

ANTIQUE MODERN



BLACKENED STEEL BEAMS, SPRAWLING PORCELAIN SUBWAY TILES, AND SUBTLE CORTEN STEEL PLANTERS GIVE THIS CITY GARDEN, SITUATED ON A SMALL LANEWAY IN THE HEART OF DOWNTOWN TORONTO,

the intimacy of interior space within the limitless outdoors. Finding refuge in the midst of the city is a time-honoured quest for today's urbanite, and the "Diamond in the Rough" backyard, created by landscape company Earth Inc., is the perfect place to unwind and forget the bustle of busy streets.

The garden's raw industrial concrete acts as a canvas for Coral Bark Japanese Maples, a Star Magnolia, and various ornamental grasses. The foliage in turn softens the hard lines of the architectural I-beams that frame the space. Overflowing with an assertively modern ambience, translucent glass panels incorporated into the high-privacy fence allow natural light into the twenty by twenty-five-foot yard.

Earth Inc. founders James Dale and Kennedy McRae have established a brand synonymous with high-end architecture and horticulture. As co-hosts of HGTV's *Dirty Business*, they can be seen creating impressive atriums and avant-garde interpretations of everyday functionalism while promoting the benefits of an urban green space.

The design process for gardens, bowers, pools, ponds, patios, porches, and decks begins with the Earth Inc. team completing a comprehensive site survey. The grade and slope of the land are measured, the presence of any surrounding structures or existing foliage is recorded, and a time sensitive sun study is undertaken to fully maximize the available light in potential designs.

Once the space is conceptualized, two-dimensional survey drawings are used to create a framework for three-dimensional digital mock-ups. It is not unusual for designers to create numerous designs for the same space, and through virtual tours clients can easily interact with their future gardens.

Using a breathtaking range of unconventional and recycled materials, Earth Inc. designers maintain a balance between environmental awareness and aesthetic preference. Natural stones contrast subway tiles or marble slabs from the discarded façade of a historic Toronto building. Accents of burnt wood, fibreglass, concrete, slate, and iron are situated amongst the regional shrubbery and exhibit a playful, urbanized approach to outdoor living.

Recently, Earth Inc. received four 2012 Landscape Ontario Awards of Excellence, including the coveted Casey Van Maris Award recognizing innovative and unique design. The Toronto Interior Design Show held in January 2012 also presented Earth Inc. with the silver award for best exhibit design.

To demonstrate their design prowess, recipients of the Landscape Ontario Awards were asked to construct a booth indicative of their design philosophies. Earth Inc.'s eclectic booth made use of sustainable products and up-cycling to showcase the team's expertise and commitment to sustainable design. The exhibit's flooring was made using the Carrara marble façade of a former Bank of Montreal building, the metal shelving forming the walls was sourced from a local junkyard, and the forest of trees mounted within the exhibit were found through a woodlot maintenance program. A temporary 'living wall' formed by moss, later recycled by a local florist, completed the stunning display leaving minimal carbon footprint.



The gardens and terraces built by Earth Inc. range from elaborate to minimalist. Where in some locations water features include a pond or fountain, in other backyards a fifty-foot industrial metal boardwalk with seating areas at either end complements a large concrete and steel water feature. Though the use of water in an urban garden requires ongoing maintenance, the sound of running water creates a serene white noise, which many find an invaluable buffer to the noises of the city.

Water features aside, the majority of Earth Inc.'s clients request low-maintenance designs—spaces that look sophisticated with minimal effort and attention. In pursuit of this, some clients choose works of art or found objects to feature in their outdoor spaces. Downtown, the "Diamond in the Rough" garden features a red "r" mounted on the back wall. Uptown, vibrant walls were built around a modern home's backyard deck in order to show off the owner's collection of art and sculpture. With recycled materials and soil, Earth Inc. creates an oasis, a comfortable and exclusive space carefully planned and constructed—the safety of your home in the heart of a wild city.



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