

## Scenic Surrounds

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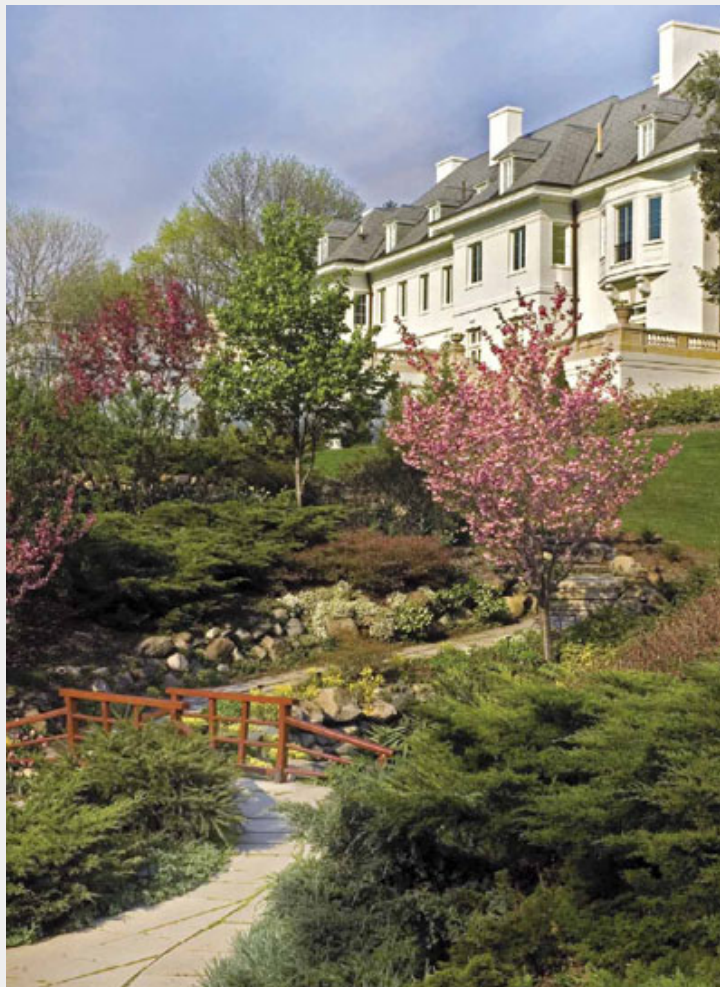
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Indiana Museum of Art offers beauty indoors and out

*PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE INDIANA MUSEUM OF ART.*



The "ravine garden" behind Lilly House was restored several years ago in keeping with the original Olmstead Brothers plans.

Indianapolis is best known for its Speedway, but with all due respect to the famed Brickyard, the city's greatest outdoor attraction might just be the Indiana Museum of Art. While the collection of more than 50,000 works of art inside is internationally acclaimed, it's the 152 acres of grounds outside that truly sets the museum apart from other art venues. "The museum has called the grounds its biggest piece of art," says Chad Franer, director of horticulture at the Indiana Museum of Art. Indeed, the museum's mission is devoted to "fostering exploration of art, design and the natural environment."

The property that Franer and the maintenance team care for is made up of three distinct areas: the area surrounding the museum itself; the former Lilly estate known as "Oldfields;" and a recently acquired 100-acre parcel that's being developed as an outdoor "art and nature park" that will bring sculpture into the natural environment.

Oldfields surrounds the historic Lilly House, former home of pharmaceutical pioneer J.K. Lilly. "We treat those 26 acres around the Lilly House in a historically sensitive way," Franer explains. "The other 26 acres surrounds the museum, and includes parking lots and gardens." Both parcels were donated by the Lilly family for the purpose of constructing an art museum, which was completed and opened in 1970.

The grounds of the Lilly House, designated a National Historic Landmark, were originally designed by Olmstead Brothers and incorporate both formal gardens and more natural areas. A comprehensive restoration effort in 1998 helped bring many of those spaces back to the original Olmstead plan. "We always try to be sensitive to the types of plant materials we put in and the colors. We try to stick to the original intent as far as shape, color and so on," says Franer.

The area around the museum mixes formal and informal gardens, along with one particularly intriguing landscape feature: a nearly 2-acre green roof built above a parking garage. "It's an 'intensive' green roof, with a 4-foot [soil] profile that holds turf, trees, shrubs, flowers and benches," says Franer. "It's not one of those tray systems with sedum. It's structural soil, similar to the Cornell mix, with expanded shale, as well as sand and some organic content mixed in."

The green roof was part of a 2005 museum expansion and renovation project, and over the past few years the groundskeeping staff has worked to develop a maintenance program for the challenging site. While the structural soil allows water to quickly drain and keeps the weight load down on the green roof, it also means that the trees, turf and plants need regular irrigation. "We have to really keep an eye on it, so it doesn't dry out on us," says Franer. This is especially important in the late fall and early spring, when the main irrigation system is off. "The trees start to show it before the grass does; they'll show a little wilt. The turf does better," he says. An acid injection has been added to that portion of the irrigation system, specifically to help the red maples growing on the base soils in the limestone-rich area. "They're not a big fan of pH, and by using our well water, we were up around 8," says Franer. He says the acid injection has only

brought the pH down slightly, but points out that at those levels, “even dropping a few tenths can be helpful.”



IMA horticulturists plant apple trees in a historic 1930s orchard on the grounds of the Oldfields estate. The orchard also features a vegetable garden and was fully restored in 2009.



IMA horticulturists installed a rain garden on the property earlier this year. The rain garden is located adjacent to a parking lot and is designed to filter stormwater runoff to prevent pollutants from entering nearby waterways.



Both formal and natural areas can be found throughout the property. Each horticulturist is responsible for maintaining a specific area, and volunteers pitch in to help with work in the beds.

Franer's horticulture department includes eight full-time staff members, and the grounds department, headed by Superintendent Chris Defabis, includes another four full-time employees.

One of the major maintenance tasks each year is mulching of the gardens throughout the property. "We probably go through 400 to 500 cubic yards of mulch a year. We get at least four semis of fine mulch, and we use a lot of chipped wood in larger border areas to knock down weeds," says Franer. A variety of equipment, ranging from trucks to Bobcats to tractors, is used to move large quantities of mulch around the vast property. However, the primary tools used are utility vehicles, which can navigate walking paths to provide access to smaller spaces and get right up next to beds. "We still do a lot of wheelbarrowing to get to some gardens," says Franer.

While the museum is closed on Mondays, the grounds are open every day from dawn to dusk, and both are completely free, so there's a steady stream of visitors coming to view the art and to stroll the scenic property. "Chris [Defabis] tries to take care of all the mowing when the museum is closed, and then coordinates his irrigation with weddings and other special events on the grounds," says Franer. A combination of Dixie Chopper and Exmark zero-turn and walk-behind mowers are used to cover the large, open areas, as well as the many smaller, tighter areas around gardens.

There are many special events, such as weddings, on the property, as well as large, annual gatherings like the Penrod Art fair, which is held each September and brings some 10,000 people a day to the facility. Trusted tent companies are used to ensure that the rules (such as no driving on the turf) are followed and the location of irrigation main lines are avoided when driving in tent states. Even so, says Franer, "the turf really takes a beating with all those people on it." On occasion, particularly if the weather has been either extremely dry or wet, large areas of turf are damaged to the point that they are completely renovated and reseeded. Most years, though, the annual aeration and fall fertilization is scheduled to take place right after the art fair ends, and that is enough to help the lawns recover.

There are a variety of gardens to care for, including a more natural ravine garden; an orchard, which was recently restored with new apple trees; a "sensory garden" that brings together many different plant textures, scents and colors as well as the sound of a fountain; cuttings gardens and others. "We also just installed a rain garden, which helps to drain a parking lot, instead of just running it out as stormwater," Franer says. There also are extensive container plantings to care for.

The many different garden areas are divided up, with each individual horticulturist responsible for an assigned area. To help supplement their work, a dedicated group of volunteers (contributing about 1,200 volunteer hours per year) join in to help with tasks such as weeding, deadheading, pruning and annual planting.

When new landscape features are installed, the work is typically done in-house. "We work with landscape architects, but we try to do the install ourselves," says Franer. "That gives us ownership of it. We know it's put in

right, and we get to pick the plants, that means it will be easier to maintain. It also saves the museum quite a bit of money.”

Franer thinks that the grounds are a perfect complement to the artwork indoors. “I think it helps the people who are inside looking at the art to be able to take a little bit of a breather and come outside to stroll around. When you’re inside learning about all the art and its history, it can be a little bit of an overload, and the grounds are a great place to take a little break. And then there are people who come here specifically for the grounds, but then they’ll wander inside, as well.”

Patrick White is a freelance writer and editor who has covered every aspect of the green industry in the past 13 years. He is based in Middlesex, Vt., and is always on the lookout for unusual stories.