

# A Natural Artist

Southwest Florida is a canvas for Naples landscape architect.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIAN TIETZ

**L**ike most artists, Ellin Goetz uses a full spectrum of color and texture to create her finished work. But her art isn't found in a museum. Instead, it's in the rich landscape tapestries she's created throughout Southwest Florida—in themed parks at Mediterra and TwinEagles, the Naples Botanical Garden, a rejuvenated Fifth Avenue South and the restoration of the historic Moonlight Garden at the Edison-Ford Winter Estates in Fort Myers.

An artist in spirit and a landscape architect by vocation, Goetz's canvases stir the same emotions as the paintings and sculptures she created as an art history student at Vassar College. "So much of our lives are internally focused, landscape architecture can draw you out," says Goetz, who co-owns Goetz + Strope



**Nature Girl:** Landscape architect Ellin Goetz paints with plants and flowers; she designed Mediterra's Parque Celestial, where she poses as a human sundial.



Landscape Architects in Naples. "A landscape's colors, textures and scents should make people pause and say, 'Wow.'"

Her work has earned professional accolades; she's been honored alongside her husband, Naples hotelier Mike Watkins, as Hodges University's (formerly International College) Humanitarians of the Year; and she received kudos as Citizen of the Year from the *Naples Daily News* for her efforts with the Conservation Collier initiative, a grassroots campaign that won voter approval

in 2002 to protect environmentally valuable land. "I believe in using the skills I've been taught to help the community," she says.

Goetz's interest in the environment was nurtured as a child. She attended conservation rallies with her parents and spent summers combing the beaches along New York Harbor with her great grandfather in search of "huge black mussels."

Goetz followed Watkins to Florida in 1985 after graduate school. "The only plants I could identify were the coconut palm and the sabal palm," she says. "I'd bring twigs into the office and drive everybody crazy

wanting to know what they were."

"You really develop an appreciation for Florida's subtle environment," she continues. "It's easy to go to the beach, but it's harder to get out in nature. That's why I like Corkscrew Swamp; you walk on the boardwalk and you're immediately immersed in the environment."

Goetz, Watkins and their three teenage children live in Old Naples but keep horses and chickens on a farm on the outskirts of town. Goetz, a former show jumper, now rides for fun. The chickens, she says, provide "natural bug control ... and fresh eggs." *B*