

The most memorable landscapes are never defined by the number of gardens they contain, the size of their terraces, or the rarity of their plant material. They are defined by the experiences they create.

At River Edge, every curve of the driveway, every carefully framed view, every garden room, and every quiet transition contributes to something larger than the landscape itself.

They cultivate a deeper relationship between people and place—reminding us that the most successful landscapes are not simply observed, they are experienced.

In the end, the greatest transformation was never the creation of a beautiful landscape.

It was revealing a place that had been waiting all along to be understood. ♦

Resource: Landscape Designer: Rosalia Sanni Design; Rosalia Sanni + Lina Cangrejo, Landscape Designers; 203.918.4619; rosaliasanni.com. **Architect:** CAH Architecture. **Builder:** Construction Management Group. **Interior Design:** Monica Fried Design. **Photographer:** Jay Cohen.