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HIGH ON *Style*

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Clever Changes for a Terraced
Landscape Result in an Inviting
European-Style Desert Garden



The backyard of this hillside home is actually located at the front of the property, where panoramic views and poolside seating entice visitors year-round. The oversized European vessels were custom-aged and filled with succulents, including flowering kalanchoe as well as native rock from the hillside. The hardscape surface is imported Italian tile.

DESIGN TIP:

A fire pit designed with openings on the sides allows the fire to keep legs and feet warm.

IMAGINATIVE landscape designs rarely happen by chance. Most of the time, they are the result of smart decision making, a creative eye, and loads of hard work. This was the case at the home of one couple relocating from Canada, who embraced their new desert lifestyle in the foothills of east Scottsdale.

When the pair purchased their newly built house in 2010, it came with a basic landscape package that did not suit their needs. So before moving in, they contacted environmental designer Troy Bankord, a Phoenix Home & Garden Master of the Southwest, to bring the grounds to life.

“Given the mountainside setting and the fact that the usable garden footprint was limited, my vision was to create functional spaces to entertain and live, as well as to create pocket gardens and sitting areas,” explains Bankord. In addition, the man of the house wanted a fire feature, while his wife requested flowers and color everywhere. “Those were the only parameters,” Bankord says. “The rest was up to me.”

Various issues needed to be addressed, including erosion of the hillside, exposed sprinkler lines, non-native vegetation that did not suit the setting, and a paved terrace that was uninviting and served little purpose. When the structural problems were resolved, the landscape designer added “charm, softness and character” to the lot by removing pavers, creating large planting



Opposite: Previously clad in stark-looking pavers, the garden terrace is now top-dressed with decomposed Madison Gold granite to bring the desert into the landscape. Sweeps of Berkeley sedge grass and Iceberg roses, along with annuals and perennials, border the sitting area. In a departure from the standard circular fire pit, Troy Bankord designed one in a diamond shape with four cutouts, making the fire more visible and allowing heat to escape near the ground to warm legs and feet.

Left: Throughout the garden, containers are filled with vertical and cascading succulents that make a connection to the desert, yet add a hint of lushness.

beds and bringing in desert trees, shrubs and cascading plants. “The home is pretty heavy and large in scale, and it needed mature trees to give the illusion that it was nestled into the land,” he explains.

The main outdoor living area—which consists of a covered patio, upper garden terrace and lower pool terrace—was entirely hardscaped when Bankord came on board. To create balance, soften the space and screen a neighboring home, he installed Swan Hill olive trees on each side of the yard. Their gray-green foliage evokes the feel of an Italian garden, which suits the home’s Old-World European architecture. He also brought in scores of plants, including spiral topiaries, ornamental grasses, herbs for fragrance and climbing roses.

One major change took place near an open stairway that descends from the patio to the garden terrace. “The area under the stairway was unsightly,” Bankord recalls. “So I designed a wall to screen it; then used it as a backdrop for a fountain.” Citrus trees are espaliered on a nearby wall, offering fragrance and European charm.

Other changes include the addition of a curved seat wall, a diamond-shaped fire pit, outdoor furnishings, a semi-formal cutting garden, and oversized pots brimming with cascading succulents. Reports Bankord: “The garden is now open and continuous, yet intimate with all four elements represented—fire, water, air and earth—plus sunset views to boot!”





Opposite: To screen an unattractive area below the stairway, a fountain wall was constructed and fitted with pairs of custom-carved cantera scuppers and wall medallions. Water pours into a cantera-capped tiled basin that also serves as a seat wall. A European-style planter atop the wall is packed with plants, as is a nearby cutting garden. Copper torches provide mood lighting.

Above: For a more organic feel, a shady spot that connects to the garden terrace was planted with columnar *Podocarpus* growing up the walls, plus giant lily turf and Berkeley sedge grass. The door, which leads to a storage area, was aged to mimic an old wooden one with iron clavos.

Right: Adjacent to the fountain is a semicircular banco that was situated around a campfire-style fire feature to maximize the enjoyment of sunset and city views. Purple-blooming Green Cloud sage suits the desert setting.

See Sources.

