

Geometry Lesson

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The curved lines of the low-slung, gently sloped Wiarton ledgerrock walls mirror the curves of the house's windows. Juxtaposing droopy hydrangeas and mallow with structured boxwood creates tailored-looking beds. Taller plantings, like yellow ligularia and miscanthus ornamental grass lend height. Landscape design, Earth Inc.

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A FORMAL
GARDEN'S
DESIGN IS
DEFINED BY
SLOPE AND
SYMMETRY.

Designing a garden to be both sophisticated and welcoming while complementing the temperament of a stately home requires a deft balance of straight lines and curves, stationary elements and a sense of movement. A visit to this verdant perennial garden in midtown Toronto reveals a formula that successfully manages this balance. From the lush symmetrical flowerbeds framing the front walkway to the luxuriously private dining area at the back of the property, the garden reflects a low-key elegance.

The garden's design echoes the interior of the house, which could be described as English classic meets urban contemporary. "The garden is very formal, but understated," says landscape

ABOVE: An hourglass shaped Wiarton flagstone and Indiana limestone cuts a line to the front door. Tall ornamental grasses, magnolia, perennials heights and a pair of columnar crab apples were planted to provide privacy from the street.



In the 2-1/2' x 9' pond, the fountain's copper spout, with its attractive patina, was inspired by a detail on the house's second floor balcony. Lush day lilies border the rustic water feature. Bowl, serving tray, pitcher, glasses, small bowl, Nestings; tall candleholder; pillar candle, Horticultural Design.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Clematis 'Jackmanii' grows through the slats of the lattice next to the garage. Apricot Nectar roses are a nod to traditional English planting. Purple coneflower and zebra grass are found on the back terrace.

BOTTOM RIGHT: A ramp of limestone connects the back of the house to the lowered seating area, forming a soft slope to balance the formal pathways. Offset by a semi-circular terrace and full beds, the hard lines of the arbour are a subtle reference to crown moulding inside the house. One of two arched trellises shields the garage.



Earth Inc.'s geometric lattice wall continues the circular shape of the ledgerrock retaining wall and the lawn, and blocks views of the neighbour's property. Freeform oversized Wiarion flagstone on both seating areas, this one visible from the kitchen, gives fluidity to the backyard.

designer Kennedy McRae of design-build firm Earth Inc., who took the project from drawing board to completion with landscape designer Lome Hancock.

Builders had hardly finished the new house when Earth Inc. moved in with soil to add curves to what had been a prairie-flat yard. "More people are bringing in landscape architects and designers at the beginning, right when a house is finished, instead of fixing do-it-yourself landscaping with a costly renovation," says McRae. The owner had wanted a garden around a pool, but, after discussing the idea with McRae and Hancock, realized that at roughly 50 by 130 feet, the property was better suited for a welltailored garden alone. Earth Inc. did incorporate a water element in the garden - a tiny crescent moon-shaped pond with a fountain.



"In big cities, a garden without a water feature can be like having a party without music," says McRae.

Once the fundamentals were in place, McRea and Hancock set about creating a sophisticated garden that further enhances the formality of the house, but with low-maintenance plantings that keep it from appearing too polished. The decorous landscape took its cue from the established look of the neighbourhood, which is dotted with 100-year-old trees. The designers borrowed motifs from the house itself, such as the curvilinear windows and crown moulding, which were repeated, respectively, on custom-made arched trellises that feature a small ledge for candles, and a large arbour that forms a beam across the back of the garden, creating a stunning focal point with built-in recessed lights. "We wanted to tie the

style of the garden in with the style of the house without making it seem too obvious," says McRae. Using materials similar to those used for the house, such as the Indiana limestone which mimics the exterior window casings - created a "subliminal effect, a feeling that everything works."

Along with several hardscaping features such as the arbour and the arched trellis, installed in the lower sitting area, McRae and Hancock also used a few clever landscaping tricks to make the property as private as possible. One of those tricks was to create a sunken dining area along the back of the property with low walls that can double as benches. "The older trees, along with the garage wall, create a sense of privacy in this area," says McRae. To finish it off, they planted a stand of lilacs between the garage and the neighbour's

fence. In spring, their heady fragrance wafts over the dining table.

McRae admits that the garden wasn't solely designed around this large dining area - there's another smaller one at the back of the house - but it ended up encouraging the owner to use the entire property. "Because it's at the rear of the property, it becomes a destination," he says. Elsewhere, gracious pathways link the various parts of the property paved with a mix of Wi art on flagstone, interlocking brick and Indiana limestone, they meander past the overflowing flowerbeds. From the stately magnolia and two columnar crab apple trees in the front garden to a sculptural Japanese maple near the backyard sitting areas, the careful calculations that went into the design have resulted in a relaxed yet refined garden.