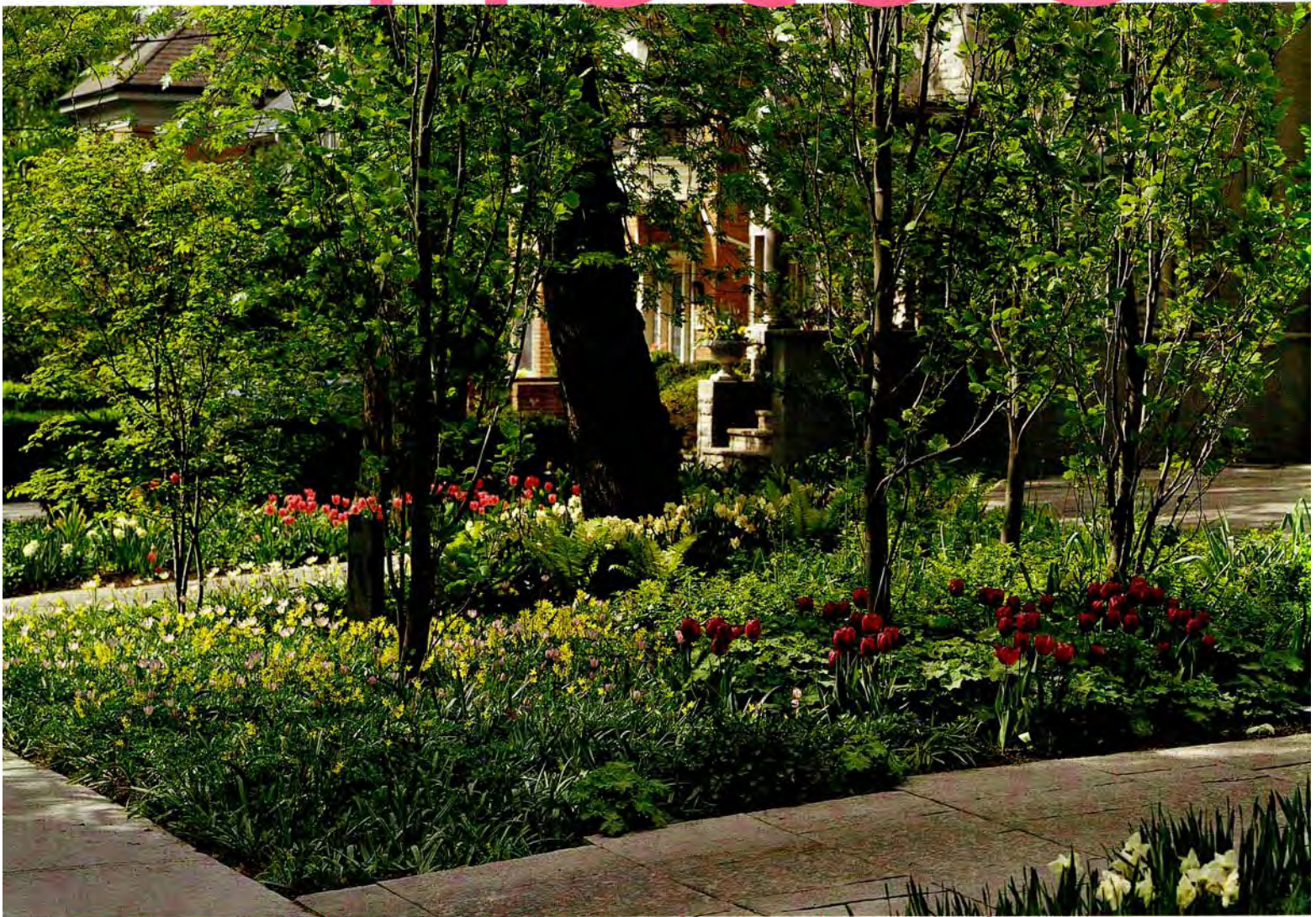


riots of



seven thousand bulbs ensure this toronto front garden retains its exuberance from the first hint of spring to the beginning of summer

by craille maguire gillies photography by andrew waller

A mass of golden 'Hawera' daffodils mingled with *Tulipa bakeri* 'Lilac Wonder' and periwinkle (*Vinca minor*) is just the opener for this spring display. Tall 'Purple Prince' and pink 'Christmas Dream' tulips add stronger tones to the carefully considered palette.

Gardens are quick to please at this time of year. After slumbering through winter, nodding snowdrops, perky daffodils and hard-working tulips suddenly spring to action. They transform a plot almost instantly, cheering the homeowner who's been cooped up for months.

That's certainly the case when it comes to the garden of journalist Linda Frum and her husband, Howard Sokolowski, a real-estate developer and co-owner of the Toronto Argonauts football team. Every spring, their vibrant garden in the otherwise conservative Forest Hill neighbourhood of Toronto awakens like a horticultural version of a golden retriever: bright, effervescent and eager to please. And it doesn't disappoint.

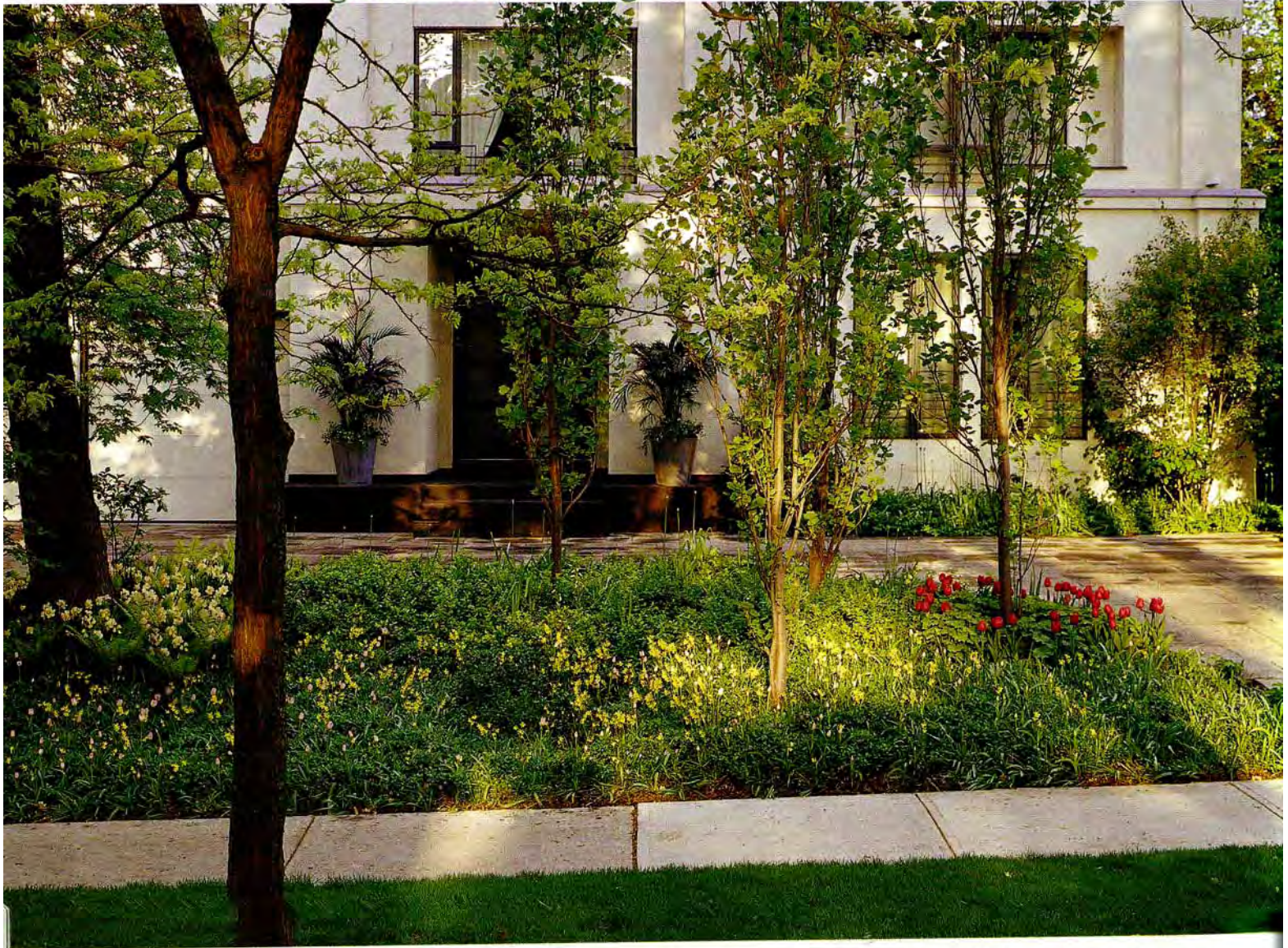
"There's a riot of activity. And it's so great to have that colour first thing in the spring," says



Spring

The peachy-cupped daffodil *Narcissus* 'Passionale' adds to the show afforded by the 'Lilac Wonder' species tulips and lemon-yellow *N.* 'Hawera'. Lush ferns and other perennials will hide the dying bulb foliage.

staggered flowering times, with bulbs on show
from winter's last gasp to the first hint of summer,
give an ever-rotating kaleidoscope of colour



Although there are thousands of bulbs in this front garden, chaos is avoided by using variously sized plants that flower at different times.

Designer Teresa Matamoros says the biggest mistake people make is not planting enough bulbs. "You have to have lots."

Teresa Matamoros of Garden Holistics Inc., the Thornbury, Ont.-based firm enlisted five years ago by Frum to transform the un-landscaped property. "It's such a hopeful time. Winter is over!"

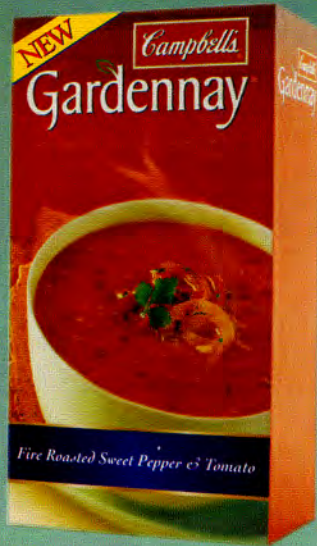
But despite the astounding number of bulbs—there are about 7,000 in the front and another 5,000-plus in the backyard around the pool—Frum's garden never looks busy. "Linda's mandate for the garden was to create something simple. She likes broad sweeps of similar plants," says Matamoros. This approach works particularly well in a spring garden, where bright daffodils and tulips can quickly look garish and a rainbow of colours can clash. "Staying within a colour scheme reduces the chaos," Matamoros says. "And using variously sized plants that flower at different times also helps—it makes sure that everything isn't happening at once."

Before digging in, Matamoros consulted Ruedi Hofer of PMA Landscape Architects Ltd. to draw up an overall plan for the ample city plot. Among other contributions, Hofer designed the hardscape elements such as the backyard patios. When the bones of the garden were finally laid, Matamoros developed the planting scheme and chose bulbs with the help of Caroline de Vries of TradeWinds International Sales Co. Inc., an Ontario bulb wholesaler.

Given that thousands of bulbs are packed in, the result is surprisingly elegant and understated. "There is a lot going on," Matamoros admits. "But there's also a continuity of colour." Pink and purple are the predominant colours and that's achieved with about 5,000 *Tulipa bakeri* 'Lilac Wonder', a charming miniature that naturalizes well.

But leaving the garden with only these rosy shades would sentence it *continued on page 78*

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Expiry Date: September 30, 2006

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to becoming a monochromatic yawn, so Matamoros introduced the long-lasting, lemon-yellow 'Hawera' daffodil. "I'm always trying to achieve conflict between colour, texture and form—that's what makes a garden interesting," she says.

While the colour, texture and form may make the garden interesting, all of that is lost if there aren't enough plants. "I think the number-one mistake most people make is to plant too few bulbs in their gardens. You have to have lots," Matamoros says emphatically. Unlike perennials, she says, most bulbs look best in their first season, then peter out. The best way to get a good show with tulips, the focal point of this garden, is to pull them out each year and pop new ones in, though budget- and time-wise this isn't for everyone. (If you don't want to replace your bulbs every year, see the sidebar on page 43 or read Mark Cullen's "Beyond Tulips" on page 30 for other ways to maintain a good show.)

But for this garden, staggered flowering times, with early- to late-blooming bulbs on show from the first hint of spring to the beginning of summer, give an ever-rotating kaleidoscope of colour. For example, early-blooming 'Purple Prince' tulips (a favourite this year) are followed by alliums and creamy white 'Maureen' tulips, paired with swathes of the moody 'Queen of Night' tulip, which flowers just long enough to welcome summer.

In many gardens, spring is just a dress rehearsal for summer, but it's the marquee event in Frum's. However, putting on such a big show also means there's a lot of cleanup—in this case, deadheading tulips and camouflaging the wilting foliage of thousands of bulbs. Fortunately, a cast of well-placed perennials is waiting in the wings. The emerging foliage of no-fuss hostas, daylilies, ornamental grasses and hardy geraniums provide expert disguise. In shady areas, the large leaves of *Brunnera* mask the straggling strands of *Scilla*.

In other seasons, the garden relies on greenery and colourful containers; each year, Matamoros takes an inventory to "see what needs beefing up." However, it is during spring that much of the maintenance is done, suggesting that there's truth in what Margaret Atwood once wrote about the season: "In the spring, at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt." □

SOMETHING WILD FROM PAGE 68

stone patio or well-placed bench.

Everything is planted in layers and every piece of ground is home to several root systems. Woodland natives including Jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*), Solomon's seal (*Polygonatum*) and trillium peek out from under the trees, shrubs and rugosa roses. Daisies bloom beneath multi-coloured spires of foxgloves (*Digitalis*) and the precocious feverfew (*Tanacetum parthenium*) pops through a lemony stand of evening primroses (*Oenothera fruticosa*).

As summer progresses, various unflagging bloomers pick up the torch, including gooseneck loosestrife (*Lysimachia clethroides*) with its long white flower heads, fiery Maltese cross (*Lychnis chalcidonica*), pink mallows, bright poppies and azure bellflowers (*Campanula*). At their feet roam several fearless groundcovers, including sweet woodruff (*Galium odoratum*) and lily-of-the-valley (*Convallaria*), both of which have white flowers in spring. Groundcovers add fullness to the garden while helping to curb its summer thirst.

Among the vegetation, Watts has artfully placed the few simple farm tools that were found during the cleanup phase. Though they are rusted to the core, she values them for their tangible link with the garden's unique, farmyard heritage.

Although the garden is just five years in the making, the plants are such vigorous spreaders and self-seeders that they have already begun drifting over the foundation and wandering off in almost every direction. Watts watches their progress approvingly. "I'll always want this garden to look as if God took a bunch of seeds and threw them into the ground. What comes up is a surprise and almost always works," she says. "And if it doesn't—if a tall plant ends up in front of a short one, for example—then I simply pull it out."

Considering Watts' lack of plan when she first surveyed the empty foundation, most would agree her garden has turned out remarkably well. "There's always something interesting happening here," she says with satisfaction, "from the time the primroses and *Pulmonaria* awaken in spring to the last days of autumn when the hardy geraniums have a final flush of bloom and birds come to feast on the elderberries." □