

# art & culture



Spring/Summer 2008

of Palm Beach County

## UNWRAPPING THE PAST

Palm Beach County History Museum  
Debuts in Restored 1916 Courthouse

## ARCHITECTURAL SHOWPIECE

John Volk's Royal Poinciana Playhouse  
Leaves Lasting Legacy in Palm Beach  
By John Loring

## CULTURAL STEW

Mixing Food and Tradition  
With a Dash of Spain

**PLUS** the Unsinkable Jan McArt, Starting Your Own Book Club,  
the First Palm Beach PopStar, Very Special Artists and Much More

# ART OF A GARDEN

The soft, delicate features of a garden often display an artistry that is just as exquisite as the elements of a piece of fine art work. "You can manipulate plants such that you would with paint, which can create an everlasting and always changing creative outlet," says Mario Nievera, of Mario Nievera Design in Palm Beach.

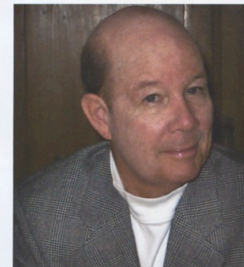
A similar realization is noted by Jeff Blakely, who had planned a life of studio art and teaching when, in the late 1970s, the culmination of several artistic movements—Robert Smithson's completion of the "Spiral Jetty"; sculptor Isamu Noguchi's creation of gardens and courtyard designs embodying exceptional beauty; and Brazilian Robert Burle Marx's creation of landscape works informed by his years as a painter—inspired him to view the artistic nature of a garden in a new light. "The principles, elements and symbol systems of visual art (line, color, texture, value, etc.) are universal and timeless, but how these elements are employed in garden making, painting, tapestry, etc. ... is what makes art," says Blakely, of Blakely and Associates Landscape Architects and Planners, Inc. in Palm Beach Gardens.

"A garden is a piece of artwork, through its natural canvas which comes from great inspiration," says Josee Palmieri, of Palmieri Nursery in West Palm Beach. These works of art can be seen throughout Palm Beach County; they are the parks that utilize negative space, they are the lushly designed gardens that thrive in this tropical oasis, they are the backyards of many a resident. "Palm Beach County's public gardens have a uniqueness about them," Palmieri says.

art&culture asked four prominent landscape architects and designers to choose their favorite personal work as well as a local garden that exemplifies the art of a garden. Jeff Blakely is a third-generation participant in the creation of stunning landscapes, while Mario Nievera transformed a love of architecture into a career of garden creations in Palm Beach. Creating private oases that reflect an international flair is the cornerstone of Josee Palmieri's love for this art form. Botanical Visions, Inc.'s William Reeve is not only a landscape designer but also a horticulturist who believes the county's "unique year-round growing season presents design opportunities to incorporate plant materials that are mostly unfamiliar to the rest of the country."

## JEFF BLAKELY FINDS INSPIRATION ON THE ISLAND

Jeff Blakely's father and grandfather were both landscape architects and nurserymen, so it is not surprising that after studying studio art he was drawn back to the love of his lineage. When asked to choose a favorite work, Blakely selected a private estate in Palm Beach with a 2.5-acre lot that is home to a garden he created in conjunction with Centerbrook Architects of Essex, Conn. The absence of the owners during construction allowed for creative freedom "in designing hardscape and landscape in concert with the architecture and nearby Atlantic Ocean," Blakely says. "Our plan incorporated the scale necessary to correspond with the new architecture while creating gardens, secreted along winding paths accessed from guest houses, providing surprise when traversing the entire site."



Victoria Chippwell

Located a few miles down the island is Blakely's favorite public garden, the Cluett Memorial Garden at Bethesda-by-the-Sea. "The Gothic-inspired garden just off the sanctuary is an example of the best use of space in garden/park making ... the space is symmetrically arranged but not boringly so ... it has the elements of a more contemporary minimalist expression," he says. "Old, distressed, weathered and tactile surfaces ... coupled with the mystical, pre-enlightenment sensibility of the architecture makes for continuing interest no matter how often you visit."

Water-saving container plants and flowers are great design elements for any garden, according to Pamela Crawford, author of "Container Gardens for Florida."