



All photos courtesy of P. Allen Smith

## *A* perennial **FAVORITE**

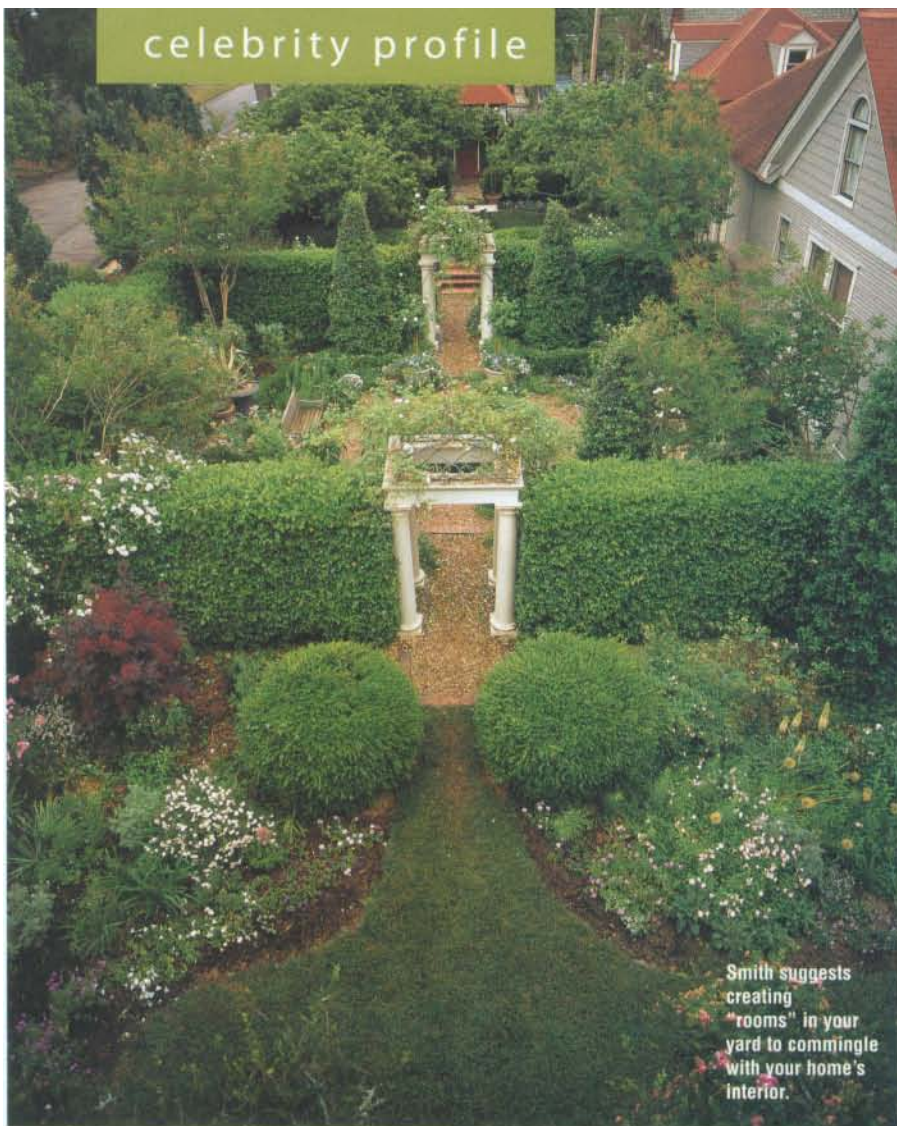
TV PERSONALITY AND PROFESSIONAL GARDENER P. ALLEN SMITH CULTIVATES GARDENERS INTO DESIGNERS

by **suzy feine**

**K**nown the world over as a national garden television personality and professional garden designer, P. Allen Smith continues to amaze and inspire homeowners in the art of garden design. Entering more than 70 million homes weekly as the Weather Channel's exclusive gardener, host of the nationally syndicated *P. Allen Smith Gardens*, a regular guest on the *CBS Early Show* and host of the Public Television series *P. Allen Smith's Garden Home*, Smith has built an empire around the art of the garden. >



## celebrity profile



Smith suggests creating "rooms" in your yard to commingle with your home's interior.

**Y**et Smith's aim is to make the illustrious art of garden design commonplace for the average gardener. "So often when we think about gardens, we get caught up in worrying about whether this plant will grow here or there, or whether this plant will work in the zone in which we garden," says Smith. "To create the best gardens, we must try to put the concern for individual plants aside and focus on the larger picture of how gardens are organized and how the foundation of their framework is created."

### SEEDS OF KNOWLEDGE

A fourth-generation gardener, Smith's earliest recollections of gardening stem

from the days on his family's 88-acre Tennessee farm in the late 1960s. At the age of 9, gardening became a passion for Smith, who grew large plots of vegetables for the family dinner table.

During his senior year in high school, Smith's fondness for gardening refitted into dreams of a lifelong horticultural career during a class trip to London. "The destination was Sussex to tour a home called Petworth," says Smith. "With no expectation, no understanding of its importance and certainly no background in the history of English country houses or English landscape style, I found myself completely unprepared for this extraordinary experience."

His findings at Petworth became the cornerstone of his career. "In the house,

each room had massive windows that perfectly framed the view of the landscapes outside," Smith says. "These windows filled the entire space from floor to ceiling. They were so large two people could easily walk through them to the terrace and into the landscape beyond. It was as though there was no separation between garden and home."

After college, Smith was awarded a post-graduate international Rotary scholarship and returned to England to study garden design. "My desire was to understand the chronology of their [English] style and the influences that formed them," he says. "I would find out what made one garden great and another only mediocre. This connected everything that excited me: art, landscaping and plants."

### ENGLISH BY DESIGN

During his studies in Europe, Smith became profoundly aware of the vast differences in attitude between European and American gardeners. "As a student, I was struck how English people, in every walk of life, loved their gardens," Smith says. "It was apparent to me I was living in a land where gardening was a part of the national language — one spoken in some form or another by virtually everyone."

Smith harnessed this passion, brought it back to the United States and infused his work with the gardening attitudes and principles he discovered in Europe. "Through the process of creating my garden home and visiting and designing hundreds of gardens throughout my career, I discovered certain principles that, when brought together, could create more enchanting spaces for us to live," Smith says. These principles are united in Smith's first garden design book, *P. Allen Smith's Garden Home*.

### SMITH'S GARDEN HOME

The premise behind Smith's book is that the interior and the exterior of a home should commingle. The gar-



den itself can serve as an extension of the home, providing additional “rooms” in which one can relax, cook, play or simply be. “Through my experience as a garden designer, I have found that when homeowners begin to see the area around their home, however large or small, as a place to blend and connect the interior and exterior living spaces into a unified whole, their dreams soar and their passions ignite,” he says.

Smith devised a fresh approach to garden design in his groundbreaking book. Unique in form and function, Smith guides homeowners through the art of design via exquisite photography and detailed instructions, allowing vir-

### SMITH'S TOP THREE PLANTS?

“To choose just three plants is like trying to paint with only three colors from the palette of nature,” Smith says. “My favorite plants change with each season, time of day and even light conditions. My true fascination with gardening comes in weaving together various captivating plant combinations.”

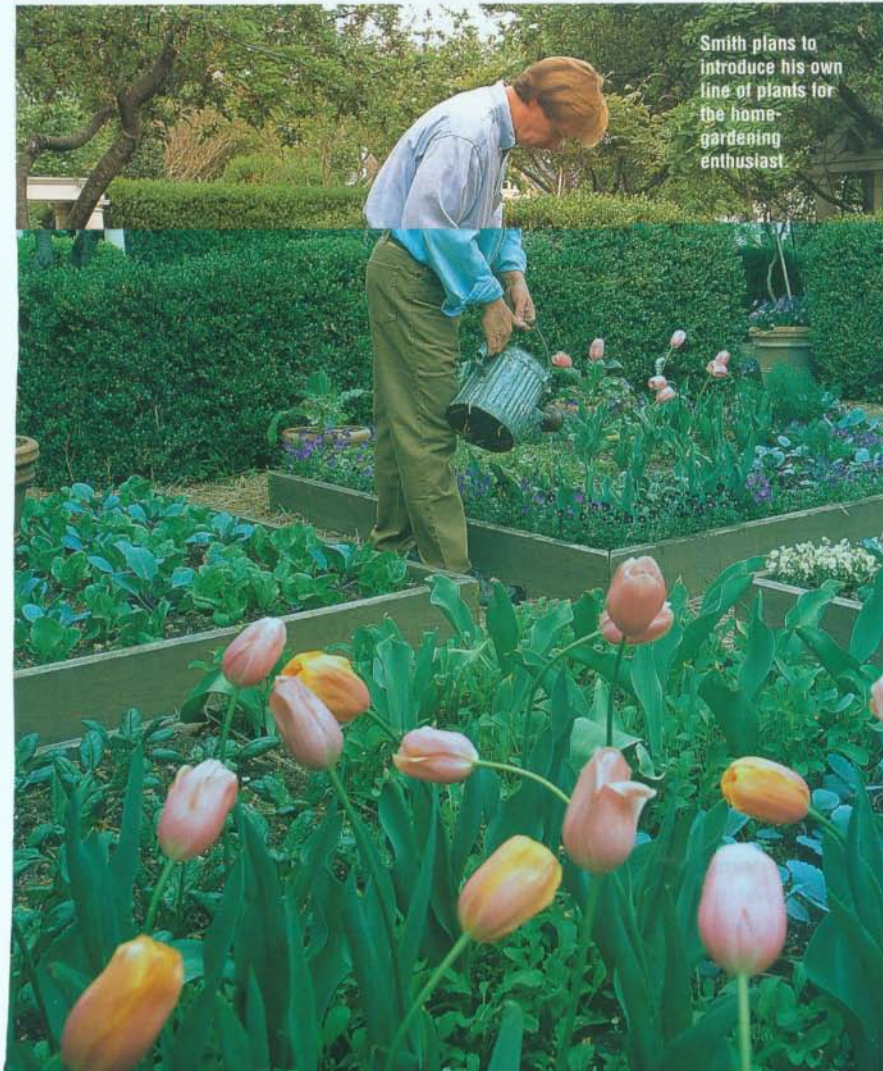
tually any person to visualize the beautiful transformation that is waiting to occur in their own yard. “So many homeowners begin with lots of enthusiasm and eagerness to get started, but

often with little or no experience, particularly in the area of design,” Smith says. “Unsure about how and where to start, they just jump in, which more often than not leads to a frustrating scenario. Even for seasoned designers the process can be overwhelming.”

The underlying roots of exceptional garden design, according to Smith, can be summed up in 12 principles of design. These principles provide the foundation and serve as a basis for any gardener to follow, whether professional or amateur. “Over the years, I have used the 12 principles of design as outlined in the book as my own personal checklist to create a memorable garden,” he says. “The 12 principles of design are meant to serve as tools to help you understand and create better gardens, not to intimidate or limit your choices. For me, it has always been helpful to take apart the components of the garden one by one and examine each individually. Then, as I put them back together, I see how they are interconnected. These principles will demystify how a well-designed garden is fashioned and arm you with the tools and confidence to create the garden you’ve always wanted.”

### THE FUTURE LOOKS GREEN

Recently the recipient of the 2003 Horticultural Communication Award by the American Horticultural Society, Smith continues to grow as a gardener and entrepreneur. On the horizon, Smith plans to introduce his own line of plants, geared toward the home-gardening enthusiast. “I’m terribly excited about my new collection of plants, which I am launching in independent garden centers,” Smith says. “The plants are coordinated for sun and shade, and I’ve selected them in a way that the colors and textures of the plants all work together. It’s a way to help the home gardener with the design process.” ■



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