

# STYLE

SMART LIVING IN BALTIMORE



Fran West, in the thick of it.

## Film clips

With help from her filmmaking relatives, Fran West shares her pruning mastery in a new DVD and field guide.  
By Kathy Hudson

### For years,

clients and garden club members have asked Fran West to create a book detailing her artistic approach to pruning shrubbery and small trees. But after six years of writing drafts and sharing her expertise via her Web site ([www.pruningmatters.com](http://www.pruningmatters.com)), West decided to do more than write a book: she made a movie.

"I had a brother in the [film] industry in Philadelphia," says West, a longtime pruning expert based in Baltimore. Given his busy commercial schedule, he didn't have time to shoot the movie. But he lent tripods, lighting equipment and cameras to West and her son Tim Donohue, a Friends School alumnus who is a recent graduate of the New York Film Academy in Los Angeles and a partner in the production company, Angel Valley Media.

During the first year of the two-year filming process, West spoke extemporaneously to Tim's camera, just as she does in the pruning workshops she conducts locally. In spite of her son's diplomatic encouragement that they could piece together something from the many takes and retakes, it didn't work. "It was a constant struggle to stay focused on what I was saying and plan the next sentence," says West. "My mouth would dry out and my lips would stick."

That's when Tim's skillful coaching, along with daughter Caroline Donohue's writing, acting and makeup experience—she is a graduate student at Maine Photographic Workshops—combined to turn Mom into a camera-savvy professional. "Caroline taught me to keep the script conversational and not drop my voice at the end of every sentence," says West, who went back to the drawing board and wrote a script to be sure she covered everything.

She, Tim and sometimes a second cameraman shot specific examples to illustrate her advice in six outstanding Baltimore gardens where she'd worked—including those of Susie Russell

McDonald and A.C. and Penny Hubbard, recently featured in *Style*. From February 2004 to December 2005, Tim served as a one-man production company—cameraman, director, sound man, lighting expert and graphic artist—and after that, he edited the 65-minute DVD. "Day in and day out, he edited his mother for months," says West. "Can you imagine?"

The unique DVD shows West smoothly explaining what equipment to use, how to make proper cuts and how to train the eye to identify and prune various growing patterns. It dispels big myths like a tree will die if pruned at the wrong time, and offers small tips, like rubbing moist earth on a fresh branch cut to make the job look better.

"Her technique is incredibly clear and simple," says Leigh Barnes, past president of the Horticultural Society of Maryland. "Her basic concepts are easy to remember with visual cues. She walks viewers through a real project ... and clearly explains her process of getting to the beauty of each plant and how it relates to the garden as a whole. More than pruning, she is sculpting with her tools." □

*Pruning Matters: The Formula for Pruning Masters (DVD: \$29.99, field guide: \$9.99, set: \$34.99) is for sale at [www.pruningmatters.com](http://www.pruningmatters.com), Ladew Topiary Gardens gift shop, The Ivy Bookshop and area garden centers, including Greenfield's, Watson's and Valley View Farms.*

### FRAN'S PRUNING POINTERS

- > Relax! Pruning, in moderation, does not kill plants.
- > Remove only one-third of a plant per growing season.
- > To preserve blossoms, early blooming plants (from February to mid-June) should be pruned after they bloom.
- > Late blooming plants (mid-June to fall) can be pruned early in the spring before the flower buds are set for the season or after they bloom, late in the season.
- > Prune when the spirit moves you! A comfortable temperature in which to work, proper tools, a trained eye and motivation are what you need.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY KIRSTEN BECKERMAN