

# Home & Garden

## NEIGHBORS

GARDEN SUCCESS STORIES BY BOB TOWNSEND

# POCKETS OF WHIMSY

Atlantan surrounds B&B with playful garden retreat

**T**he first thing you notice about Adele Northrup's Virginia-Highland bed-and-breakfast is the small front garden that surrounds her 1920 Craftsman bungalow in exuberant waves of color and texture.

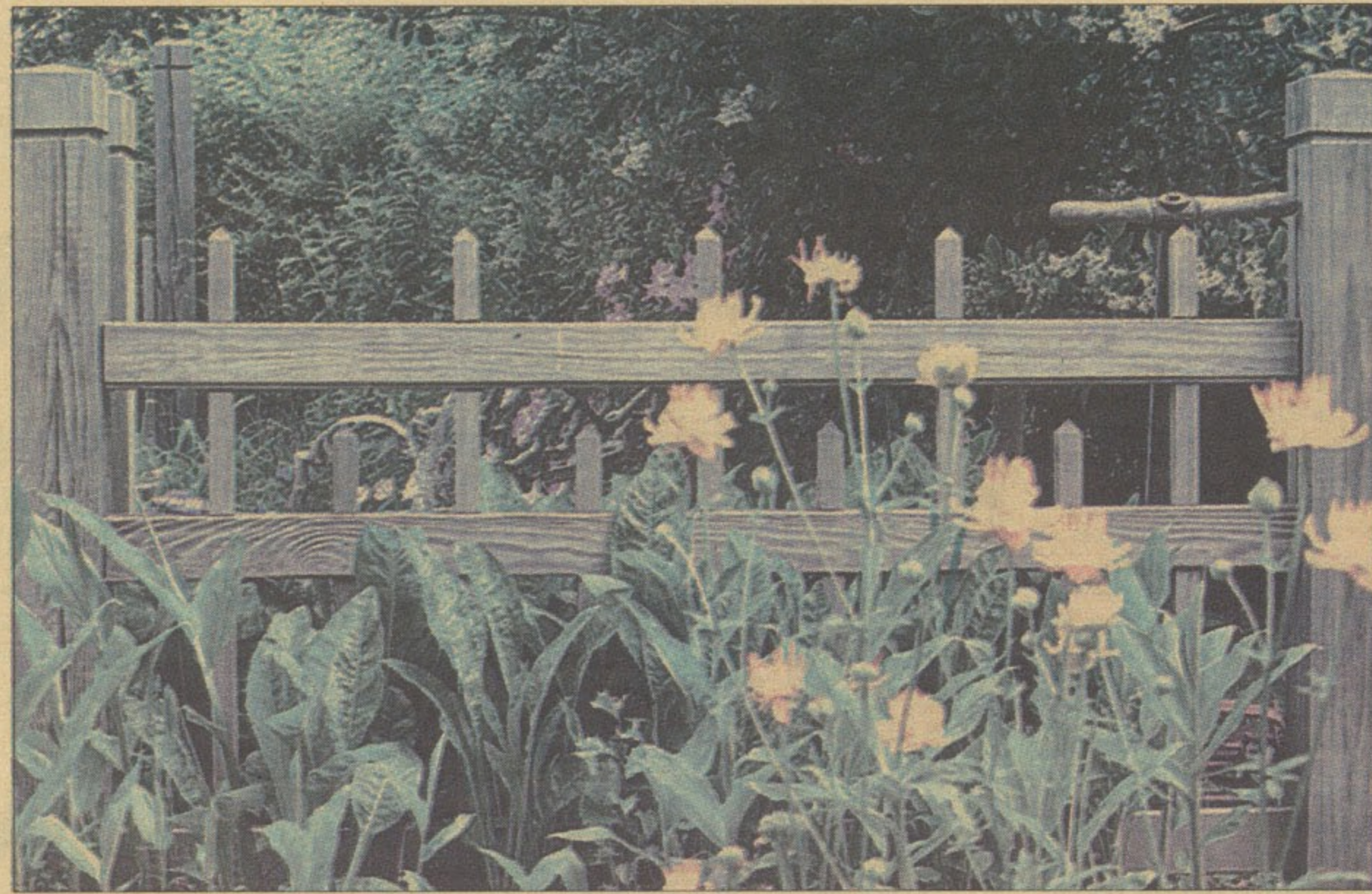
The imaginative assortment of plants and curios is only one part of the picture, though. Those who stop to take a look around or strike up a conversation with Northrup learn that the garden and its owner are full of fascinating stories.

"I like to describe this place as an urban retreat," Northrup says, explaining how she first decided to fulfill her dream of opening a B&B.

In 1995, the home — where she'd lived since 1973 — suddenly turned into a nightmare. One evening she returned to find that a fire had gutted her bedroom and caused smoke damage to the rest of the house. Her response was to turn the tragedy into an opportunity: After extensive restoration, she had her B&B up and running for the 1996 Olympics.

"It had been a kernel of thought for a long time," she recalls. "But the fire forced my hand, and I just really did it up."

Since then, she has continually refined the landscape, creating pockets of whimsy within a more familiar cottage garden design. By the curb, roses, spirea, salvia



Photos by LOUIE FAVORITE / Staff

Landscaping around Adele Northrup's bed-and-breakfast combines familiar garden design with whimsical accents such as old garden tools, bits of yard art and a fence designed by her son, an architect.

and plume poppy grow next to tomatoes, peppers and blueberries; everywhere there are old garden tools, hand mowers, wooden ducks and other bits of yard art gathered from flea markets and antique shops.

Northrup's casual, do-it-yourself sensibility was formed back in the '70s, when she was raising her two children, Ben and Stephanie, as a single mom in what was then a much more marginal neighborhood.

"There were a lot of young people with children, like myself," Northrup says. "We started the Stone Soup food co-op, we had a baby-sitting co-op, and we were very active in the neighborhood and the city. It was quite an exciting time to be here."

Before opening the B&B, Northrup ran an interior plant design and maintenance service and did a bit of gardening. All those creative influences seemed to have rubbed off on Ben, who is now an architect in New Haven, Conn. He helped with the renovation of the house and installation of the garden; he also built the distinctive front fence and cantilevered back deck and later designed the balcony and trellises at the rear of the house.

One of the things Northrup treasures most is a book that Ben gave her inscribed with the words: "To Mom: Thank you for a world of beauty."

But she recently took possession of an



Her affinity for gardening is "a God-given gift," says the Chicago native, who moved into her Atlanta home in 1973.

even bigger tribute to the creative bond between mother and son — a huge cast-cement Ionic capital that is like six others Ben designed for the new Meadows Museum at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. It forms the focal point of her latest project, a tranquil shade garden of woodland plants.

Standing near her son's ancient-looking work, Northrup looks a bit puzzled when explaining how she first came to gardening.

"I grew up in Chicago in an apartment building, so that's kind of a good question," she says. "I would say it's a God-given gift. My mother loved plants, and she had an interest in architecture and historic preservation. If she were alive today, I think she would really enjoy sitting in my garden."

### THE ADELE NORTHRUP FILE

► **The gardener:** 58; grew up in Chicago; graduate of Augusta College and Atlanta University; Fulton County Master Gardener; two children, Stephanie, an actress in Los Angeles, and Ben, an architect in New Haven, Conn.

► **Her landscape:** Eclectic urban garden around her Virginia-Highland B&B.

► **Her passion:** Integrating a variety of plants with architectural features and found objects.

► **Her secret:** Nurturing each plant and keeping track of all the little details.

► **Quote:** "I think it takes a certain eye to walk slowly through a garden and appreciate each plant. I just love looking; it's like chocolate ice cream for my eyes."

### STORY IDEA?

► Contact Bob Townsend at townsb@earthlink.net or call 404-526-5969.



The focal point of Northrup's new shade garden of woodland plants is an ancient-looking, cast-cement Ionic capital designed by son Ben.