

# Use Your Garden to Expand Your Home

Story and photos by Hunter Stubbs

After 15 years of designing gardens, I have helped design everything from pocket gardens to grand estates. Other than creating curb appeal, the most important and most utilized area for any home is the threshold into the backyard. This is the space directly out the back door, and is a natural extension of a home's interior space.

Creative decking and patios indulge our desire to be outside in a pleasing environment. When well

designed, family and social gatherings are able to flow out into this area, and it can lend a new sense of space to the interior of the home. This is an area for outdoor living, and it can be furnished and decorated much the same as the interior of your home. Outdoor furniture has reached new levels of elegance and comfort, while incorporating cooking areas, fireplaces, fire pits and hot tubs will assure that you never want to go back indoors.

In January of this year I had the opportunity to work on creating one of these outdoor living spaces. An active family contacted BB Barnes with their challenge: To help make their backyard space more appealing for entertaining and playing. The home is located in the Grove Park area of Asheville, where there are many historic homes and space is very tight. The constraints of their current space made outdoor living less than ideal. Most of the back-



A flagstone patio helps bring living space to the outdoors for the homeowners of this house in the historic Grove Park neighborhood of Asheville, NC.



**A small, steep lot proved to be a challenge in designing a useable outdoor living space and recreation area. But with some creativity Hunter Stubbs and his team were able to meet that challenge. They used the alley beside the house to gain access to the backyard, where they moved dirt to create terraces for flower beds and built an area for a small basketball pad. They were also able to enlarge the patio and add a fireplace, helping make the outdoor living area a welcoming place all year long.**



Durable but elegant patio furniture is the perfect finishing touch to any outdoor living area, providing a welcoming spot to sit and enjoy the sights and sounds of the garden.

yard consisted of a steep slope that had been terraced, and the existing patio was awkward and small.

I began by thinking of a new scenario that would better serve the wishes of the family, which were to have space for relaxing, entertaining and playing, with garden beds and turf to bring it all together. We ended up maximizing a space for family entertaining on the main level and modifying the upper terrace play area to receive a concrete pad for basketball. The area between these two levels was a space for ornamental plantings and sod paths.

For the garden patio we decided to increase the size and dramatically revise the shape, incorporating a fireplace to create the ambience and space our clients wanted for their outdoor living environment. The fireplace was sized to match the scale of the space, and the original patio wall was modified to take in the new 400 square-foot patio. The walls were built of a gray Elk Mountain stone and the wall caps and mantle were laid with a Jamestown flagstone to match the new flagstone patio. The walls were also outfitted with low voltage lighting to minimize the need for the use of flood lights.

As in many remodel jobs, the greatest challenge was the tight space. Vehicle access was limited to a tight back alley and there was little room for staging any materials other than what was used on a daily basis. The grading work that had to be done meant lots of extra dirt was created in a small space. All of this meant careful coordination was needed by the crew to manage everything efficiently. This also meant that most of the stone had to be brought in by hand.

Fortunately, the corner of the yard receiving the new concrete basketball pad abutted an alley, so access for the concrete pour was relatively easy. A 10-foot tall sport net was installed to ensure that the occasional air ball doesn't end up down the mountain.

After all the hardscaping was in place, it was time to plant. All of the plantings would be prominently displayed on the slopes surrounding the patio. Interest and durability were the key factors in choosing plants, with low maintenance coming in as a close third.

The blue 'Penny Mac' hydrangea (*Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Penny Mac') plays a prominent role in this landscape, while diverse foliage of plants like autumn fern (*Dryopteris*

*erythrosora*) and the gold Hakone grass (*Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola') give season-long appeal with little maintenance. The burgundy foliage of the nandina 'Harbor Belle' adds more evergreen for winter interest, along with the evergreen, spring-blooming azaleas 'Girard's Rose' and 'The Robe'.

Late fall and winter interest is accentuated by the flowers of the autumn cherry (*Prunus subhirtella* 'Autumnalis'), heath (*Erica* 'Springwood Pink') and paperbush (*Edgeworthia chrysantha*). Other notable plants include the early-season beauty of thrift (*Phlox subulata*), *Helleborus* 'Jacob' and the burgundy foliage of Chinese fringe flower (*Loropetalum* 'Zhu Zhou').

Although this project was highly involved, in part because of the steep slope and confined space, the end result is something the entire family will enjoy. Creating an outdoor living area can be as simple or as complicated as you wish to make it. My encouragement to each of you is to take the time to think about this important area of your garden and how you can expand it to make more of your home. ☺

*Hunter Stubbs is owner and principle designer of BB Barnes Landscape Services Group ([www.bbarns.com](http://www.bbarns.com)) in Asheville, NC.*