

New England HOME

CT

Celebrating Fine Design, Architecture, and Building

*Lighten
Up!*



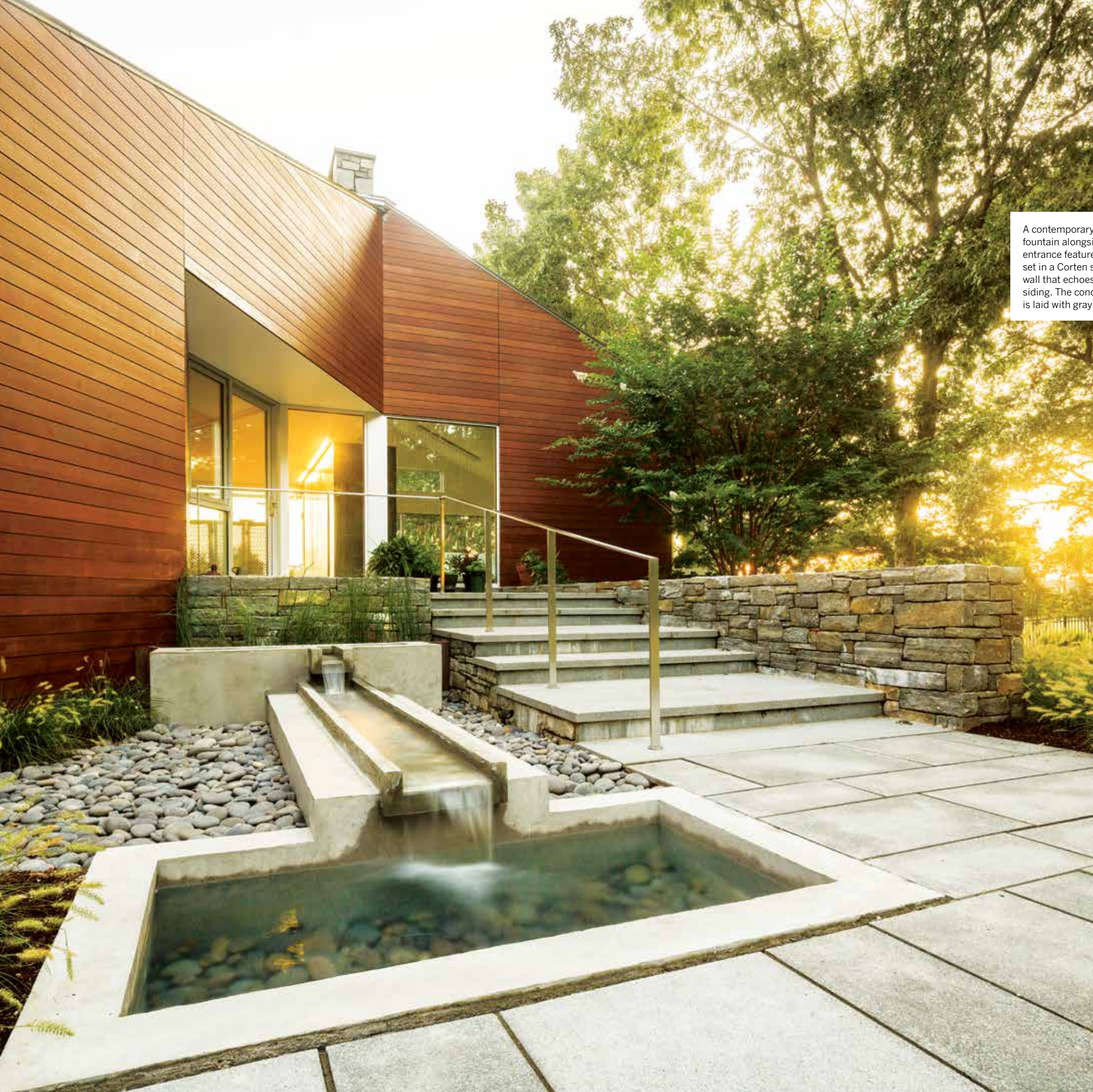


The structures and plantings in this Westport landscape mimic the flow of the tidal creek it borders while protecting the lawn from erosion and the creek from runoff. The design, by Sandy Hook landscape architect Tara Vincenta, won a 2020 honor award from the Connecticut Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

Tidal Track

A meandering coastal creek sets the course for a renewed shoreline property.

Text by DEBRA JUDGE SILBER | *Photography by* NEIL LANDINO



A contemporary water fountain alongside the front entrance features a scupper set in a Corten steel knee wall that echoes the home's siding. The concrete pool is laid with gray river stone.

Tara Vincenta loves working on the edge. For the landscape architect, a childhood spent sailing on Long Island Sound has evolved into a knack for curating the balance between land and water. “I love marine environments—so designing them and designing for their sustainability is a passion of mine,” she says. She also relishes the puzzle of piecing together ecological features, clients’ needs,

and coastal regulations in a seamless landscape. “When someone looks at the end result,” Vincenta says, “they have no idea of the baby steps it took to get there.”

The property on Westport’s Mill Creek was the perfect puzzle. Snug against the winding waterway, its failings included a decrepit driveway, a slope that hindered access to a tennis court alongside the house, predictable plantings, and erosion along the

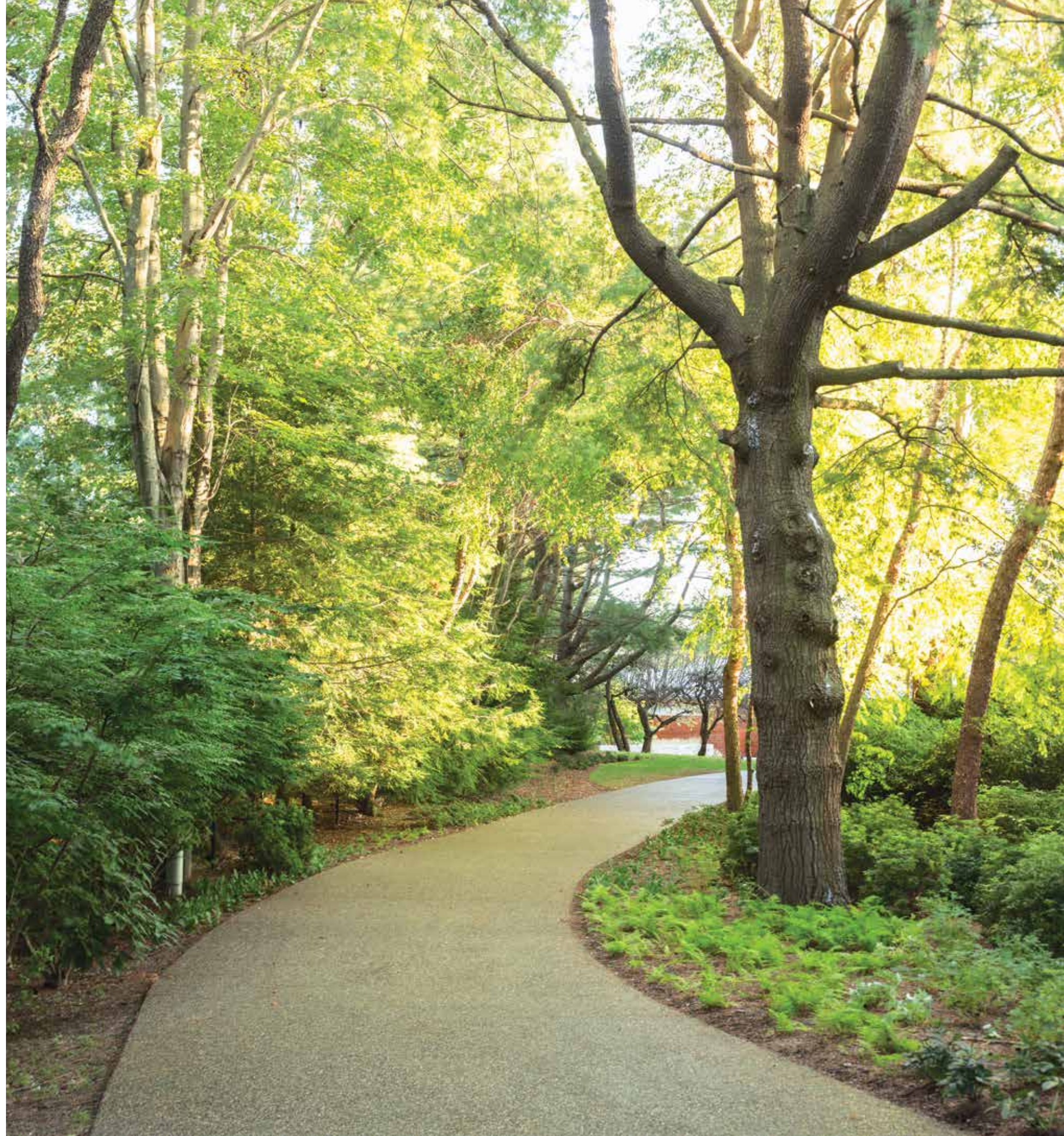
LEFT: A galvanized-steel cable railing and a resin additive that binds the gravel into a permeable, nonskid surface enhances safety, while limelight hydrangeas spill over a new walkway that provides a scenic approach to the tennis court.
RIGHT: The existing gravel driveway was realigned and resurfaced. Deer- and shade-tolerant native plants, including fern, astilbe, lady's mantle, and andromeda, line its edges.



shore. Having remodeled the contemporary-styled house, the homeowners sought to remedy those problems as well as enhance the view from their new windows. “They wanted a landscape that was beautiful to look at from inside, with that spectacular view of the creek and landscape below,” Vincenta says. “And they also wanted to be able to engage with the landscape.”

Vincenta could see why. “When I walked onto the site, I was truly captivated by the marshlands,” she recalls. “It became the inspiration for the design of the property.”

She began by extending the house into the landscape, using Corten steel walls to tame the slope between the house and the tennis court. A resin-reinforced gravel path now cuts across the slope with





“When I walked onto the site, I was truly captivated by the marshlands. It became the inspiration for the design of the property.”

—LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT TARA VINCENTA



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The steel-and-stone structure of gabion walls seems right at home in the coastal New England environment; mounds of hyssop and twilight aster add color along their curves. Between the path and the creek, a mix of salt-tolerant native plants provide interest, while taller grasses, strategically placed, form a privacy screen between the creek and pool. The introduction of native plants draws butterflies, dragonflies, and a variety of birds, like this goldfinch, to the yard.



steps leading safely downward among lush beds of hydrangea, echinacea, and fountain grass. Alongside the front entrance, a new, industrial-styled water feature greets arrivals with the soothing music of trickling water.

In back, a crumbling stone wall and unsightly chain-link fence between an existing pool and the shoreline was

replaced with a dry-stack wall that filters lawn contaminants and checks erosion, and a lightweight galvanized-steel fence that meets pool codes and confines the clients’ two rambunctious dogs. Tall grasses camouflage the fence at ground level, preserving the view from the house above while providing privacy from kayakers skimming up and down the waterway.

At the yard’s edge, a gravel walkway invites a stroll along the sinuous curves of the creek. To define the path and reduce the rate of runoff from the lawn, Vincenta used gabion walls—stone-filled steel cages originally engineered to stabilize slopes—that are illuminated at night. Though not necessarily native to New England, their basket-like forms

LANDSCAPE DESIGN: Tara M. Vincenta, Artemis Landscape Architects

LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR: Luppino Landscaping and Masonry

ARCHITECTURE: Tom Murdough, Murdough Design

“It’s one thing to have a big vision for a property, but it’s being able to create details to implement those ideas that makes or breaks a project.”

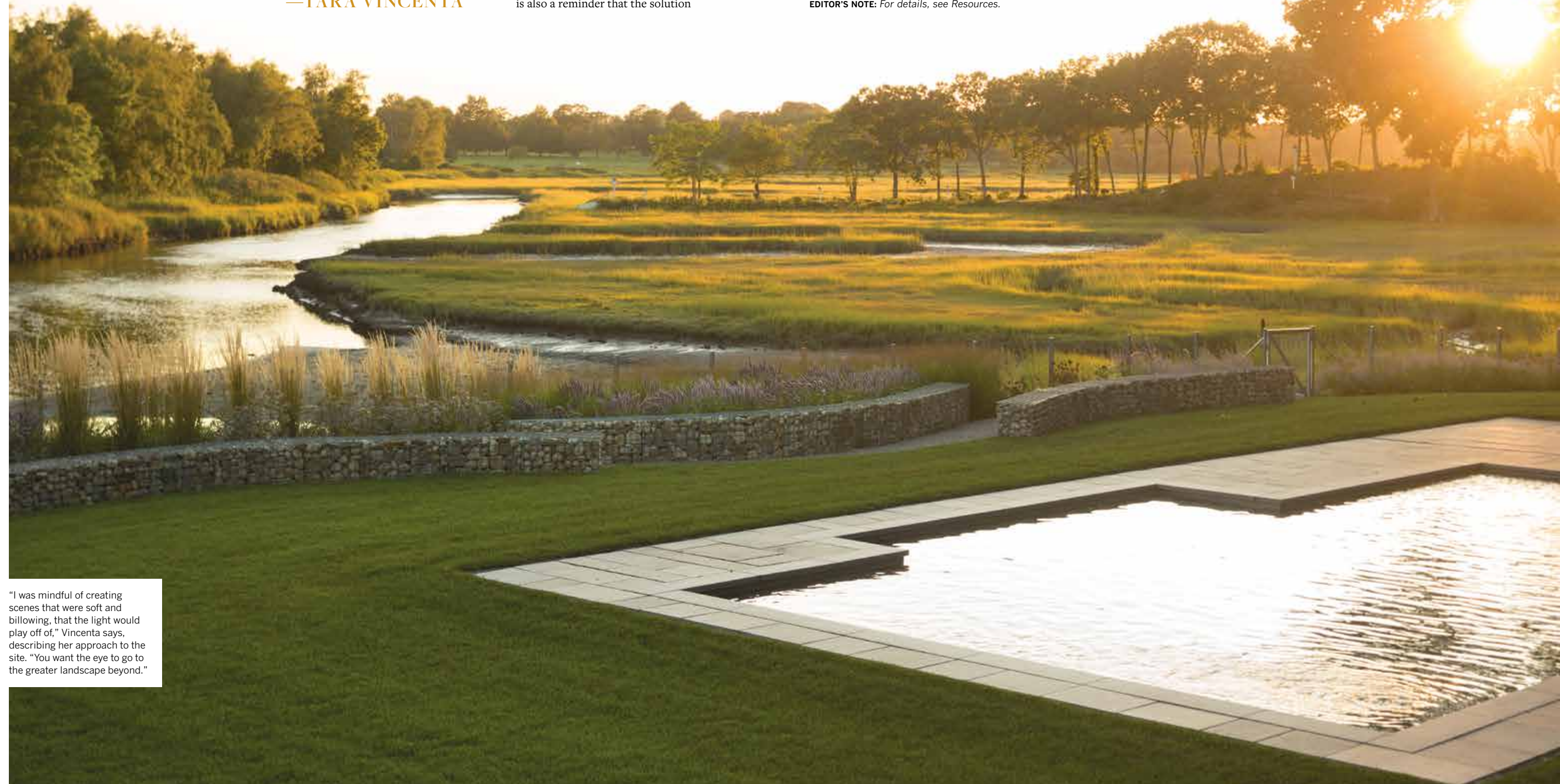
—TARA VINCENTA

call to mind old-time lobster traps, weighted down with stones harvested from one of the region’s rocky beaches. “They’re a great reflection not only of a place, but the steel detailing speaks to the architecture [of the house],” says Vincenta. “From above, they become a sculptural element that’s reflective of the marshlands.”

The walls’ unique construction is also a reminder that the solution

to any landscape puzzle lies in each individual piece. “It’s one thing to have a big vision for a property, but it’s being able to create details to implement those ideas that makes or breaks a project,” Vincenta says. “On a plan, those walls could be any type of curved shape. But how well those curved walls are executed will determine how well they stand the test of time.”

EDITOR’S NOTE: For details, see *Resources*.



“I was mindful of creating scenes that were soft and billowing, that the light would play off of,” Vincenta says, describing her approach to the site. “You want the eye to go to the greater landscape beyond.”