



PRETTY BIG DIRT

ON 20 SCRUBBY ACRES IN FLORIDA, THE SLASH PINES HAVE SOME INTERESTING NEW COMPANY.

BY BETH DUNLOP

1 SLASH PINES

Already on the site, they were left to create a sense of the untouched landscape.

2 APPROACH

The approach to the house gives the idea of a formal European estate, albeit one transplanted to the subtropics.

3 TRELISES

Landscape trellises, covered in bougainvillea, lead from space to space.

4 DRIVE

The new driving drive into the property splits as it passes an existing tree.

IMAGE CREDITS

Courtesy: Krent Ireland Design

RIGHT

Specimen trees and ancient oaks add to the size of the "sound landscape," while black bamboo combines with more typical Florida island trees on the west grounds of this Florida house.

IMAGE CREDITS

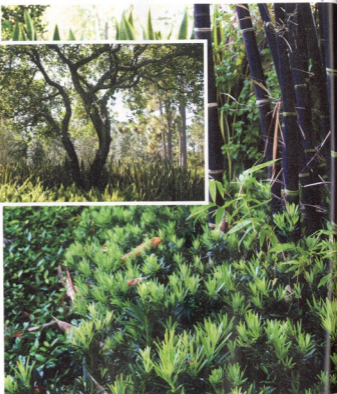
Courtesy Krent Wieland Design



The land, as Krent Wieland, ASLA, first encountered it, is not where you would expect to build a vast European-inspired house that sits on carefully designed grounds. It was 20 acres of slash pine uplands far inland from the Atlantic Ocean. To get to this spot, you have to drive west into the scrub of Florida's low-lying interior to a community far removed from the ready-made glamour of Palm Beach or Jupiter Island.

Yet that is where John F. and Sharon Chapple had chosen to build their new house, a part of a larger development known as Ranch Colony, which is aimed at luring avid golfers, pilots, equestrians, and even ranchers and carving out sizable homesteads where once only birds roosted and cattle roamed. And that is where Wieland faced the challenge of creating a fantasy out of fallow ground.

His eponymous landscape design firm—Krent Wieland Design Inc.—is based in Delray Beach, but the practice spreads beyond Florida to Texas and North Carolina and then into the Bahamas, the Caribbean, and on to points much farther, including Israel. But after 35 years of practice, it is Florida's landscape that is





ABOVE

The Houder staff took on a more Italian-influenced feel as the design progressed. Kent Wieland, ASLA, chose specimen Canary Island date palms along with abundantly blooming bougainvillea for the more “domestic” landscape.

IMAGE CREDIT
 Courtesy Kent Wieland
 Design

closest to his heart; though he's from a well-entrenched Midwestern furniture-making family, he moved south to the subtropics in 1975 with a landscape degree he had just finished at Michigan State University.

Wieland's work shows his flair for contained drama and restrained romanticism, for creating from the proverbial *tabula rasa*, or blank slate. Wieland is no stranger to large holdings of untouched (and often uninteresting) terrain that

need to be transformed into lush botanical offerings, and he is no stranger to designing the landscapes of large houses. His practice embraces a wide range of residential landscape design, from entire new communities to private homes, most of them at a very large scale. “In the heyday, in the 1980s and 1990s and even the early ’2000s,” he says, “I was doing some pretty big dirt.”

And that was the case with the Chapple project, where Wieland got to

shape both the land and the landscape. “We had one lake and an old garage, and everything—except a piece of the garage—got bulldozed,” he says. “Then we began again.” First he dug out a second lake, then reshaped the existing one. His process includes storyboarding, and in this case the clients looked at several of these collage-like assemblages of images and “charged their whole architectural vocabulary,” he said. Once the architectural vocabulary became more Italianate and less



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ABOVE

Two views, one already on the property and one added, exemplify the dichotomy between the wild and the tamed that pervades this design.

IMAGE CREDITS

Courtesy, Krest Wieland Design

Spanish, as had originally been planned, both the house design (the architect was Spencer Golger of Palm Beach) and the landscape plan became clear.

A formal entryway—wrought iron gates, stone piers, and two imposing specimen date palms—segues into a meandering and rustic road that in turn leads to a formal entry sequence. The driveway circles around an elliptical knot pond decorated with stone mosaic swags, in another nod to the house's Italian inklings. The front

door is marked by two brilliant—and big—bougainvillea plants.

At 20,000 square feet, this is a big house, but, Wieland says, "it's really like a compound," with separate pieces wrapping around courtyards and connected by loggias. In turn, the house looks across a horizon-edge swimming pool at the original lake. A guest house (it is comparatively small at 2,500 square feet) sits across the tip of the lake. One vista leads to another. "It all lines up axially," says Wieland.

Those axial views played an important role in Wieland's design: There are landscape sequences that direct the eye from house to garden, building to courtyard—all part of the intricate spatial arrangement of the complex. The landscape design runs the gamut from gardens, courtyards, terraces, pergolas, and follies that you might have found in an old formal country estate to what Wieland calls "near organic."

Indeed, the extensive site offered an enormous opportunity to delve into

landscape design history. Wieland chose to treat the site much the way Florida's earliest landscape architects—among them the Olmsted-trained William Lyman Phillips—had in creating what are now treasured historic gardens. Like Phillips and his turn-of-the-20th-century peers, Wieland shaped views and carefully arranged the landscape to look as natural as possible, as if it had been a found landscape.

Thus, formal interventions yield to a near-wild landscape on other parts





ABOVE

The approach to the house juxtaposes new trees and the far more rustic pines. The more informal landscape of much of the grounds evolves into the cultivated look of the front of the house, with bougainvilleas in urns adding to the Old World quality.

IMAGE CREDITS

Courtesy: Krent Wieland Design

of the estate. Besides the canary date trees, he also brought in specimen oaks, "some of which were close to 100 years old, including a beautiful oak with five trunks," he says, and large magnolia and bougainvillea trees. Certain plants were kept to specific locations—for example, black bamboo in the courtyards.

The hardscape—driveway, arrival area, back terraces, and poolside—follows a specific palette as well, one that worked with the stone cladding of the facade. The driveway itself is aggregate, but much of the rest relies on Pennsylvania limestone and marble, including built-in planter edges to allow only minimal poolside furniture and inlay detailing in the pool. Pergolas wrapped in bougainvilleas allow for romantic passage from space to space, and iron fences and gates are not just punctuation points but further define and divide the grounds.

"Obviously," he says, "up close to the house we're more architectural, but when you're doing 20 acres, you want to be as native as possible." Besides the original pines, the site bore ferns, coco palm, bolly, and sabal palms. Wieland kept much of the original vegetation, focusing largely on the predominant slash pines, in an effort to be true to the land and to the microclimate. "I made the new lake totally native, surrounded by sabal palm hammocks, live oaks, and native grasses," he said. "The challenge for a lot of it was to make it look like it wasn't designed." ■

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Project Credits

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