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IN CENTRAL ILLINOIS

SUMMER 2023

Less is more

Mahomet couple kept things small while building what they hope is their forever home

A place in the city

Interior designer helps Champaign pair turn downtown condo into chic getaway

Barn Yarn

Plenty of horseplay at J&S Farm east of Monticello

Seeds of inspiration

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Lainey Boughton grooms her horse in his stall in the main barn at Jamie Gerardi's J&S Farm southeast of White Heath.

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On our cover

The floating staircase at Ryan and Brandon Wingard's home in Mahomet was custom built by Country Stairways in an industrial modern style with steel-cable-laced balustrades.

Photo by
Robin Scholz

Find more photos and feature content at news-gazette.com

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EDITOR'S NOTE

A feast for the eyes



Light, color, texture — these design elements apply whether you're decorating your home or thinking about what to grow in your planters or garden, and in this issue of At Home, readers will get plenty of insight on their use both inside and outside.

From a couple who intentionally built a smaller home in Mahomet to another couple who wanted to try condo living in an urban setting, you'll get all the details on their design and style choices.

Moving outdoors, we also get some great advice about the use of light, color and texture when thinking about patio and porch planters. And for some real-life inspiration, we have a sneak peek of some of the gardens that will be featured in this year's Champaign County Master Gardeners' Garden Walk.

Mixed in is a fun read about an equestrian farm southeast of White Heath and wine slushies at Alto Vineyards in Champaign.

I hope this issue inspires you to take action in your home, garden or patio, and when you're done, reward yourself with a refreshing wine slushie or whatever cold beverage helps you unwind at the end of a productive day.

For more home and garden inspiration, follow us on our brand-new Facebook page (@athomeincentralillinois) and on Instagram (@athomecentralillinois).

Enjoy the lazy days of summer and we'll see you again soon!!

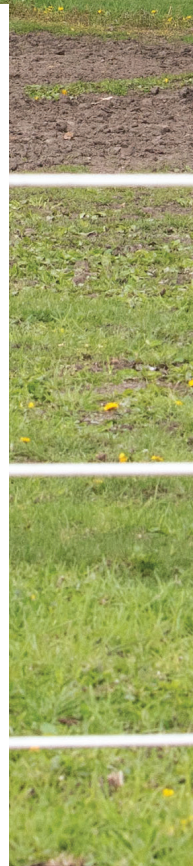
Cheers!

— Carolyn



A framed collection of horse drawings hangs just inside the door to the stables at Jamie Gerardi's J&S Farm southeast of White Heath.

Jamie Gerardi and daughter Sydney's J&S Farm outside White Heath includes stables and an indoor and outdoor arena. **INSET:** Trainer Katie Forshey gives a rubdown to quarter horse Bill between lessons.



MEET THE NEIGH-BORS

They're serious about horseplay at **Jamie Gerardi Equestrian Instruction** southeast of White Heath



Story **Janani Pattabi**



Photos **Robin Scholz**

WHITE HEATH

If you're looking to try a new outdoor activity now that the weather has warmed up, you might want to visit Jamie Gerardi's farm.

The owner of Jamie Gerardi Equestrian Instruction offers riding lessons for all ages, with a goal for students to have a good time and feel good.

"Here, we just strive to build confidence, build everybody's esteem [and] to have a nice time with the horses," Jamie explains.

Her farm consists of several large bright red barns, pens for teacup pigs and goats, horse stables and an indoor and outdoor arena. The indoor arena is connected to a 16-stall stable along with a private viewing area overlooking it.

Given that Jamie and her team teach over 200 lessons a week, the two arenas are often used in tandem when the weather is warm. However, she likes using the indoor arena for beginner lessons specifically.

"It's a safer environment for the kids to learn in because it's smaller and more controllable," she explains. "When you're a beginner, you don't really want to have a very large area to run around in."



ABOVE: The indoor arena at J&S Farm southeast of White Heath. **INSET:** From left, Jamie Gerardi looks over the stables in her second barn; Piper Donley, 4, of Mahomet, trots Rhy under the watchful eyes of trainer Katie Forshey; and Lainey Boughton, 15, of Mahomet gets a lesson from Gerardi's daughter, Sydney Savage.

Most of the facility was built in May 2014 after she bought the property on County Road 100 E about 10 miles southeast of White Heath.

“The only thing that was entirely here was my house and a couple of the older buildings,” she says.

At first, there were only 16 stalls built, but eventually enough were added to accommodate 24 horses (except two who enjoy staying outside at night). Jamie says managing all the horses has been “a bit of a juggling process.”

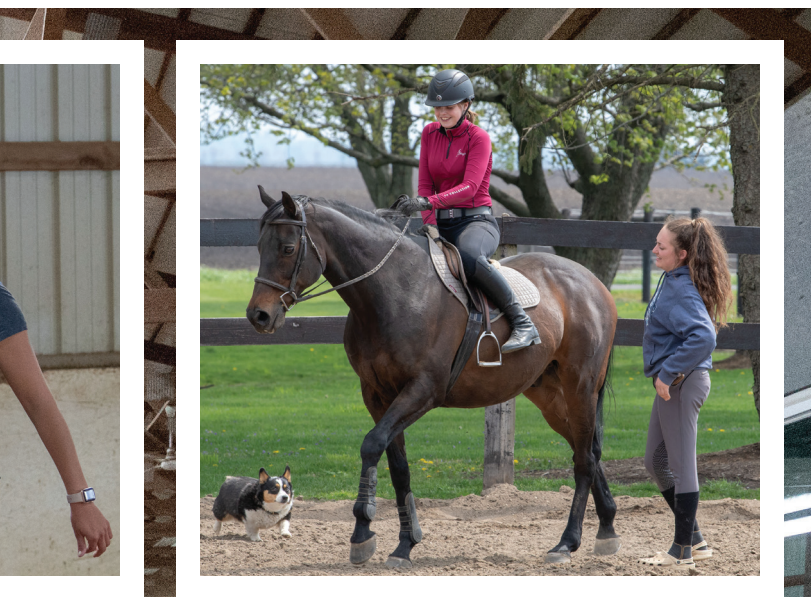
In addition to teaching the more experienced kids, Jamie manages the business — “a lot of my job is on the telephone” — and works with her teams. Her daughter Sydney is heavily involved with the middle school team and also manages a lot of the barn maintenance. Trainer Katie Forshey — according to Jamie, practically a member of the family — teaches all of the younger children and beginners. There is also a crew who comes in to do upkeep, including feeding the horses and cleaning their stalls. With everything so meticulously organized, Jamie agrees that “it takes a village” to keep things running smoothly.

The older students also pitch in to help take care of the horses, helping get them ready between lessons and with tasks like sweeping and watering. For their efforts, they get a free lesson.

“They learn how to do tasks in a timely manner and then they also have to learn to work together,” Jamie says, so it’s a win-win for everybody. For students who own horses and board them at her facilities, there’s another layer of involvement, as they “get to feel more part of the barn and it’s fun for them.”

With lessons, Jamie offers a variety to match different comfort levels and skill sets. Similarly, the horses match this variety: More highly trained horses are used for beginners, while younger horses with less training are ridden by more experienced students.

There are a couple of events students can take part in, like the Interscholastic Equestrian Association team, which participates in competitions, and the biannual Summer Show, which gives students who are currently taking lessons a chance to showcase their talents. Students across the board are trained in versatility so that they are able to do well on any horse.



Gerardi gives some scratches to one of the pet pigs that also live at her farm, along with some goats and several dogs.

Over the years, Jamie has enjoyed watching her “barn family” grow.

“I’ve had a lot of kids ... that have been here for over half their lives and a lot of little ones have started as 4-year-olds [and] gone up to teenagers,” she says. “I really like watching them improve ... [and] watching their confidence build.”

She’s really proud of how close her students have gotten. With 52 kids on the team, Jamie puts a lot of work into planning activities and workshops to help them form bonds. While there have been a few challenges, she believes that her students “are just as comfortable as a little family.”

Jamie’s own history with horses stems from her childhood. She began teaching lessons before high school but decided to pursue an accounting major at the University of Connecticut. She was part of an equestrian team in college and competed in Intercollegiate Horse Show Association events. She and her team won a national title at the highest level in the “Open Division Over Fences” category. She then went on to compete in Belgium.

In college, she also got the experience of managing a horse barn. The college’s horse barn manager “also had a home barn, so I managed that and taught there,” she explains.

After graduation, she realized she wanted to continue working with horses, and her dream came to fruition when she and daughter Sidney, who has been riding since she was 2 years old, started J&S Farms.

Jamie put her life’s passion into her business and strives every day to help people find the same joy she has for horses and equestrian activities. With its tight-knit community and dozens of cute animals, Jamie Gerardi Equestrian Instruction is a welcoming space for anyone interested in horses, regardless of skill level.

If you visit, make sure to say hello to her teacup pigs, Holly, Thor, Cedric and Neville; her goats; and Carolina, their favorite dog. 



Savage takes a break on a show trunk in the stable while Rosie tries to get her attention Lacey takes a snooze.



CHIC

*With the help of interior design
downtown Champaign con*

Story **Carolyn Maille-Petersen**

Photos **Robin Scholz**

CHAMPAIGN

Seven stories above downtown Champaign, Angie and John Kluth's chic condominium provides a bird's-eye view of downtown and easy access to the amenities of urban living. But it took a few years to become the home away from home they had envisioned.

The Kluths bought the three-bedroom, two-bathroom condo in the M2 on Neil building in 2019 as an oasis from the daily grind, hoping to use it on weekends as a place to relax, entertain family and friends and enjoy the energetic downtown nightlife. They also viewed it as a low-risk way to see how they liked living in a smaller space — the condo is less than 2,000 square feet, which is relatively small compared to their suburban Champaign home.

Fast forward a few months and the pandemic hit, throwing their plans out the window. Instead, the condo became a landing place for their two young adult children, Aly and Jake, who used it when working from home was the norm.

As the pandemic restrictions faded, however, the couple got serious about updating the space. That's when they turned to local interior designer Peggy Monahan of Grand House Interior Solutions. With Peggy's guidance, they modernized the space in stages, starting with the common areas.

Their living- and dining-room furniture, which they bought from RH, Arhaus and Crate & Barrel, gave Peggy a starting point. After chatting with Angie and John about their preferences — both of them wanted to do something completely different from their suburban home — Peggy got to work.



and the CITY

designer *Peggy Monahan, Angie and John Kluth* turned their condo from a pandemic respite to a base camp for hitting the town





The kitchen is original except for the Venetian-style blown-glass globe lights.

To start, they needed something to unify the space.

“My vision was a big piece of art,” Angie says, and with Peggy’s help, they found a wall-size abstract print in shades of yellow and gray.

“I love butter yellow,” Angie adds, and Peggy took the color and ran with it.

“We worked off that piece of art and kind of just flowed through,” Peggy says.

Fabric for the pillows, seating cubes and drapes that incorporated colors from the painting were sourced by Peggy, who then handed off fabrication and installation to Draperies & Interiors in Savoy. The subtle use of pale grays and yellows in the fabric and draperies help pull together the common area and give some added vibrancy.

To compliment the modern aesthetic of the furniture, Peggy suggested some large, contemporary light fixtures for the living and dining area that are not only functional, but also works of art in their own right. Additionally, she found some of the accent pieces, like the freestanding mirror-front bar cabinet and a slender crystal martini table to give the room some character — “all

those touches that make you just go wow,” Angie says.

The Kluths provided the personality, decorating the space with mementos from their travels — an Elvis poker set they picked up while visiting family in Phoenix and a diminutive yellow, blue and red mosaic glass bird from a boutique in Cave Creek, Ariz.

Closer to home, Angie found an eye-catching teal glass bowl and decorative metal tray from Texture Home in Champaign for the living room, as well as a contemporary metal sculpture displayed atop a lucite stand by the floor-to-ceiling windows in the living room.

The Kluths didn’t want to do any major renovations that would involve tearing out floors, fixtures or cabinetry, so they focused mainly on how they could update the space with furniture, paint and wallpaper.

Thus, the galley-style kitchen is all original with a few minor updates. They added new, Venetian-style blown-glass globe lights over the kitchen island and installed antiqued-glass panels behind the stools lining the high-top bar. The glass is both fun and functional in that it visually expands the space while also protecting the wall from scuff marks.



ABOVE: Three abstract paintings from Draperies & Interiors’ in-house art brand line the main hallway.

BELOW: A mosaic glass bird sits on a table in the living room.



A woman with long brown hair is sitting on a white metal chair in a desert landscape. She is wearing a white sleeveless top, orange pants, and brown Birkenstock sandals. She is positioned next to a large, textured tree trunk. The background shows a vast, arid desert with low mountains under a clear blue sky.


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A side table in the living room, left, and a contemporary metal sculpture displayed atop a lucite stand by the floor-to-ceiling windows in the living room, which look out on Church Street toward West Side Park.

They also wallpapered the entry, dining room and hallway with a muted silver-gray grasscloth to give some texture and lightness to the space. But even with wallpaper, the hallway still needed something, Angie says.

Once again, Peggy worked her magic and presented the couple with a few select choices. After sifting through the options, they chose in-house brand art from Draperies & Interiors. Angie and John were able to customize the art in that they could choose the size, color scheme and style they wanted. Based on their choices, they received three large abstract paintings in swirls of red, yellow, white and blue.

"I just love these colors," Angie says.

"They're a pop of color, but they're not crazy. They just added some brightness to the hallway."

The next big decision was the bedroom.

"We knew we needed some color in here other than paint," Angie says.

After looking at a lot of neutral wallpaper, Peggy showed her a series of beautiful gray silk mural panels with hand-painted magnolia branches in bloom stretching across it. Angie fell in love.

"If we're going to do it, let's do it right; let's do it big," she recalls thinking. The result,

she says, is "stunning."

Next door in the main bathroom, the Kluths also opted for cosmetic changes rather than a tear-out. They removed the original vanity and replaced it with a brushed brown oak one topped with a white quartz countertop from RH, adding satin brass fixtures, mirrors and lighting for a contemporary feel. The shower, with its dark, dated tile, will wait until a future phase of renovation, they say.

In the meantime, they are enjoying their bright renovated space with its floor-to-ceiling windows and sunset views over West Side Park.



They are also getting to enjoy a return to their favorite downtown bars and eateries. When they are not at the condo, they happily offer it up to family and friends for visits both long and short. Their condo has played host to bridal parties and showers and has served as a home away from home for friends who live elsewhere but come to Champaign for work reasons.

From the art to the lighting to the accent pieces, they took a leap of faith with the choices they made, and they are so glad they did. But that doesn't mean it didn't come with plenty of moments of doubt, Angie says.

"That's been a lot of this process," she says with a laugh.

Because they were doing something completely different with the look and feel of the condo, she had many moments of discomfort and doubt, but ultimately, she and John trusted their interior designer to help them make choices that were edgy, but ultimately very satisfying.

Now they can free their minds of all the tough interior design decisions and focus on other less pressing matters, such as which restaurant they want to hit up next!



TOP: Texture abounds in the main bedroom. **ABOVE:** The view — and light — from the floor-to-ceiling windows are reflected in a mirrored cabinet.



Ryan, left, and Brandon Wingard in their kitchen

Little ho

When **Ryan** and **Brandon W**
they purposefully went small



Story **Carolyn Maille-Petersen** § Photos **Robin Scholz**

MAHOMET

Just 20 minutes west of Champaign lies the village of Mahomet, home to Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve and a number of boutiques, coffeeshops and restaurants that cater to this community nestled in the bends of the Sangamon River.

It is also where Ryan Wingard and her husband, Brandon, decided to build what they hope will be their forever home. What makes their home unique by today's standards is its size. At less than 1,700 square feet, it is small in comparison to a lot of new builds. And that's the way Ryan and Brandon like it.

Their less-is-more vibe comes across the moment you walk into the home. With its lofty two-story living space and minimal furnishings, it becomes obvious very quickly that they are not into accumulating material goods.

"If we own it, it has a purpose," Ryan says.

This minimalist philosophy is something the Wingards share, and after years of living in a variety of homes, they had a pretty good idea of what they wanted: something modest and open that fit with their carefree, low-maintenance lifestyle. So when it came time to come up with a design, Ryan spent a lot of hours on Houzz, a website where homeowners can find home building and remodeling inspiration as well as connect to professionals who can make their ideas a reality.

House on the prairie

Wingard built what they hope is their forever home in Mahomet, all to match a lifestyle that eschews material goods for experiences







The more Ryan looked around and saved ideas, the more she found herself drawn to simple Scandinavian or industrial modern design concepts. Even the shape of the house is simple. Ryan describes it as looking exactly the way young children draw houses: a box with a triangle-shaped roof.

Inside, the main floor is all straight lines, open design and neutral colors. The kitchen, living and dining spaces all flow together and are unified by the slate gray Marmoleum flooring they installed themselves. They love it for its durability and anti-bacterial qualities.

The main floor also includes their main bedroom, en suite bathroom and entryway on the back end of the home. Dividing the bedroom from the living room is a floating staircase leading up to the loft and down to the basement. Custom built by Country Stairways, it is a wonder of industrial modern design with its steel-cable-laced balustrades.

At the top of the staircase is an open loft area with a guest bedroom, home office and full bathroom. The loft overlooks the living room and kitchen and is outfitted with a dartboard, a working antique jukebox from Brandon's father and a seating area with Ryan's vintage upholstered chairs atop a faux cowhide rug. It acts as an overflow space to hang out and play games when they have get-togethers with friends, Ryan says.

All three bedrooms, one of which is used as Brandon's home office, are also small and do not have built-in closets. The Wingards' philosophy is that bedrooms are just for sleeping and thus don't require much space.

As for the lack of closets, Ryan says, "I've had big closets in all of our other homes. The closets just became a disaster. You just fill them up, and I was like, 'I don't want closets.'"

Instead, every bedroom has compact IKEA wardrobes attached to the walls.

"You can't really get too big," Ryan says. "When they get too full, we purge."

It forces her and Brandon to think before they buy, she says: "It makes you be conscious."

By comparison, the common area on the main floor is all spaciousness and light. The second-story picture windows on three sides add to the openness and provide what Ryan describes as rotating natural artwork. The windows offer a lovely view of the clouds, trees and even the moon.

"You look up and it looks like a framed piece of art," she says.

Though they could have extended the loft all the way across the house to create a second floor, that's not what they wanted. They wanted those oversized picture windows and high ceilings.

"We have a lot of volume, but not a lot of square footage," Ryan says. "Our footprint isn't that big, so (the two-story living room) was kind of our compromise to make it seem larger. I mean, it's our living room, it's our eating area, it's our kitchen, and it's probably 25 by 25" feet.

The size forces them to keep it simple, although for the Wingards, that's never really been a problem.

Even the galley kitchen has limited storage.

"You can only have what you can have," says Ryan, opening the cupboard doors to reveal very little in the way of dishes, glassware and other typical kitchenware. "I do have to say, our basement is a bit of a saving grace. If it's something we only use quarterly or maybe once a month ... it probably lives in the basement."

However, she is quick to point out that they only have a partial basement, so even that space requires them to be judicious in their choices since there isn't room to store endless amounts of stuff.

Despite their minimalistic leanings, they do have some artwork and decorative items around the house, most of which are mementos from their travels.

"We take our memories with us," Ryan says. "I'm not a big photo-taker. We don't even have a wedding picture," she says with a laugh.



ABOVE: The Wingards' minimalist philosophy is on display in every area of their home, including, from left, the living room, the main bathroom and the main bedroom, which has wardrobes instead of closets. **BELOW:** Mini-goldendoodle Auggie rests on his chair next to a wall holding his leashes at the base of the main staircase, with a wood stove nearby.





Both she and her husband are dive-certified, Ryan, “so if we want a souvenir, we find something in the water.”

Their “tchotchkes,” as she calls them — a smattering of photos, seashells, books and an American flag from the military funeral for Brandon’s grandfather — are all contained on three small shelves on the landing leading down to their basement.

“That’s my one little trinket wall,” Ryan says. “That’s what I’ve allowed myself to have.”

Brandon has a souvenir wall as well, but his is filled with unique specialty bourbons that he has carefully curated over the years. The bourbon wall originally housed a set of kitchen cabinets, but during the pandemic, the Wingards removed the cabinets and installed shiplap and floating shelves to display his collection.

But that’s not all — they then built a divider wall between the kitchen and the entryway and reattached the kitchen cabinets they previously removed from the bourbon wall. And they did all the work themselves with the exception of the finish work on the drywall. All in a week’s work for the handy couple!

While the addition didn’t give them any more kitchen storage space, it did provide a handy drop zone for coats in the entryway, Ryan says.

A commitment to living with less helps the Wingards maintain a low-maintenance lifestyle that gives them more time to spend outdoors. Why have a lot of indoor space to care for if you are going to spend the majority of your time outside?

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The main bedroom is situated on the first floor, next to the floating staircase.



A guest bedroom.

This attitude not only influenced their decision on how big to build, but also where to build. Their home is walking distance from Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve, where they are able to run, bike, kayak and walk Auggie, their mini-goldendoodle.

Living minimally isn't for everyone, but for the Wingards, it's the obvious choice.

"We finally found a home that sort of fits the look and the way that we live," Ryan says.

It allows them to spend more time doing what they love, which doesn't include caring for a big house and all its contents. They've also shown that a smaller space can still look big; it's all in the design and a commitment to streamlining one's belongings.

From the square footage to the style, the Wingards put a lot of thought into how they could maximize a smaller space to accommodate the few tangible items that are meaningful to them. In doing so, it gives them more time to enjoy the intangibles of life: the world outside their door. 



The Wingards' few material mementos include Brandon's wall full of specialty bourbons near the kitchen, above left; a working antique jukebox from his father in the loft space, above right; and 'tchotchkes' displayed on shelves on the landing to the basement.





Heard it throu

Champaign's **Alto Vineyards** has them c



Story **Kevin Barlow**



Photos **Robin Scholz**

CHAMPAIGN

Even as general manager of Alto Vineyards, a third-generation family-owned winery at 4210 N. Duncan Road in Champaign, Tarah Lynch finds it difficult to include all the events and experiences a visitor can have.

ough the GRAPEVINE

coming for the wine slushies, staying for a wide variety of events



"There is just so much going on right now," she says. "I have trouble coming up with a place to start."

A number of visitors, though, start not with the events, but the wine slushies, something the winery has become known for.

"The slushies are one of our most popular drinks," she says. "We start with our own mix and then add some of our Alto wine in it, and people really enjoy it."

With different visitors having different tastes, slushies come in many flavors, including mango, raspberry, strawberry and peach.

A wine slushy is a refreshing boozy slushy made with wine, frozen fruit and ice. It's blended in a high-speed blender until a slushy consistency is achieved.

"The slushies are definitely a summer favorite," she says. "But we have a variety of drinks and are always trying new things."

Among the most popular, she adds, is the Black-N-Blush, a sweet-tasting fruit wine made from 75 percent Concord grapes and 25 percent blackberries. It was the winner of the Silver medal in the Illinois State Wine competition in 2017 and 2019.

Making wine is nothing new at Alto Vineyards. In 1982, Guy Renzaglia had a vision along with partners Skip Cosgrove and Ted Wickman. The trio bought 50 acres in Alto Pass in southern Illinois and embarked on a journey to rebuild the grape and wine industry in the southern part of the state. They planted 10 acres of grapes.

Three years later, Guy's son, Paul, became a winemaker, and five years later, they built a 600-square-foot winery. The first 1,500 gallons of wine sold out in three days, and the business boomed after that. In 2021, the family opened the facility on Duncan Road. Directly off of Interstate 74, the winery provides a scenic venue for parties, weddings, fundraisers and business events.

"We are really busy this summer," Tarah says. "We are undergoing a remodel and building a large stage to accommodate the acts. We are adding two new decks and the new stage."

And there are plenty of events, she adds.

The large festival hall is 1,500 square feet and can fit up to 100 guests. The wine deck is set up for outdoor parties with up to 50 guests. It also has easy access to the tasting room.

The shade house has a capacity of 200 for weddings, reunions and social events.

There are musical acts every weekend, including "Music on the Vine" concerts every Saturday and "Wine Down Sundays" on Sundays. "Comedy Under the Stars"



takes place on the last Saturday of every month, and there are selected "Dog Days" throughout the summer where visitors are encouraged to bring their canine friends.

Among the music slated for this summer, which leans toward jazz and blues, are Aces N' Rhythms, Stuart Smith, Candy Foster & the Shades of Blue, the Nightcaps, Dave N' Lisa, and War Road Gypsy.

Visitors can bring their own food, but there will be several food trucks available as well, Tarah says.

While the Champaign location is only a few years old, Tarah says it benefits from Alto Vineyards' long, successful history in southern Illinois.

"Wine is what we do best and it's what we are all about," Paul says.

There is free wine tasting so visitors can sample the different types.

Many start out with sweet or dessert wines, such as Alto's German-style Shawnee Gold or the sweet rosé Heartland Blush. Fruitier wines include German Riesling, Hungarian Tokaji and Italian Vin Santo.

Next, they tend to become more curious about red wine, the most discussed and collected. That's usually followed by elegant wine and then sparkling wine, according to the experts at Alto.

Natural and other wines include the popular Black-N-Blush, but the Cherry Berry, made from a 50/50 blend of cherries and raspberries, and the spiced Nona Mia Sangria or sweet Porto Di Guido are also favorites.

"We have people who always drink their favorites and we have visitors who try something new every time," Tarah says. "But we strive to be something for everybody. We do that with entertainment and our special drinks and it works as our customers keep coming back."

The winery also sells domestic and craft beers and non-alcoholic drinks. 

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STEP-BY-STEP INSPIRATION

Private, public spaces on full display for Champaign County Master Gardeners' 2023 walk



Story **Carolyn Maille-Peteresen**



Photos **Provided**

Get your walking shoes on, because it's that time of year again! Gardens are in bloom and the Champaign County Master Gardeners are hosting their annual garden walk June 17.

CHAMPAIGN

This year's theme is "Inspirational Gardens: New, Old, Reimagined," and includes six private and two

public gardens along with the Marketplace at the Idea Garden. In addition, a variety of sustainability

practices will be showcased at both the private and public gardens, according to Lynne Hellmer, one of the chairs for this year's event.

Lynna and co-chairs Gail Kennedy and Mary Knight, all of whom are Master Gardeners, gave us a preview, and it will not disappoint. Turn the page for just a few of the gardens that will be on display.



‘Urban Oasis’

Jan Erkert and Bernt Lewy’s garden, “Urban Oasis,” is just that. The couple bought an old ice house north of downtown Champaign and transformed what was a weed-filled parking lot for semitrailers into a haven not only for themselves, but also for birds, bees, butterflies and other four-legged creatures.

“There are many ecosystems within the property,” says Jan, who refers to them as “rooms.” Some rooms are dedicated to shade, while others are on the sunnier side. “I wanted anyone that walked through the front gate (including me) to experience the magical surprise of finding an oasis tucked into the heart of the city.

“When we began this project 17 years ago, there was not one worm in the ground or birds hovering,” she says. Fast forward to the present, and “the birds and butterflies hover daily, their multiple flight paths looking like O’Hare airport. ... It appears that every living thing desperately needed an oasis.”



‘Down the Garden Path’

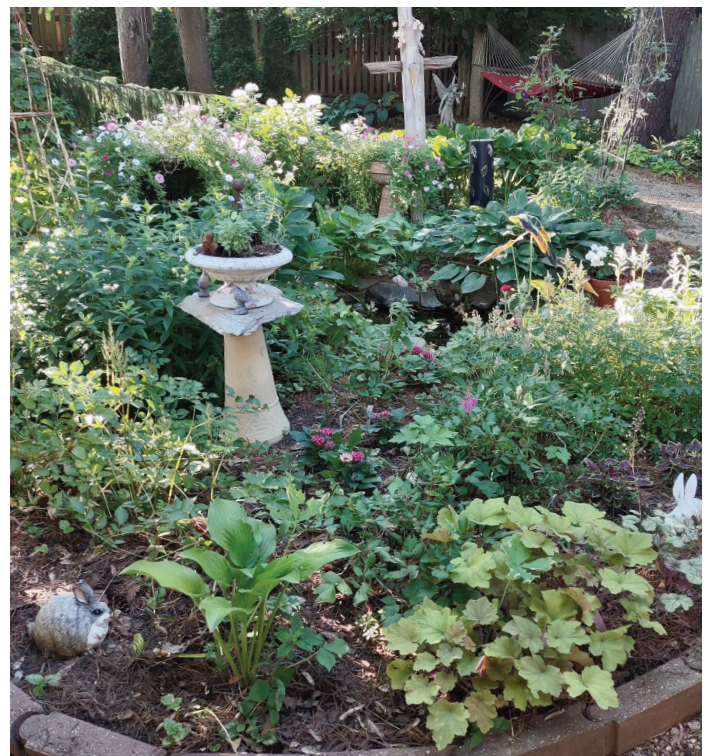
Across town in Urbana, Tonya and Kenston Chism’s entire property is their garden. Entitled “Down the Garden Path,” their yard has zero grass.

“It didn’t start out that way,” Tonya says, “but the more I did garden-wise, the less space I had, until I just had gardens and pathways that took you from one area to another.”

Tonya is a no-nonsense gardener, with a tough-love attitude toward her plants.

“My philosophy is to relax, which is unlike me anyplace else in my life,” she says. “I don’t have time to baby a plant. If it doesn’t work out for me ... it finds a new home with a friend or family member.”

She isn’t striving for a perfect garden, she says, just one where people feel welcome.





‘My Earthly Paradise’

Also in Urbana is “My Earthly Paradise,” the moniker given to Janice Revell’s garden.

It’s filled with hostas, coleus and perennial flowers interspersed with a variety of statues, including her favorite, which she calls the “Bird Girl.”

There’s also a cute red potting shed and a purple-painted bike with a basket full of flowers parked under a tree.

“It actually is my paradise,” she says. “There is nothing I like better than working and planting beautiful flowers.”



If you go

The event runs from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. June 17. Tickets, which cost \$10 (free for those 10 and under) can be bought in advance at Country Arbors Nursery in Urbana and Prairie Gardens in Champaign or by scanning the QR code at right. They may also be bought the day of the event at the Champaign County Idea Garden at 1846 S. Lincoln Ave., U.



Scan this QR code to buy tickets to the 2023 Garden Walk



‘My Secret Garden’

Back in Champaign, “My Secret Garden” at the home of Jody Boles will surprise and delight visitors.

“My backyard is fenced in and very secluded,” Jody says. “I’ve heard many times, ‘I had no idea this is back here,’ so ‘My Secret Garden’ feels appropriate.”

Tucked away in this secret garden is a goldfish pond, a garden shed and a plethora of flowers, from sun-loving black-eyed Susans and coneflowers to shade-lovers like hostas and heucheras.

“I originally started gardening because we had this ugly backyard that had been neglected,” Jody says. “I am a graphic designer, so it’s a creative outlet.”



In addition to the personal gardens, the walk will also feature the City of Champaign Township’s Prosperity Gardens, which added a new location in 2021. This 1-acre urban farm can be found at the corner of North and Water streets and is tended to by unhoused individuals employed through the township’s CU@Work Program.

There will also be a birdhouse artistry competition.

Whether you are looking for inspiration for your own garden or just want to soak in the sights of some of Champaign-Urbana’s hidden and not-so-hidden garden gems, the walk has something for everyone. 

Beautify your patio with plants

Story **Carolyn Maille-Petersen**



Photo **Provided**

DANVILLE

It's patio season — finally! Time to get outside and enjoy the longer, warmer days, and what better place to do it than on your patio or balcony? Whether your space is massive or minuscule, Danville Gardens has suggestions on how to beautify it with some well-placed planters.

When thinking about patio planters, the most important considerations are location, pot size, and how much work you want to put into it, says Lisa Campbell, who owns the garden center with husband Nathan.

At the top of Lisa's list is location — as in, will your pots be in a mostly sunny or a mostly shady place? Gauging the amount and intensity of sun will determine the types of plants you can successfully grow in a particular spot from season to season. Morning sun is generally less intense than afternoon sun, so it's not just about whether a plant is in the sun or shade.

When deciding on the type of plant, it's a good idea to make note of how many hours of sun a spot gets in a day, and the intensity. Plants in pots that get a lot of late-afternoon sun need to be more heat tolerant than those that get early-morning sunshine.

The second consideration is pot size. To successfully grow perennials in a pot, it needs to be a bare minimum of 16 to 20 inches in diameter and preferably made of glazed ceramic or something similar. The size and "make" not only offer insulation for the root ball when the weather turns cold, but also allow for plenty of soil for water retention, which means more room for roots to grow and less watering. You want a larger root system because there is a higher probability that your perennials will survive from one year to the next.

Once you have decided on the placement of your pots and gauged the amount of sun or shade they are



going to get, it's time for the fun part — choosing plants! For year-round interest, consider planting a combination of perennials and annuals, Lisa says. Perennials are plants that come back year after year, whereas annuals have one growing season and do not come back the following year.

As with any plant, choosing something that grows well in central Illinois is of paramount importance. Though our area is technically in Zone 5 on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Plant Hardiness Zone Map, Lisa recommends erring on the conservative side when planting in containers.

"If you go with something that is technically labeled for Zone 3 or 4, then it should be hardier and it should be able to survive in that container," she says.

If you are looking for a little privacy from your perennials, Lisa favors dwarf hydrangeas, boxwood, arborvitae and viburnum as hardy options. They provide a little bit of height, but they won't overwhelm the container, and they add interest year round. In the warmer months, you can add seasonal plantings around the base such as petunias, begonias or coleus, and voila — you are set for the summer season.

If privacy isn't a concern, she says, less-imposing perennials that do well



in pots include hostas, heuchera and ferns, as long as they are in a shady spot. For color and seasonal interest, she recommends pairing these with caladiums or begonias.

The third consideration is how much effort you want to put into your planters. There are a variety of plants available for both the neglectful and the attentive gardener; it's just a matter of knowing your style. A knowledgeable staffer at your favorite garden center should be helpful in choosing plants that will thrive in your care, so don't be afraid to ask.

If you're new to gardening, overwhelmed by the choices or have had trouble with particular plants in the past, the most valuable piece of advice Lisa can offer is this: "You want to go to a reputable garden center and you want to ask questions. They are gardeners, and they know what grows well here."

Regardless of where you buy your plants, Lisa urges gardeners to develop a relationship with the staff. Any garden center worth its salt will be staffed with knowledgeable, approachable people.

"You can ask a lot of questions and you can eliminate a lot of mistakes," she says.

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