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A Mythological Garden [Transforming the American Garden: 12 New Landscape Designs-Exhibitor]

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Author:

[Weintraub, Lee](#)
[Di Domenico, John](#)

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Every age has its gods and heroes, icons that demarcate and exemplify the limits of our culture. The ancients worshipped the gods of Olympus, built temples to them and engaged in rites celebrating their power. Modern man worships the gods of our time: athletes. We build arenas—“gardens”—where these people demonstrate their otherworldly athletic talents for the delight and entertainment of the masses.

The crowds faithfully come to see these contemporary gods. They are worshipful and watchful, and carry placards and banners showing their devotion to one man in particular—Magic. Magic, a basketball player, is a god of the court, a wizard of whooshes, a man who—with superhuman grace—always turns in a remarkable athletic performance. Magic is a high priest of a popular culture, a mythological figure worshipped by an adoring public, the earthly epitome of all things Magic.

The worshippers celebrate his power and majesty ritualistically at each contest, sipping the golden nectar of Schlitz and Schaefer and working themselves into a Dionysian frenzy. They chant and scream

until they drop exhausted into their seats, and occasionally they fall to the floor in a stupor, unconscious.

After this unearthly scene, Magic retreats to his mountaintop to another garden—an earthly garden of unearthly pleasures harboring the restorative powers that only green grass, trees and water can provide. This garden—for a child of the city—is about an hour and a half by Porsche from the glimmering, shimmering metropolis. Here Magic is restored and revived. Here he practices his otherworldly talents, unwinding away from the hurly-burly of his public life. He allows the restorative powers of the special garden to wash over him while he wiles away the hours in his Jacuzzi, shoots hoops on the mountaintop and finds release in the lush countryside around him.

The Site: A series of ascending pastures in the horse breeding country of Columbia County in New York State, flanked on both sides by a mature hardwood forest of oaks (signifying strength) and sugar maples (for color and sweetness). The topography is characterized by a 10 percent change in grade, with a

100 foot change in elevation sloping upward to a mountaintop. This peak commands views to the south and east and on a clear day, the spires of the great metropolis, home of the other Gardens where Magic reigns—Madison Square and Boston—are visible 150 miles away.

This is a landscape of contrasts. A path leads from one pasture through another, reaching a gate where one enters the final pasture in the sequence. The temple complex comes into view about 1,000 feet away, perched above on the mountainside and framed by the forest. Inside the gate the path changes direction, veering into the woodland and out of sight of the temples. Then only the paths and the dappled darkness of the forest are visible, pierced by bursts of sunlight. At the forest edge, the temples come into view again, glistening white and serene against the green of the meadow.

The sojourner enters the sacred precinct of leisure, where a reception area with a hot tub and swimming pool culminates at a statue of Nike, the God of Sneakers. The garden landscape is ordered by architectonic features—pavilions, canopies,

trellises—to form a unified composition. Priestlike, Magic routinely ascends the hill to the main area of worship, the basketball court, surrounded by an open temple structure. The pediments anchor backboards on the north and south ends.

In this temple, high above the treetops and overlooking the pristine green pastures, the earthbound Magic vaults into the air—majestic and masterful—intoxicated by the beauty of this very special garden. Here, the master athlete and the garden where he plays mesh and become one and the same—Magic—a culmination of man's striving for human athletic perfection, matched in the lushness and perfection of this garden suitable for a god.

