

makeover

night light

A LOW-MAINTENANCE URBAN OASIS
MAKES A STATEMENT—DAY OR NIGHT

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An EnviroPave patio angles out into the garden that features a rectangle of lawn edged with euonymus and spirea. “I don’t know how I’d live without the grass,” says this home, and dog, owner. OPPOSITE PAGE: A well-lit sitting area under a shade sail is accessed by a metal spiral staircase, a vast improvement over the space-eating wooden one (shown right).



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he busy banking lawyer and homeowner of this midtown Toronto lot confesses he is not a gardener. Nevertheless, he relishes the time he can spend in the yard—usually evenings—and wanted to make it over following an interior reno. Enter Peter Guinane of Oriole Landscaping, mandated to transform the steeply graded property, with its tiered decks, into a low-maintenance, accessible space day (and especially) night.

The home is perched on a hill: from the front to the back, the land slopes nine feet, so the street-level main floor at the front becomes a second floor at the back. The kitchen and living room open onto a second-floor deck, which is where the homeowner spends most of his time. Outfitted with a barbecue, some seating and a retractable awning to create shade and divert rain, the second-floor deck became a wonderful extension off the living area.

Figuring out how to get down to the yard from the raised balcony, however, was a challenge, says Stefano Giannini, the project’s lead designer. A standard staircase would extend much too far into the already small yard. The solution? A spiral staircase, which takes up only a fraction of the space. Made of stainless-steel railings and powder-coated metal treads, it is an elegant route down to a platform cedar deck six inches above the ground, covered by a custom triangular shade sail that provides welcome privacy from neighbouring two- and three-storey houses.

From the cedar deck, a step of Wiarton stone brings you to a third patio constructed at grade and made of a permeable product called EnviroPave. This combination of crushed stone and a naturally derived bonding agent is much more cost-effective than flagstone. But unlike the upper and lower decks that sit squarely to the house, this patio, which is bordered in Wiarton stone, extends at an angle into the yard. “The purpose was to create a sense of depth,” says Guinane. >

A cedar fence topped with horizontal boards brings balance to the vertical lines in the garden, says Guinane. BELOW: Rubber plants and colourful crotons spend the summer outdoors.



The lawn area beyond is flanked by euonymus and spirea, as well as some evergreen yews and cedars chosen because they are hardy and low maintenance. Perennial astilbes and ground-covering periwinkle and ivy are tucked in among the shrubs. There are also several existing mature trees. “We were thrilled they were there,” says Guinane. “They create a canopy that gives more privacy on the second level.” The organic, craggy form of a crabapple tree also punctuates the back fence and is a welcome juxtaposition to the contemporary lines and composition of the rest of the garden.

With planting concerns taken care of, and a compact staircase to join the upper and lower decks in place, the only thing left was to light the garden for full use of the yard at night. But doing so didn’t mean flooding it with lights. “If you light everything, you light nothing,” says Bob Maheu of LightFX in Brampton, Ont., who was brought in to do the job. “By planning brighter and darker areas it is possible to create different rooms without ever having to put up a wall.”

Maheu tied the upper and lower decks together using the same stainless-steel light fixtures, which pick up on the metal of the railings and staircase. On the upper deck, wall-mounted fixtures shine light both up and down in a narrow beam to create height and define some of the brick. On the lower deck, Maheu shone lights onto the sail from above. The sail acts as a diffuser and emanates a very even light on the sitting area. When you look up, the sail is illuminated and the light source unseen. “You just see the glow of the sail and the trees beyond it,” says Maheu. Around the lawn and its surrounding plantings,

Maheu cast a glow down on the shrubs by mounting lights on the trees and fence. This means the eye is drawn to the plantings and their varying heights and shapes, rather than the flat expanse of grass.

For this homeowner, a rare space with intriguing lighting has been created. It’s one that can be delightful even on the hottest of days, restful and dry during a rain and fully enjoyed on even the darkest nights. □

bright ideas

Bob Maheu of LightFX offers these tips on creating lighting drama in your garden.

- 1.** Don’t light everything. “What makes the lighting dramatic is having areas that are brighter and areas that are darker.”
- 2.** The light source should never be seen. “If you see it, that is where your eye will go rather than the object you are lighting.”
- 3.** Start with the uplighting—lights that go from the ground up. “They are the anchors, and then you fill in from there.”
- 4.** Never put lights in a straight line. “I put everything in triangles to create a sense of width and depth.”
- 5.** Make the lights dimmable, so you can create different moods.

Sleek stainless-steel railings with galvanized wiring running along the upper deck reflect the fence detail (shown above).

