DOWN THE *Garden* PATH

Meet three men who are in the business of cultivating beauty, each leaving his footprint and personal perspective on gardens across the South

CARSON McELHENEY
Atlanta, GA

JEFFREY CARBO
Baton Rouge, LA

TROY RHONE
Birmingham, AL

By **LYDIA SOMERVILLE**

Brick paths converge in a Carson McElheney garden with sculpted hedges and eye-catching blooms.

BY EMILY FOLLOWILL

TROY RHONE

BIRMINGHAM, AL

Designing with a decidedly British accent, Rhone creates signature garden rooms that reveal layered borders and expanses of green lawn. Trained vines, banks of hydrangeas, and impactful compositions are hallmarks of his style.

Enduring inspiration: The work of early English landscape designers Vita Sackville-West and Gertrude Jekyll was profoundly influential in my development as a gardener. I'll never forget my first visit to Sissinghurst Castle—I loved how Sackville-West divided such a large property into so many "rooms." It's a perfect mix of clean lines and billowing foliage. She was a master at grouping plants, and would often say, "Why have one or two and not 600?"

Advice to new clients: What's under the ground is more valuable than what's above the ground. If the soil isn't conditioned for growing, plants will never thrive. Invest in good prep work.

Gardens matter: I think it's a tragedy that our lives are so busy and filled with possessions that we miss the cultural relevance of gardening. We spend thousands of dollars on wedding flowers hoping they'll last 24 hours, but we don't see the value in possessing a plant that belonged to our grandmother and that will endure. What is more important?

Focal points and flourishes: I like to direct the eye where I want it to go. Containers are great to add dimension and weight, and I also often use gates and walls for definition and to create the sense that you're entering or exiting a room.

Color commentary: I try to be sensitive to color in response to the climate. If I'm in the hot South, I'll use cool colors; If I'm in the Northeast, I'll use warmer colors. Color should be chosen more by how it makes you feel and less by what's trendy.

Transformative power: My first home used to be the most unattractive ranch bungalow on the street (and it was also the only house in that neighborhood I could afford). I thought of ways to change the architecture, but I decided to make a very formal cottage garden to add character. It worked. Creating a window box that was a permanent fixture and growing a vine to hide the 1950s roofline was the turning point.

Favorite flower: Antique roses. Some favorites are 'Crystal Fairy,' 'Perle d'Or,' and 'Climbing Pinkie.' They thrive off neglect, so they allow you to have all the benefits without the commitment. I hope that doesn't say something about me!

Landscape designer Troy Rhone employs focal points in the form of containers, statuary, and armillary spheres. Gates open to reveal garden rooms set off by walls and parterres, while his frequent use of hydrangeas is a testament to Rhone's Southern roots.

TOP LEFT: BY LISA ROMEREIN/OTTO; PORTRAIT: BY ALI HARPER; BOTTOM AND OPPOSITE: BY EDWARD BADHAM