



# The Caretakers

BY JANE MARION | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MITRO HOOD

**P**aul Fowler and Frank McNeil both love to while away the hours in the garden of their 1927 Guilford Colonial home. They just have different reasons why they love to garden.

For Fowler, who is a radiation oncologist at Union Memorial and Good Samaritan Hospitals, gardening is a lifelong passion and an antidote to the sometimes sad nature of his work. "I think what appeals to me is the nurturing instinct," says Fowler. "When I'm working in my garden, I feel like I'm taking part of my piece of earth producing something that will be there long after I'm gone. It's a spiritual thing for me and an outlet from my work."

For McNeil, an African-American former Marine officer

who works as a community affairs representative for the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, the desire to garden is deeply rooted in setting a certain standard. "For me, it goes back to taking care of our part," says McNeil. "I've traditionally grown up in predominantly white neighborhoods, and I've always felt I am representative of—fill in the blank—blacks, gays, men, the military. I don't want it said, 'They moved in, and there went the neighborhood.'"

Quite the contrary—the neighborhood has only gotten more magnificent since the couple took up residence in 1999. When they first moved in, the garden consisted of a few trees, some unwanted bamboo, and a thicket of weeds (Fowler likens it to the Dark Forest in Harry Potter). But the couple



