



photo by Sarah Valentine

THE Art of Flourishing

Mary Palmer Dargan talks about her and husband Hugh's long, storied career as landscape architects.

If you have ever spent even just a little amount of time watching the HGTV cable channel, or picked up the occasional home and garden magazine, chances are pretty good you know the names Mary Palmer Dargan and Hugh Graham Dargan. Their garden and landscape work has been celebrated consistently over the years for its innovative style and philosophical approach—"a timeless quality" is a refrain you'll frequently hear in reference to the Dargans. For them, the idea is to nurture and coexist with our environmental surroundings rather than simply alter those surroundings to suit our immediate needs, be they aesthetic or utilitarian. Their goal, says Mary Palmer,

is to design places "for people to flourish in their home environments... [It] is our passion!"

Hugh Dargan founded Dargan Landscape Architects in 1973 in rural South Carolina, subsequently moving to Charleston, then marrying Mary Palmer in 1984. (They trained together in England on their wedding trip and wound up doing a pair of projects for The British National Trust.) Later, they would base their business in Atlanta, but in recent years they found their way to Western North Carolina and now live in Cashiers. And during their life journey they have earned multiple awards from the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), the



American Horticultural Society, and the Garden Club of America. Mary Palmer has also applied her botanical knowledge and experience to the academic world as a professor of landscape architecture at Clemson University (2000-2005), where she founded a certificate course in landscape design for homeowners while also teaching students. Additionally, the Dargans have written several best-selling books about landscape design and landscape history, and Mary Palmer does the "Timeless Landscape Design" podcast about wellness and landscape design, which now has 5500 downloads in 12 countries.

"When fitting a landscape to a lifestyle like a glove, the proper customization of a home environment is not to be taken lightly."

In short, the Dargans really know their plants and how to shape outdoor spaces where people want to live; they are careful stewards of the environment of individual home owner's properties and recommend permaculture principles. What, then, does Mary Palmer feel is the source of their acclaim—what sets them apart from other landscape architects?

"When fitting a landscape to a lifestyle like a glove, the proper customization of a home environment is not to be taken lightly," she notes. "Our design philosophy springs from our book *Timeless Landscape Design: The Four Part Master Plan*, the universal language of the land of approach and arrival sequence, the hub of the house, perimeter spaces, and linkages to destinations. To embrace wellness, another book, *Lifelong*



MARY PALMER DARGAN
with their Boykin
Spaniel, Henry.

Landscape Design: Environments for Health & Longevity, offers eight key components to designing a wellness garden at home.”

She also reflects on their milestones to date and some of the challenges they’ve faced along the way, saying, “Our projects on the West Coast in California and Washington and those in coastal Florida and St. Croix provided a diversity of landscapes that honor environmental challenges. I served three years as zone representative as the National Affairs & Legislation and Conservation Representative for the Garden Club of America and received the zone Conservation Award in 2016. We have survived four recessions in 45 years, wrote four books, and watched a small business thrive in Charleston, Atlanta, and

“Our projects on the West Coast in California and Washington and those in coastal Florida and St. Croix provided a diversity of landscapes that honor environmental challenges.”



HUGH DARGAN
at the Gregory Bald Trail

Cashiers, while remaining digitally and physically nimble. The hurdle of finding talented staff had me turn to teaching at Clemson in order to understand ‘what in the world schools were teaching these days!’”

Mary Palmer is equally enthusiastic about their current base, saying, “Summering in Cashiers and wintering in Asheville is the perfect mix. Mother lives at Deerfield Episcopal Retirement Center, so we loved the flexibility of moving to Crowfields in Asheville to enjoy her company. The Garden Talk Salon, a lecture series on landscape design and horticulture, is held at Dovecote, our office property in Cashiers, weekly from mid-May until mid-October. We are [also] very involved with the Cashiers Historical Society. Teaching courses in wellness garden design across the United States is on the horizon, too, so I love having the convenient airport here!

“We are inordinately proud of our Boykin Spaniel, Henry, who is garnering advanced titles at hunt tests. Our life list of places to hike, our 2018 camping expedition to Gregory Bald in the Smokies to see the ‘swarm’ of azaleas in full bloom was extraordinary! We love the NC Arboretum, the WNC Herb Festival in late April, plus Organic Growers School courses.

“And in a practical vein, our community garden plot at Crowfields brings us endless pleasure!”

Spoken like a true Western North Carolina acolyte. ©

To see more of the Dargan Landscape Architects work visit www.facebook.com/darganlandscape.