

A vibrant garden scene featuring a path lined with pink roses and purple flowers, leading towards a stone pillar topped with a planter. The background is filled with dense green foliage.

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# The Great Outdoors

For nearly 100 years, **Gale Nurseries** has been providing homeowners with gorgeous gardens, landscapes, and gathering spaces that highlight the natural beauty of their surroundings.

by **MATT COSENTINO**

**W**hen Christine Gale is asked if her family business will someday be passed on to a fifth generation, she points out that it's impossible to predict the future. That said, consider the rich history of Gale Nurseries, which has had a beautifying impact on the Philadelphia area and beyond since 1927. Chances are that someone in the family will develop a passion for gardens and landscape design, just like she did as a little girl.

Gale, the great-granddaughter of founder Charles H. Gale II, seemed almost predestined to get involved in the family business. Her grandfather, Charlie, and father, Chuck, won a competition at the Philadelphia Flower Show with "Christine's Garden," named after her.

"I maintained my own garden at home, and planted it and designed it when I was around 10 years old," she says. "I've always been interested in the creative side, so it was a good medium for me to go into. It fits my skill set."

After her time at Skidmore College, where she was a standout tennis player and earned degrees in business and art, she went on to receive her master's in landscape architecture from the University of Massachusetts. She officially joined Gale Nurseries in 2008.

Today she is the CEO of a company that specializes in designing stunning landscapes, overseeing massive outdoor construction projects for a wide range of clients, and providing ongoing property management. She learned horticulture from her grandfather.

Although Gale succeeded her father as CEO, he remains very much involved in the business as a designer and mentor to the staff. He personally trained several of the designers, who have been with Gale Nurseries for more than a decade. Many of the company's employees go back to the days of Christine's grandfather. The company also has longstanding relationships with subcontractors such as masons, pool builders, and electricians, thereby ensuring efficiency and strong communication on each project.

"I think we create a very good culture, and of course it changes over time," Gale says. "My dad had a different leadership style than I do, but our employees work really hard. When they

see someone new not living up to the standard, they bring them up to speed very quickly."

The process for a new project begins with a consultation and site evaluation, at which time the designers learn about the homeowners' lifestyle and wish list. For example, a client who spends summers at a vacation home will require different plantings. Maintenance is also a factor—a rose garden will need more upkeep than a pachysandra bed—and privacy is almost always desired.

"It all depends on the client," Gale says. "There are some who know exactly what they want, and others are looking for direction and we can give them a few ideas and go from there."

"We build outdoor rooms, and design is definitely one of our competitive edges," she continues. "It has everything to do with their lifestyle, and also the fact that most of the time, they're going to be viewing the landscape from inside, so the lines of the rooms dictate what we do outside. If you have a window somewhere, then you're going to want to extend the view outside and try to elongate it most of the time."

Teamwork is essential as well. One of the benefits to working with Gale Nurseries is the collaboration among all members of the design team. She cites the leadership of two individuals in particular: Ryan Winneberger, the company's senior landscape designer; and Robert Digney, the company's chief operations officer.

Photos courtesy of Gale Nurseries





"All of our eyes are on all of the plans," Gale says. "If there's something we have to fix during construction, which is typical, we all get together and brainstorm it."

That attention to detail continues after a project is finished. Most homeowners become clients for life, with the Gale Nurseries team offering regular lawn care, seasonal plantings, and scouting for any evidence of disease or insect damage. They also help plan for summer

parties and make sure flowers are blooming at the right time and the landscape is able to withstand the extra traffic.

The company has a long track record of success on the Main Line and in Bucks County, but also has many satisfied clients throughout the area in locations such as Princeton and Delaware. Local residents often ask Gale Nurseries to work on vacation homes, too, so the company has completed projects up

and down the East Coast, from Nantucket to Florida, and even farther afield; it even has an upcoming job in Arizona.

One year, Chuck Gale even designed a garden in France and made a family vacation out of it.

"We're very versatile, and if there's an interesting project anywhere, we'll take it," his daughter says. "I think we're known for our classical design, but that doesn't limit us. If we have a client who has more of a contemporary taste, we can design that, too."

Of course, having an impact close to home is the main priority. That's why both Gale and her father have been heavily involved with Bucks Beautiful, a nonprofit that coordinates gardening projects, reforestation efforts, and educational programs in the county. For example, through a program called Bulbs for Bucks, Gale Nurseries planted 1.3 million bulbs in Bucks County and donated the planting of the first million.

"That's been a very successful project, and now we're working on replacing some of the ash trees that were killed by the emerald ash borer through a program called Replant Bucks," she adds. "We live in Bucks County, and it's a great feeling driving around and seeing all of the bulbs we've planted over the years and all the trees we've planted. Now homeowners are starting to plant tons of daffodils in their own yards, and it's so nice to see."

With its 100th birthday approaching in less than two years, Gale Nurseries will continue striving to make a difference for clients and communities alike. If Gale has her way, the company will continue to beautify the Philadelphia area and beyond for many years to come.

"We plan on keeping the business going, whether it's in the family or an employee exchange later on," she says. "We're training future generations so they can keep the business going if I decide to retire. I don't think I'm going to retire and my dad is definitely not going to retire; I think he will be working on his last day of life. We both still love what we do." ■



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