

Is  
the yard  
the new  
cottage?

## Getting away without the commute

Steve McCormick was annoyed by the high cost of owning and running a cottage, so he decided to find an alternative to meet his leisure needs a little closer to home.

His own backyard.

He took the cottage elements he was looking for and squeezed them down to create a relaxation destination without the four-hour commute.

"A lot of our clients like to bring the cottage home for a quarter of the price," says James Dale, a lead designer on McCormick's backyard renovations, which was showcased on the HGTV's *Dirty Business*.

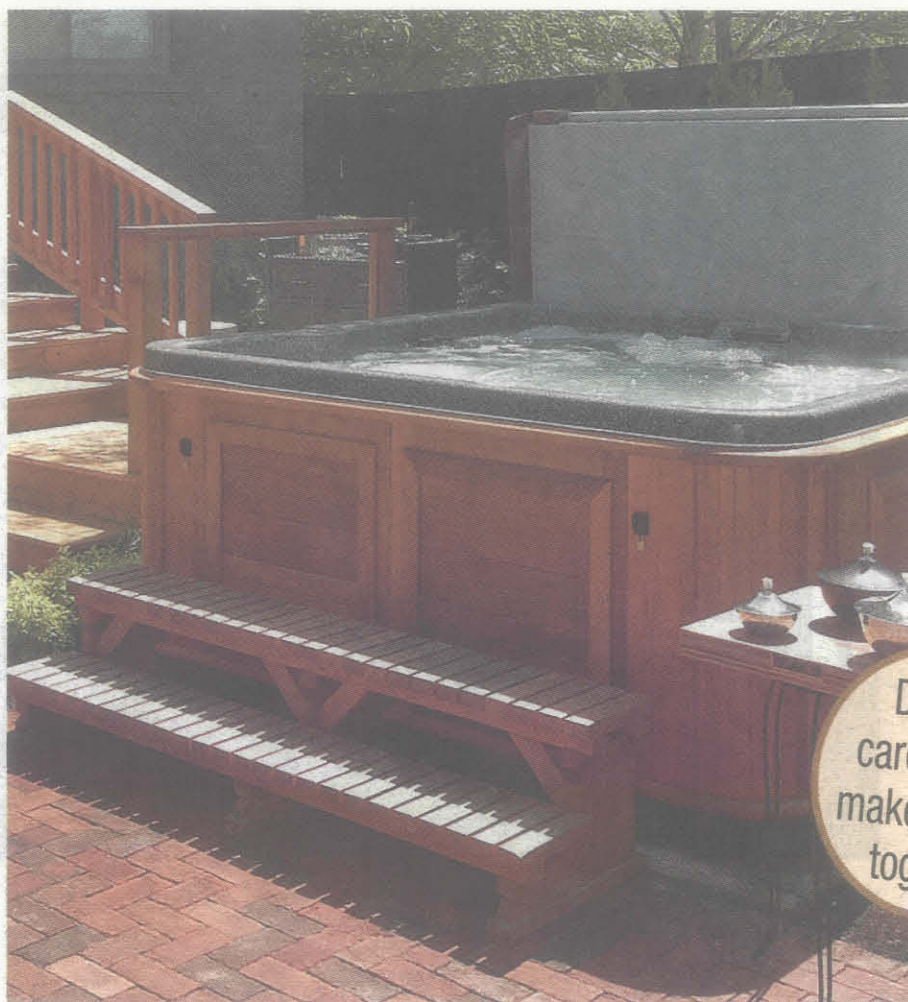
"People always feel they have to get away," says Dale. "But design a proper garden and you can get that feeling."

For McCormick, a business owner with limited time, it was the perfect solution.

He chose items that mimicked aspects of cottage life. Instead of a lake, he has a hot tub with a waterfall installation to provide that calming ambient noise. He brought the wilderness to him by adding indigenous forest plants. Privacy was achieved with high fences and an outdoor shed to have that retreat from the house.

Dale offered the *Town Crier* some tips on

A great garden gives you the same feeling



Design  
carefully to  
make it work  
together



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**URBAN GETAWAYS:** On opposite page, Steve McCormick transformed his backyard into a retreat as an alternative to spending hours in a car to get to the cottage. Above left, the outdoor jacuzzi in McCormick's getaway. Above right, James Dale's team that designed the backyard renovation.

## Keep it simple — for easy maintenance

how to make the perfect urban getaway.

"Paint the fence black, it gives a nice backdrop to the plants," he says. "Don't go too crazy on water features. A lot of people don't know the maintenance required."

However, if you do add a water feature or a pool Dale says you need to design the space carefully to make sure everything works together. He suggests thinking about the layout of your backyard much like you would for an interior room.

As for the garden, Dale advises keeping it simple.

Though the lavish garden might be appealing, he finds many end up not wanting to maintain it.

"Be realistic in what you want in your garden," he says.

Finally, Dale recommends budgeting properly for the project.

Think about the materials you'll need so you don't blow your entire budget on marble flooring and have nothing left for the pool.

McCormick also had a few tips to share from his experience redoing his backyard.

"Brace yourself," he says. "Your whole house becomes like a war zone."

Choosing your contractor and the people you'll be working with wisely, he adds, as you'll be spending a lot of time around them.

You can also learn from McCormick's mistakes, and not start the work in late fall, as he faced many delays in the process due to the winter.

So how much will this all cost you? For Dale's company Earth Inc., which caters to a higher end clientele, backyard projects can cost anywhere between \$50,000 and \$150,000.

Still to McCormick it was money well spent.

"I'm very happy," he said. "It really does create a relaxing lifestyle."

"I'm in my garden every meal. It's very peaceful."

— Eric Stober