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LANDSCAPE PORTRAIT

Colourful conifers, snaking pathways and clever planting schemes ensure Cassandra and Bryan Barrett's Oregon garden provides year-round interest

WORDS VANESSA BERRIDGE | PHOTOGRAPHS ALLAN MANDELL



THIS PICTURE The Barretts have made excellent use of the views of the landscape that surrounds their garden. Their own trees appear to drift without interruption into the mountain trees on the lower slopes of Mount Zion beyond.


ABOVE The weeping birch *Betula pendula* 'Youngii' anchors the wintry planting of cyclamen, hellebores, species crocus and trilliums; the tree is a particular favourite of Cassandra's for its smoky plum colour.



THIS PICTURE The half-moon gate in laminated rosewood seems to float above the ground, but in fact the striking structure is kept in place by barely visible black PVC feet. The view beyond is that of the lavender grid, which is interspersed with heather.

BELOW In the Alpine Garden Cassandra has interwoven conifers, such as the yellow *Pinus contorta* var. *latifolia* and low-growing *Calluna vulgaris*, with grasses for winter interest.





“Most gardens are not very exciting in autumn and winter – we have a lot of grey days, so it’s important to lift the spirits with colour”

THIS PICTURE An oversized, blue urn adds bold colour to a border filled with several varieties of hellebore. Cassandra plants three or four options of most plants so that they can act as a showcase for her clients.

OPPOSITE *Acer palmatum* ‘Atrolineare’ and a lime-green *Thuja orientalis* frame a modern-style birdbath, which cleverly conceals an uplighter.

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For many gardeners, two and a half acres is a decent-sized space to play with. However, Cassandra and Bryan Barrett's plot of that size in Dexter, Oregon, is split in two by a country road – just 30 feet from their home – so designing a garden to suit has been no mean feat.

"I started with the perimeter planting," says Cassandra. "I didn't want to lose the view of Mount Zion, which lies beyond our land, so I used low trees and shrubs as hedging, and put big trees in places to obscure things like telegraph poles."

The Barretts are garden designers, so they use their own space to showcase plants for clients. "It's like a design showroom," says Cassandra. "I need several options of most plants to help clients personalise their gardens."

That said, as you wander around the site closest to the house, as shown on these pages, it is clear that the garden has been designed to make the most of its environment. When the couple moved here 11 years ago, there was a U-shaped drive and what Cassandra calls "basic rural planting", some wishing wells and

Mugo pines. They removed the drive and laid serpentine gravel paths and thin borders of lawn to intersect the flowerbeds. The sinewy curves of the paths and lawn snake across the front garden, swirling around beds and drawing the eye so that visitors focus on the richness of the planting, unaware of the house's close proximity to the road.

Perhaps the most surprising feature is the omnipresence of conifers, which, on the whole, are an acquired taste, but here they work superbly, meshing seamlessly on a foggy day with tall mountain trees in the landscape beyond. "We use conifers for their vibrant colours and shapes," says Cassandra.

As many of the ornamental beds are little more than thin strips, Cassandra and Bryan chose dwarf conifers to suit the scale of the surrounding planting. A short *Picea pungens* 'Fat Albert' and a small weeping birch, for instance, provide a perfect backdrop for underplantings of cyclamen, hellebore, species crocus and trilliums.

The garden has been divided up into several "rooms", containing in turn perennials,

vegetables, a meadow, and a damp area with dogwoods and elders. But the Barretts' fondness for conifers means that it is the front garden that comes into its own at this time of year. "Most gardens are not very exciting in autumn and winter," says Cassandra. "Here, our climate is similar to yours in Britain, with a lot of grey days, so it's important to lift the spirits with colour."

The couple mixed deciduous trees and shrubs with the conifers to highlight shapes and patterns. In February, the spectral outline of a lichen-covered *Aralia elata* 'Aureovariegata' leans over a bed of irises, hellebores and cyclamens, and provides a frame for a blue lacy conifer, *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Pelt's Blue'.

A key feature of the garden is the Barretts' use of repetition. Great goblets of fiery red *Cornus sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire', chosen for its winter stem colour, appear three times in a single border. Similarly, various types of grey-blue picea are linked through the garden, alongside the winding paths. These repetitions give a pleasing sense of rhythm and pattern, and an irresistible urge to explore. ■



ILLUSTRATION SCOTT JESSOP



GARDEN GUIDE

SOIL Alluvial; the house stands on a flood plane.

ORIENTATION East and west.

SPECIAL FEATURES

Serpentine paths and lawns; conifers including *Abies koreana* 'Silberlocke', *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Gold Fern', *Picea orientalis* 'Skylands', *Picea pungens*

'Glauca Globosa' and *Thuja orientalis*. Deciduous highlights, chosen for stem and branch effect, include *Betula pendula* 'Youngii' and *Cornus alternifolia*.

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