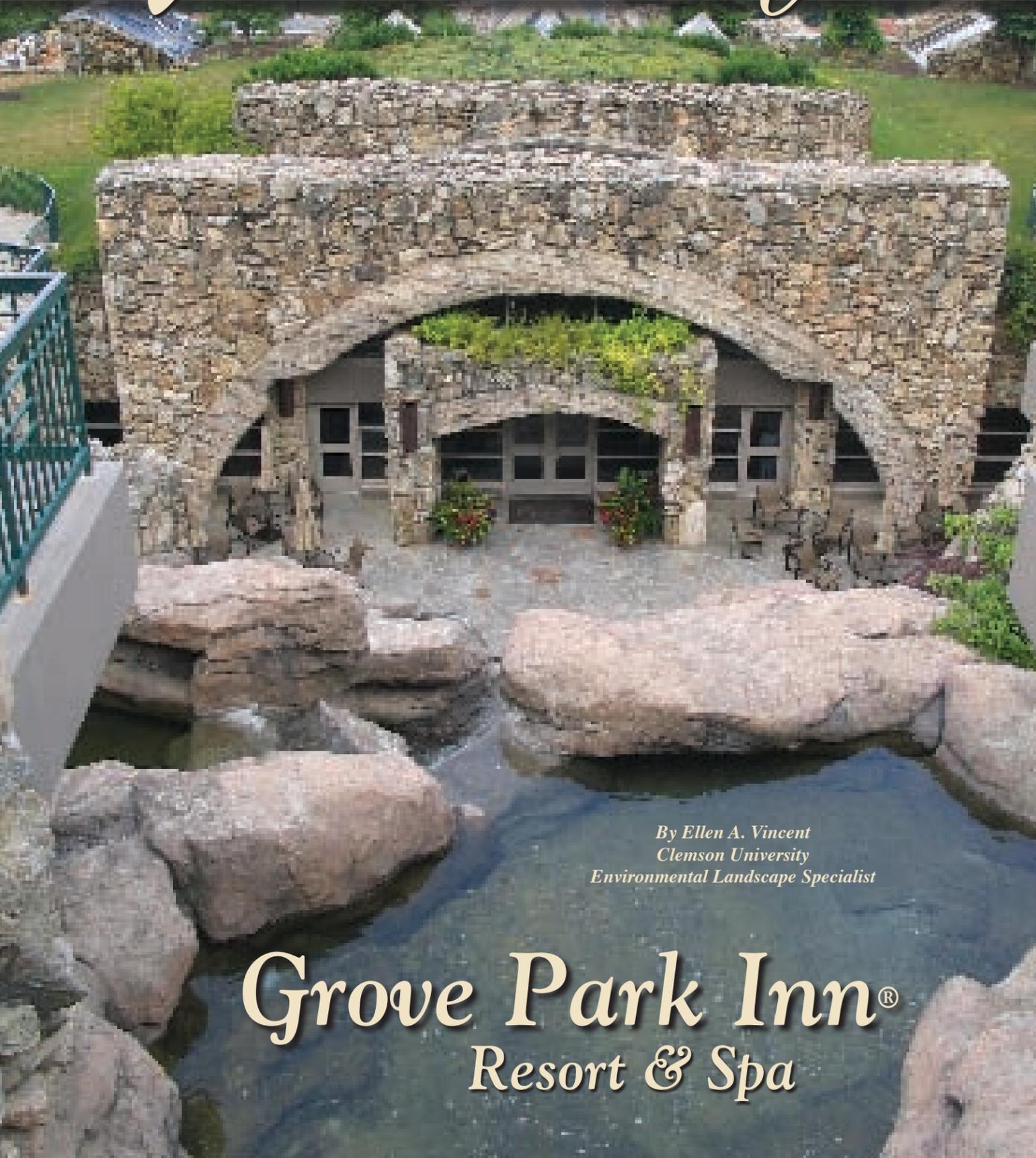


Garden Profile



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Grove Park Inn® Resort & Spa



Edwin W. Grove, owner and founder of Grove's Pharmacy and Paris Medicine Company of St. Louis, MO., suffered with bronchitis. His doctor suggested he spend time in the mountain climate to regain his health, so in the 1880s he became a regular visitor to Asheville, NC. The climate suited him perfectly and he spent more and more time there, becoming involved in the growth and development of the city. He began dreaming of a resort hotel around 1909 and began construction in 1912.¹

This would be no ordinary hotel. As Fred Seely, Grove's son-in-law and hotel project manager reported, "The idea was to build a big home where every modern convenience could be had, but with all the old-fashioned qualities of genuineness with no sham...all attempt at the bizarre, the tawdry and flashy foolishness [would be] omitted."²

Workers came from all over the South to work on the project. The site was on a grassy mountain slope that overlooked the city and the Blue Ridge Mountains. "Hundreds of mules, wagons, pulleys and ropes were used to move the massive granite stones, some weighing as much as 10,000 pounds, into place", reports the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The stones were mined from Sunset Mountain and the red roof tile shingles were shipped in from Kentucky. The red shingles were laid in an undulating pattern on top of a concrete roof to resemble the English thatch roof.

The original inn opened in 1913. Secretary of State Williams Jennings Bryan (1860-1925) delivered the keynote address at the opening. Bryan proclaimed, "Today we stand in this wonderful hotel, not built for a few, but for the multitudes that will come and go. I congratulate these men. They have built for the ages."³

Bryan earned the nickname "The Great Commoner," due to his defense of Southern and Midwestern farmers and laborers.⁴ He was also known as a magnificent public speaker, even when young, and was also called "The Boy Orator." He was one of the first politicians to hold public discourse from the back of a railroad car to directly address crowds throughout the United States.⁵ He received both criticism and respect for this new act of directly addressing the people.

Just as Grove Park Inn was a therapeutic destination for founder Edwin Grove, it

broadened its services in 1999 by adding a 40,000 sf spa and expanding its fitness center.⁶ This is all in addition to an 85-acre golf course played by notable golfers Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer.⁷ The spa was placed underground and the architect, Robert LeBlond, drew on the native themes of fire, sky, water, and, of course, stone in its design. The spa opened in 2001 and is included in reviews and lists of world-class spas.

The grounds crew at The Grove Park Inn consists of eight full-time and two seasonal employees. There are 140 acres to maintain, with 85 of these dedicated to a golf course. Maggie Young is Grounds and Recycling Manager and has worked at Grove Park Inn for 10 years. She earned her B.S. in horticulture from Clemson University in 1996. Kim Burress, Landscape Supervisor, has worked at the resort for four years and earned her horticulture degree from Spartanburg Technical College in 1982. They aren't responsible for the indoor cut flowers or for the golf course. But that leaves plenty of challenges for the duo and the grounds staff.

One huge landscape design feature they work with is perspective. Most of the rooms at Grove Park Inn overlook the spacious grounds. Which means the perspective or view that receives the most attention is straight down, and plantings must have the capacity to reach to the 11th floor. Young and Burress address this by selecting bright red and yellow colored

plants to catch the viewer's eye. Crocosmia; Dragon Wing™ begonia; lantana 'Dallas Red'; and Knock Out® roses are a few of the red star attractions. Coreopsis, black-eyed Susan, and yellow lantana offer striking yellow color tones. Plants are arranged in "pocket plantings" throughout the grounds for the pleasure of the Inn's clientele.

Scale is the second design challenge at the Inn. The massive wooden beams on the terraces, heavy stone walls, stone arches, and stone walkways create a sense of great scale and magnitude. The varying slopes to the ground, with views edged by forests and mountains further create a grand majestic setting within which they work. Burriss remembers how long it took for the smaller plants to fill the large container pots used on terraces and in special event areas. Events sometimes include two weddings a weekend during the season, plus continuous conferences, banquets and receptions during the week. "We can't wait six weeks for the plants to grow," she explains.

This problem of scale is handled two ways. First, they now contract with Roebuck Greenhouses in SC to grow all their container plants. The pots arrive chock full of color and foliage to perform admirably from day one. Another concession to scale is to cluster the 52" pots together for a huge splash of color and texture. The pool area containers create a tropical oasis of annuals and perennials edged by giant reed grass.





The second solution for scale is to add shrubs and trees to the large pots. Loropetalum and Green Giant arborvitae (*Thuja (standishii x plicata)* 'Green Giant') add bold texture and height to the center of the container garden and help the pots stand their ground amidst conifers and columns. Both Young and Burriss enjoy the challenge of scale and perspective. This is the creative aspect to their work they relish. "I have the freedom to be creative here", claims Young, which makes this job better than any other. They bounce ideas back and forth to arrive at new planting schemes each season. They shake their heads however when asked about the naturalistic banks that surround the stairs from the lodge down to the spa.

The sheer slope down to the spa is also the steepest challenge. While some of the bank plants have been purposely planted others are volunteers. The difficulty involved with hauling equipment and plants down the stone stairs or onto the lodge elevators plus the sheer steepness of the banks make work in this area a formidable undertaking. Right now they are contemplating installing wildflowers on the bank, but are still assessing the situation.

Another challenge for Young, Burriss, and their team is the maintenance of invasive plant species on the grounds. English ivy (*Hedera helix*) is a dominant landscape plant and historically significant to the Inn. The grounds crew manages its growth by laborious hand cutting. The bamboo planting is fortunately surrounded by heavy stone edging and is strategically located between two asphalt roads. Could the bright red stop sign at the edge of the planting have a horticultural message? Young assured me the sign was intended for automobile drivers only.

Grounds are managed using integrated pest management principles and practices. Pest resistant plants that can withstand the heat are selected as pesticide use is minimal. Glyphosate (Round-up herbicide) is occasionally used, but more often hand-weeding is applied. Watering is an ongoing activity and with the help of others, Young and Burriss converted a Bobcat into a watering cart by adding two 55 gallon barrels and a pump. This labor saving device reduces dragging hoses all about the grounds. The benefits to working on the grounds at Grove Park Inn are numerous. First, both women acknowledge their beautiful surroundings and the good fortune to work outside. They are not immune to the beauty, even after four years (Burriss) and 10 years (Young). They also value the working relationships that exist at the resort. They count on each other for ideas and creative encouragement. Their talents always seem to compliment one another. The word is out that the grounds crew is a great place to work and four people have transferred in. Communication is also strong between resort management and employees. Young

receives daily communications from the human resources department with information to share with her team.

A generous benefits package comes with the jobs. In addition to complete health coverage, employees receive a free city bus pass; uniforms (laundered); free lunch in the employee's cafeteria; and discounts to the spa and the sports complex. In addition, management offers mind body spirit programs to promote employee wellness. One popular competitive program divides participating employees into teams of four. Each team member's wellness is calculated at the start of the program; they have three months to make improvements; then their wellness is again assessed. The team with the greatest improvement wins \$1500 (each); two spa treatments; and a night on the coveted Club Floor.

Grove Park Inn now sits in the midst of a residential neighborhood. This presents a special challenge to grounds workers regarding noise. They simply can't create any. Employees, Inn, and spa guests all have one thing in common according to Young and Burriss, "Everyone here is calm."

Horticulturists who need a holiday will certainly benefit from a trip to Grove Park Inn Resort and Spa. The natural and built beauty will not escape you and the grounds crew at this world class resort will make sure you can rest easy; everything has been taken care of. If you really need help relaxing, the spa should certainly be part of your holiday or day package. Interior waterfalls (which you can stand under); warm water pools and mineral pools for soaking or swimming in and massages for every body and every occasion are available. The spa is pricey, but worth every penny.

And for those who want nothing to do



with frou-frou spas, they can stay outside and ponder the mechanics of the waterfall just across from the front doors of the spa or peer up at the green roof to the spa trying to figure out exactly what grasses and other perennials are growing up there.

