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DESIGN

NEW ENGLAND

Historic
Saves



A wooden pergola structure with a blue ceramic pot on a bench in front of a dense green hedge. The text "THE Blue GARDEN" is overlaid in the center. The word "THE" is in a bold, white, sans-serif font. "Blue" is in a white, elegant script font. "GARDEN" is in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The background is a lush green hedge with a blue sky visible at the top.

THE
Blue
GARDEN

M

ost efforts to restore significant architectural icons in Newport, Rhode Island, focus on elaborate Gilded Age mansions or landmark Shingle Style cottages. But preservationist, philanthropist, and garden lover Dorrance Hamilton had a different kind of vision: She restored a garden — and not just any garden. She zeroed in on the 100-year-old Blue Garden, a glorious outdoor space that had flourished for a few decades and then vanished, despite having been designed by one of America's most important landscape architecture firms. "The Blue Garden has just been a mystique through all these years," said Hamilton at a recent celebration of the garden's revival. "It's been so exciting to learn about its history and how it was designed, and to save it."

The original Blue Garden, by all accounts, had tremendous cachet. Olmsted Brothers, the landscape firm in Brookline, Massachusetts, headed by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and John Charles Olmsted (sons of Frederick Law Olmsted, considered the father of American landscape architecture), designed the Blue Garden in 1912–1913 for the Newport property of wealthy railroad owners Arthur and Harriet James. With Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. as the lead designer, the firm drew a garden that was axial and formal, with elegant classical proportions, water features, pergolas, and a planting list of 83 different plants

THE REFLECTING POOL, framed by white iron fountains, is a garden focal point and is at the center of the original Olmsted plan (shown). Plantings were installed by landscape contractor R.P. Marcell of Andover, Massachusetts, and White of Cumberland, Rhode Island. The pergolas were built by carpenter using wood from swamp-grown Japanese cedar cut on the site.

