

SLEEK NEW
LANDSCAPING
TRANSFORMS A
CITY YARD INTO
A SOPHISTICATED
COURTYARD
RETREAT.

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HIGH COURT

The urban garage is more often an archive than a source of inspiration, but for Rundi Phelan it proved to be a starting point for the redesign of her back garden in a verdant midtown Toronto neighbourhood. Rundi, an artist whose paintings show at galleries in and around Toronto, bought the three-storey, 1920s brick Georgian in 2005 and found she never had much use for the garage. A year later, an “Aha!” moment transpired when she suddenly envisioned the space as a rehearsal studio for Paul, 19, the youngest of her four children and a jazz musician.

“We installed french doors on the garage, and the whole space was transformed,” Rundi explains. “It opened it up and integrated it with the outdoor space beautifully.” It also set the creative ball rolling. But while Rundi had her own ideas about the renovation of

ABOVE: In the enchanting reworked backyard of Rundi Phelan (pictured top right), a new entry at the back of the drive consists of a brick wall and cedar gates. Beyond, a studio space, created in the little-used garage, opens out to the new terraced dining area.

RIGHT: Adding new french doors in the studio opened it up to the backyard dramatically. The terrace area leading to the gate is bordered by Hill’s yews and boxwood, which enhance privacy and inject texture. Green pillow, Virginia Johnson.





Part of the old driveway was annexed to provide more space for seating areas near the house, and the stylish, low-key yard now encompasses dining and lounging areas. A grapevine ball filled with twinkle lights makes a playful light fixture. Above, the principal bedroom's deck has tidy ipé wood walls that riff on the yard's sleek new look. Dedon dining table, sofa, Studio b; round tables, pink and green pillows, lantern, Fresh Home & Garden; landscape lighting, Moonstruck Landscape Lighting.

the garage itself — which she eventually plans to use as a painting studio — she called in the pros to rework the back garden, which was dominated by a large wooden deck. For this, her daughter Jamie, a New York-based interior designer, recommended Toronto landscape architect Mark Hartley. Jamie had visited a garden by Hartley and had fallen in love with it. Envisioning more of a sophisticated outdoor living space than a haven for indulging a green thumb, Rundi was concerned mainly with keeping the space clean and functional, while also imbuing it with an easy, practical flow.

The transformation was masterminded by Hartley and chief designer Maureen Sedran and was carried out over 10 weeks in the summer of 2006. Owner and designer decided to maintain the fence, a row of yews and a sizable oak, but to rip out part of the concrete driveway and the large deck. Then, the designers set out to conquer the space by dividing it into a set of distinct living areas. “The idea was to give the illusion of more space,”



ABOVE: Echoing the aesthetic used down below in the garden, this small ipé wood deck located off the principal bedroom is perched high above the neighbours and is wrapped in horizontally oriented walls, so it affords both privacy and great views of the moon on clear evenings. The upholstery on the chairs is the same as that used in the garden. Deck design, Mark Hartley Landscape Architects; Dedon chairs, ottomans, Studio b.



says Hartley, “and to limit the number of materials we used, so as not to clutter it up.”

Grass was vetoed in favour of subtly contrasting Wiarton limestone pavers. “I love grass, but we decided there was no room for it here,” Rundi says, “And no one really wants to mow!” Hartley’s admiration for the material is more aesthetically driven: “The limestone adds some texture,” he says. “And by using it throughout, we were able to integrate two very different spaces.”

Which gets back to the designers’ main goal for the project: to create unique, contemporary spaces that provide a comfortable forum for both quiet relaxing and entertaining groups. Between the house and garage, and in the space where the driveway used to be, lies a sitting area replete with ample sofas upholstered in a crisp monochromatic stripe, and a glass-topped dining table — an ample piece large enough to seat a crowd. A set of limestone steps leads from here into the family room. Further back in the yard is a water garden of sorts: a 6-by-12-foot salt-water plunge pool and a little pond, both fed by a single central fountain. Made of Algonquin stone, a form of honed limestone, this striking geometric feature contributes a Zen fluidity to the space. Its placement — it’s visible from the kitchen window — is designed to bring some of the garden’s understated calm into the home.

In fact, part of the garden was essentially brought into the house: a second-storey veranda, designed by Sedran and sheltered by sleek ipé wood walls, overlooks the inviting new backyard retreat off the principal bedroom. Here, chairs upholstered in the same crisp



ABOVE: Flooring the entire garden in Wiarton limestone pavers unifies the former driveway space (at rear) with the yard and affords its owner the luxury of no lawn upkeep. Potted perennials like white ‘Rozanne’ geraniums are delicate contrasting accents in the clean-lined garden. Bright green hakone grass punctuates the back

border; Rundi also plants jasmine here. Dedon dining table, sofa, Studio b; lantern, votives, pink and green throw pillows, Fresh Home & Garden.

TOP LEFT: Entertaining is now one of Rundi’s favourite uses for the backyard. Dedon dining table, Studio b; lantern, flower-shaped votives, Fresh Home & Garden.



“The garden suggests the potential for an entire afternoon of lingering and lounging”

ABOVE: Edged in yews and a tall fence, the back of the yard is quite private. Designed by Hartley and Sedran and built of Algonquin stone, the fountain that flows into both the pond and salt-water plunge pool channels an edgy, geometric Modernist sculpture. It also fills the yard

with the soothing sound of water. Pond, pool, Paradise Pools; fountain built by York Marble, installed by Design Landscape Contracting; chairs, Hollace Cluny. **RIGHT:** Rundi's son Paul (left) and friends, Devin Hart (centre) and Adrian Goodgoll use the renovated garage as a jam space.

stripe afford a spot to read or have a morning coffee amidst the leafy boughs of the mature trees that surround the property.

With the chic but effortless look that best suited Rundi and her family in mind, Sedran kept the plantings in the yard itself minimalist and predominantly green. Along with the addition of several more yews along the perimeter of the yard, she added perennials including ornamental pear trees, hydrangea and potted geraniums. For her part, Rundi varies the aesthetic each summer by changing the colour of the impatiens she plants around the garden's border. “It's a nice, simple way to change the look,” she says. And the evergreen plantings — the yews and boxwoods — guarantee an attractive winter tableau. Another accent that works year-round is the playful grapevine ball Rundi filled with

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