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Art in Nature

AT WILTON'S ROUND HOUSE, LANDSCAPE DESIGNER DARREL MORRISON RESTORES A SENSE OF BALANCE AND DYNAMISM



Completed in 1968, architect Richard T. Foster's Round House sprouts like a mushroom out of a rural southwestern Connecticut hillside. In addition to its unusual shape, the house can rotate 360 degrees with a push of a button, providing its residents an ever-changing view of the surrounding landscape. Foster lived in the house with his family until his death in 2002. In 2010, a family from Manhattan purchased the property as their weekend getaway. They soon discovered that in spite of the home's all-around views, its pie-slice floor plan actually prohibited ample access to daylight. After Atlanta-based architects Merrill Elam and Mack Scogin opened up the interior to bring in more nature, upgrades to the surrounding landscape became imperative as well.

When renowned landscape designer and educator Darrel Morrison first visited the grounds, he found a typical suburban landscape, i.e., lots of lawn with little "wild growing." But he was impressed by the site's topography and its potential for having big outdoor rooms. There was upland, lowland, a pond, and steep slopes—what he called a "big bowl-like space." An ardent proponent of "where ecological processes

inform the design," Darrel had to undo forty years of generic grass and minimal diversity by planting native species such as gray dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*), American hazelnut (*Corylus americana*), quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*), American plum (*Prunus americana*), staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*), ragwort (*Packera aurea*), Jacob's ladder (*Polemonium reptans*), and wild blue phlox (*Phlox divaricata*).

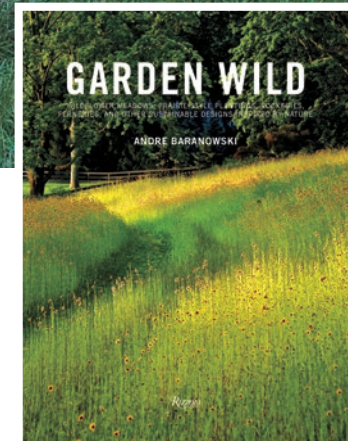
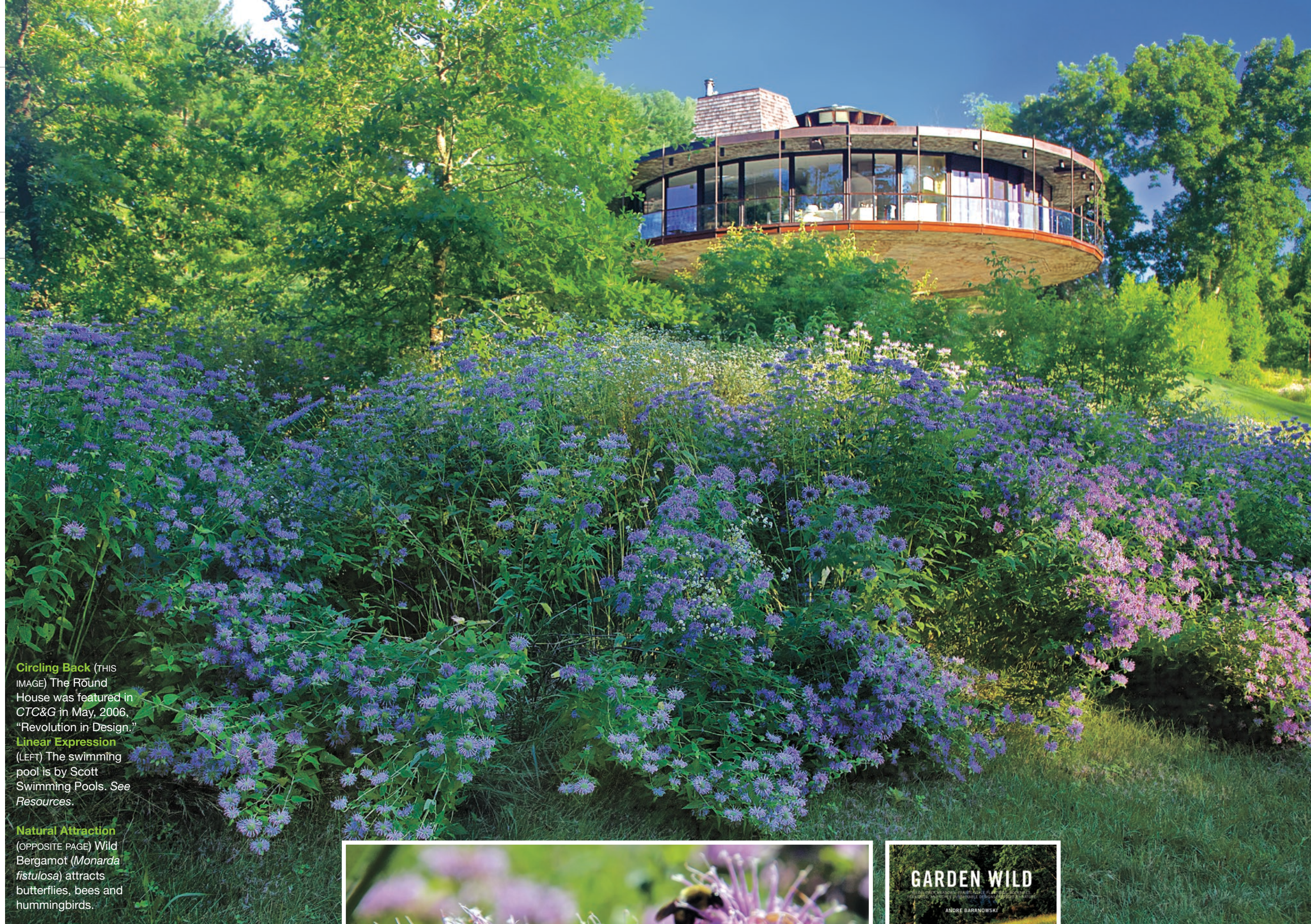
As a big fan of drift, or fluid movement that can lead to intermingling of species, Darrel started his redevelopment with the naturally occurring fern drifts that were already present, which he built on with clusters of prairie-like sweeps throughout the property. He is also a firm believer of plant communities—a group of species that associate naturally. The result is a dynamic landscape that changes over time, not just through the four seasons but over many years, so that the landscape of 2017 will be very different from the landscape in fifty years.

Art has always inspired Darrel's landscaping. In particular, he is drawn to Kandinsky's energy and van Gogh's movement. Like a work of art in nature, the Round House landscape is enlivened by complexity via species diversity, mystery

from not being able to see everything at once, coherence through patterns, and legibility, or the ability to read how to move through the place without feeling confused or claustrophobic. At Round House, stepping into a work of art is a dream that one never has to defer.

Circling Back (THIS IMAGE) The Round House was featured in CTC&G in May, 2006, "Revolution in Design." **Linear Expression** (LEFT) The swimming pool is by Scott Swimming Pools. See **Resources**.

Natural Attraction (OPPOSITE PAGE) Wild Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*) attracts butterflies, bees and hummingbirds.



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