



## FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

*A Dunbar garden is visually pleasing and a welcoming play spot for children*

BY SUSAN KELLY

PHOTOGRAPHY: JANIS NICOLAY


**GARDEN DESIGN 101** dictates that landscaping should mirror a home's style. Landscape architect Julian Pattison, principal at Considered Design, and partner Alison Magill broke the rule with this garden in the Dunbar area of Vancouver. And in so doing, they put it into a class all its own.

A couple with two young children—a two-year-old son and five-year-old daughter—and a golden retriever live in the Craftsman-style home. In upgrading parts of the interior along with the garden, they logically assumed their designers would conform to the original style. And yet, it was difficult to ignore the homeowners' forward and contemporary tastes in decor. "We convinced them to make the new elements very modern, in high contrast with the old, and that we could celebrate both old and new in a way that worked for them," says Pattison.

The landscape specialists worked closely with architect Nigel Parish of Splyce Design, who designed the new addition off the living room. Separate from the house and adjoining the back lane, a shed was knocked down. In its place

rose a larger contemporary design structure that houses a home gym and serves as a garage.

It marked a very different approach to landscape design for the 6,500-square-foot lot. "First, we defined the horizontal and vertical surfaces, which is a more abstract and contemporary way of organizing space," says Pattison. The next steps involved getting each element to function for the family and choosing the right materials.

Striking horizontal lines were created in the backyard through the inseting of rectangular engineered concrete slabs in the lawn that mimic paving stones. They visually and practically connect the home to the new gym/garage. For the deck, cedar planks were laid parallel to the back door and extend for 33 feet, creating the illusion of wide-open spaces. 



*(Opposite page) The deck's minimalist design offers the homeowners options in how they use the space. It also provides a seamless flow from the new living room extension. "It's a very flexible and sociable way of designing space," says landscape architect Julian Pattison.*

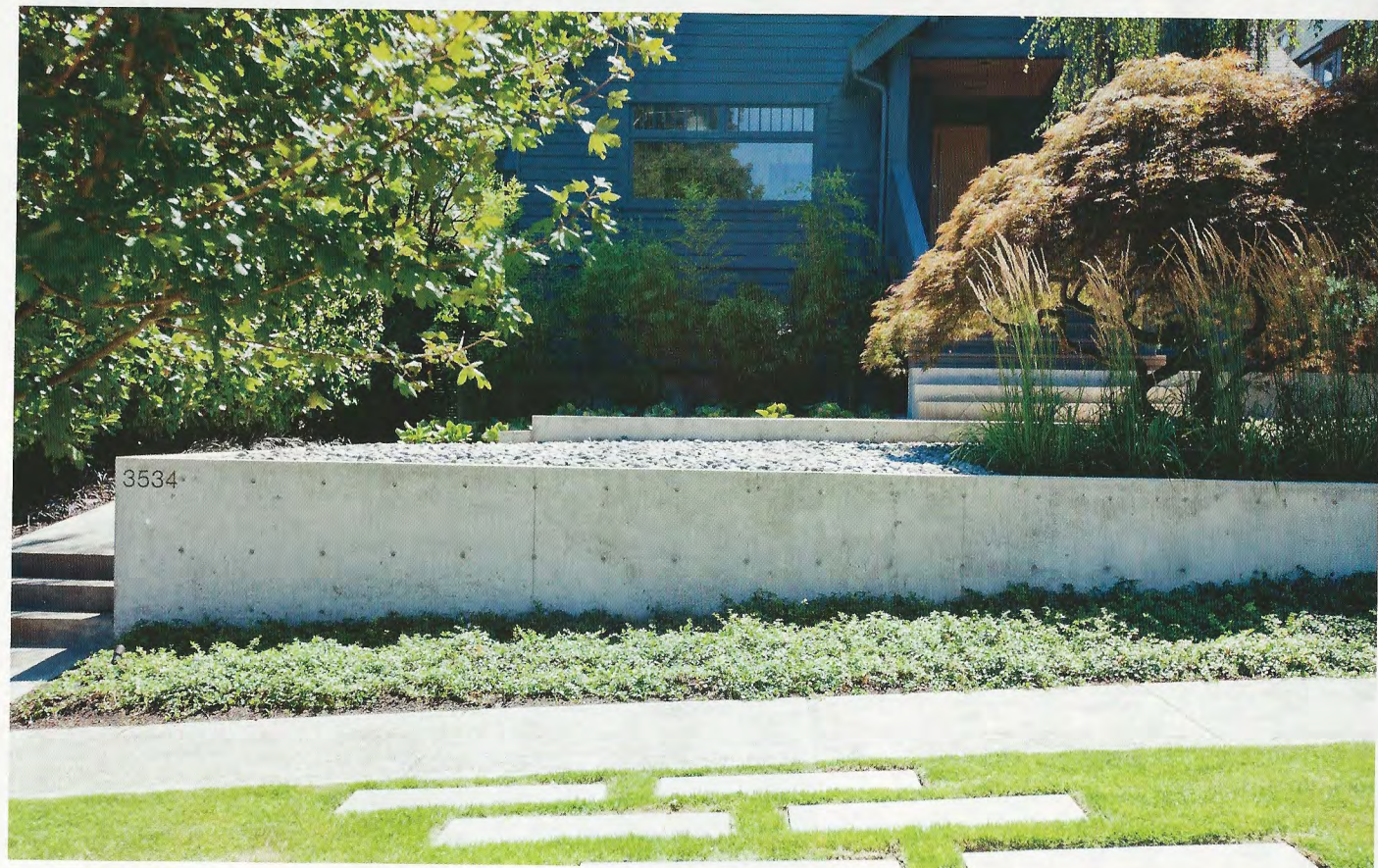
In the front yard, horizontal planes appear to float, thanks to the juxtaposition of concrete slabs and planted areas of feather reed grass (*Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster') and bergenia. A walkway entices visitors from the sidewalk before a black pigment-dyed slab set at a sharp angle draws them to the front door. For an even greater sense of presence, the designers moved the path to the original Craftsman-style front stairs, creating an off-centre entrance.

An elegant and gracefully mature Japanese maple retains pride of place in the front yard. Its sinuous shape contrasts with the linear plantings that surround it. "Just as when you renovate a home's interior, you don't want to obliterate everything outside it," says Pattison. Also kept were a large birch tree that provides a low-hanging branch for the children's rope swing, and the mature hedge opposite it on the east side.

The landscape designers configured the garden for ease of maintenance; the owners simply have to mow the lawn. New plant species were chosen for eye-pleasing textures and forms and to be robust enough to endure a child riding a bike over them now and then. "There are also moments of lightness and delight, but nothing too precious," says Pattison. ☞

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In spring, randomly planted black tulips poke up through the ground-covering vinca, which flowers discreetly all summer long. The three trembling aspens along the back fence turn a vibrant yellow in the autumn, and in the summertime, the leaves appear to dance and provide a soothing ambient sound.

Like the plants, Pattison’s original design has grown organically, he says. The children discovered that the concrete side wall is a great place to launch onto their rope swing. The huge back deck was left with no defined areas other than one bench and a fire pit. The modern design opens up possibilities for the owners, the designer says. “They wanted almost a blank canvas so they could then figure out how they wanted to use it as they went,” he says. “We basically provided the bones, and the real life of the project comes from the people as they use it.”

*Contemporary in design, the front yard was also designed to be play-friendly for the homeowners’ two children. Plants were chosen for aesthetic appeal but had to be robust enough to be trodden on now and then.*