



BACKYARD HIDEAWAY

SECRET GARDEN

High brick walls and rich plantings transform Tom Stringer's ordinary plot in Lakeview into a Southern-inspired escape that is a feast for the senses.

By Tate Gunnerson

"This is a respite from the hubbub of the city," says interior designer Tom Stringer (tomstringer.com) about the rear garden that he shares with husband Scott Waller. The setting is not only a relaxing retreat but also an ideal fundraising venue for the philanthropically minded pair, who have hosted events there in support of many causes, including Northlight Theatre and Human Rights Campaign. "We host two or three big events every summer, and we have a number of smaller events as well," Stringer shares. "We've easily entertained a thousand people there."

To transform the once-nondescript backyard into a suitable venue for swanky soirees, Stringer brought in Doug Hoerr and Abigale Baldwin of Hoerr Schaudt Landscape Architects (hoerrschaudt.com). "The aesthetic is sort of a lush New Orleans-style English garden with dripping balconies, flowers and vines," Baldwin notes, pointing to the wrought-iron second-floor balcony on the back of the house.

Once the land had been cleared, Hoerr created

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GOOD ROOTS Clockwise from top: Tom Stringer and landscape designer Abigale Baldwin were trying to achieve the feeling of the inside spilling out so that when you throw open the kitchen doors, it's all one experience; brick inlays break up the limestone pavement and help to delineate separate zones for reading, dining and entertaining.

MAIN PHOTO BY BOB COSCARELLI; SMALL PHOTO BY JAMIE PADGETT



GOING GREEN

Clockwise from top: The side of the garage was disguised with a series of orchids in clay pots hung from iron rings, providing a pretty backdrop for the outdoor living room; Stringer and Waller planted extra trees in adjacent yards so that greenery would surpass concrete as the prominent focal point; the team created several areas for lounging and eating with a mix of sun and shade to mimic the comfort of an indoor space.

...CONTINUED three distinct functional zones around a densely planted area distinguished by a mature honey locust tree. “It feels like it has always been there,” Baldwin says. “Having something to provide shade on hot summer days was absolutely necessary.”

Equally necessary were the 8-foot brick walls, which required a variance from the city before they could be built. During the approval process, Stringer agreed to pick up the cost of planting extra trees in the adjacent yards, which not only made the neighbors happy but also improved the vistas from the second-floor rear patio. “We created a greenbelt in what was a concrete jungle,” Stringer says.

Likewise, bricks were used to break up the predominantly limestone pavement and help to define distinct areas for reading, dining and conversation. “The beautiful inlays feel almost like rugs,” says Baldwin. “We wanted it to feel like the inside was sort of spilling out, so when they throw open the kitchen doors, it’s all one experience.”

In the winter, Stringer puts the furniture into storage and fills up the planters with greens and white birch branches. Come summer, the muted palette gives way to orchids, vermillion and other flowering plants. “It continues to evolve,” Stringer explains. “One of the wonderful things about gardens is that they aren’t static.”

Weather permitting, the couple can usually be found in the backyard, either reading in the teak chair by the fountain or relaxing in the living area against the garage, where a matrix of orchids in clay pots creates a colorful backdrop for a teak sofa and chairs. “It’s a riot of color,” says Stringer. “When I walk into the garden, I’m transported to a different place.” ■

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MAIN PHOTO AND LOUNGE PHOTO BY DOUG
SNOWER; GREENERY PHOTO BY HOERR SCHAUDT

