

Garden of Glad

Find some inner peace, and maybe a little magic, at Madoo *By Emily Toy*





Set on just shy of two acres, you feel like you could wander for days on Madoo Conservancy's wild but well-thought-out grounds, packed with elements both natural and artistic.



"It's a super place to spend some time to mellow out," says Saralegui (top). "I like to think that your blood pressure drops about 10 points just from walking in."

WHEN WE think Sagaponack — a consistent top contender among the wealthiest neighborhoods in the nation — we think swanky, massive beachfront homes and the swanky people who dwell in them.

But when the late Impressionist painter Robert Dash purchased the not-even-two-acre property his eventual Madoo (Scottish for “my dove”) Conservancy would sit upon back in 1967, Sagaponack wasn’t swanky at all.

In fact, just like many other pockets of earth scattered among the South Fork’s hamlets, it was an artists’ retreat, beloved for its simple, immersive and practically palpable connectedness to the natural world. And today, it still is.

Formed as a nonprofit in 1993, Madoo (618 Sagg Main St., Sagaponack) has evolved from a bucolic private residence for

Dash to its present day role as an open-to-the-public garden series. Tucked away on a cul-de-sac off Sagg Road, its 1.9 acres hold carefully curated and innately intimate outdoor spaces connected by small, meandering footpaths, dotted with myriad flora comprising both lush vegetation and native pollinators, with tiny areas carved out for stopping, seeing and sitting.

“It’s a super place to spend some time to mellow out,” says Alejandro Saralegui, director at the Conservancy. “I like to think that your blood pressure drops about 10 points just from walking in.”

Madoo’s mash-up of horticulture and Expressionist landscape, peppered with almost modern-day Monet vibes, allows visitors to quickly see that the plots of land draw design inspiration from myriad

influences, from historical Indo-Persian to beach-filled Greek islands to gardens found in the south of Spain — or France or England for that matter.

“We keep it very loose in terms of genres found within the gardening world,” says Saralegui. “As I like to say, Robert didn’t want the garden to be preserved in amber. We have to maintain that freedom to be able to change it up when we feel we need to.”

While the actual flora may change intermittently, there are some not-to-be missed permanent fixtures at Madoo that speak to Dash’s structure, style and original vision. “We’re known for our bold use of color while remaining incredibly elegant,” he says.

Two barns still remain: the Dash summer house, originally erected around 1740, along with his winter house, built nearly a century later. The former is now used as an open exhibition space with seasonally rotating works.

Open Fridays and Saturdays, with additional visiting weekdays starting just before the summer solstice, the season at Madoo runs from around mid-April to mid-October, and entry to the gardens and the indoor exhibition spaces is free. Beginning in May is an exhibit featuring illustrator and painter Jean-Phillipe Delhomme, while the nonprofit’s biggest event, which Saralegui unequivocally calls “the most beautiful party of the year,” is the annual summer gala “Much Ado About Madoo” on June 15.

Other goings-on at Madoo this summer include dances, garden lectures, flower arranging workshops and multi-disciplinary presentations, with a performance from the Trisha Brown Dance Company slated for July.

“Our mission here is about preserving and enhancing this garden space,” Saralegui says, “and ultimately aiming toward the preservation of a simpler life.”