ON THE WATERFRONT

A tapestry of wild grasses, driftwood sculpture and fabulous views of the river create a peaceful scene in Chichita and Mani Lindberg's idyllic Maryland garden

WORDS KIRSTY FERGUSSON | **PHOTOGRAPHS** CLAIRE TAKACS

LEFT Chaises longues add to the scheme, providing bursts of vibrant orange beside a bed of white-flowered *Asteromoea mongolica*.

THIS PAGE Against a towering backdrop of *Pinus taeda* (loblolly pine) yellow *Rudbeckia maxima* (great coneflower) nods gently in the river breeze.

Eight years ago, Chichita and Mani Lindberg found a dilapidated 1950s house in Maryland, on the banks of a tributary of the Choptank River, which flows into Chesapeake Bay. For four years, they concentrated their efforts on rebuilding the house, turning it into a spacious home. Then, in 2005, they turned their attention to the garden, an overgrown two-acre plot of pines and bamboos.

The couple's idea was to create a scheme that would not only blend in sensitively with the surrounding landscape but also provide a place in which they, their family and their artist and musician friends could relax. To help them, they turned to James (Jim) van Sweden, the man who pioneered prairie-style gardens and who had remodelled their town garden in Washington many years earlier. "Over the years, we have come to know and appreciate a lot of Jim's work in the Washington area, and his own garden is not far from us here in Maryland," says Chichita. "We had always promised ourselves that one day we would ask him to design something larger for us in the natural setting we had dreamed of finding."

Working with Eric Groft, who is one of James's principals at Oehme, van Sweden & Associates, the couple settled to the business of planning a suitable design. The prairie style was to be the basis, but the Lindbergs wanted some extras that do not usually figure in the van Sweden canon. "I love hydrangeas and roses," says Chichita, "and I also insisted on having a lawn for grandchildren to play on, although, in the prairie-style plantings for which

THIS PICTURE AND RIGHT The outside dining area and, lower down the garden, the driftwood spars which were installed by sculptor Ben Forgey as an "imaginary gazebo". **ABOVE LEFT** *Panicum virgatum* 'Northwind' and *Pycnanthemum muticum* line the path to the house. **ABOVE RIGHT** *Buddleja davidii* 'Black Knight' frames the chaises longues.

THIS PICTURE Visitors who arrive by boat land at the dock. **RIGHT** The feathery purple wands of *Perovskia atriplicifolia* (Russian sage) soften a corner of the deck.

Broad steps and decking suit the wide proportions of the house, while bark mulch echoes the adjacent wood floor.

Grassy planting near the river bank epitomises the prairie style. Beside the *Rudbeckia maxima* is a dense green clump of *Pycnanthemum muticum* (mountain mint), loved by butterflies and bees.

James and Eric are famous, lawns are strictly taboo.

"The idea was to bring carefully selected elements of nature right up to and all around the house, so that it would be tightly incorporated into its environment," explains Chichita. "Eric chose grasses that would create that feeling but without blocking off the large, open view that we wanted to have from the house."

Naturally, the river and landing dock are key elements of that view but the river is not for swimming in ("The water is brackish and contains little stinging jellyfish"), so Eric allowed space for a pool in the deck at the back of the house. A low wall affords privacy and includes a stunning water feature – a sheet of water that cascades into the pool below. "It is based on one in Jim's garden nearby," says Chichita.

A driftwood sculpture by artist friend Ben Forgey offers another focal point near the river bank. Instead of digging out an existing concrete roundel, the artist used it as footing for his carefully chosen driftwood posts that erupt dramatically up out of the grasses and perennials in summer. With hammocks suspended between them, the spot makes a peaceful resting place.

"I call the finished garden a place where you can find your true core," says Chichita. "The grandchildren are yet to appear, but I do have my lawn." ■

ILLUSTRATION SCOTT JESSOP

Garden guide

ORIENTATION Riverside garden in Maryland, America, sheltered by mature woodland.
SOIL TYPE Imported neutral loam enriched with compost.
SPECIAL FEATURES Prairie-style planting, with masses of perennials and grasses; enclosed spaces for quiet meditation.
GARDEN DESIGN Oehme, van Sweden & Associates, 001 202 546 7575, ovsla.com.