



Backyard Bliss

AFTER

By Julia LeConte

A Toronto family turns their bleak yard into the ultimate retreat

When Elizabeth Davey and her husband, Doug, purchased their north Toronto home in 2000, part of the appeal was the walkout basement and the almost untouched, park-like backyard. It was a blank slate.

When their existing, simplistic upper-story deck started to rot in 2006, it was finally time for a complete overhaul. The Daveys wanted a no-maintenance deck that was bigger than the existing one, to accommodate their love of entertaining. They were after a different look to their entire yard that would include landscaping and a hot tub. They began with the most pressing issue. “We just started looking for a deck company, and my husband saw these Trex products,” says Davey. “So we went on the Trex website looking for contractors who would be able

to work with the product in this area.”

They found Todd Mounsey of Your Deck Co., located in Richmond Hill. “We clicked, which you have to do when you hire a contractor,” says Davey. After the initial meeting, and after obtaining the clients’ wish list, Mounsey came back with a multi-level deck design that perfectly suited the Daveys’ graded backyard. “That deck was really the only option for that space,” says Mounsey, “and it worked in well for the hot tub.”

Mounsey’s clients were very happy with his plan, which included a spiral staircase going from the top to the bottom level. Mounsey used Trex Brasilia in burnished amber, which is 100% recycled product — 50% wood and 50% polyethylene plastic. Unlike the cedar deck that was rotting off the back of the Daveys’ house, Trex has a 25-year warranty. “You don’t get the splintering and the splitting... No painting involved, no sanding, no maintenance with that respect,” says Mounsey.

For the railings, Mounsey installed

Deckorators aluminum pickets from Maurizio Bertato’s Liv Outdoor International, Inc. The pickets (or balusters) are $\frac{3}{4}$ in. thick — thinner than traditional wood pickets. “It gives a lighter, more airy feel and increases the view into the yard,” says Mounsey. Furthermore, unlike wood or cast-iron balusters, they won’t rust or rot and there isn’t any maintenance.

But the yard still wouldn’t be complete when the last nail was hammered into the deck. The landscaping was also an essential part of the Daveys’ dream backyard, and had to be carefully planned in conjunction with the construction. Mounsey called on



BEFORE

Photos courtesy of Your Deck Company



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Kristen Farewell of Premier Landscaping & Design (the company has a long-standing working relationship with Your Deck Co.) to help complete the project.

"They had some grading going on in their backyard, so there wasn't a lot of usable space," says Farewell. "It wasn't a bad thing at all — it actually made for a really interesting design." She adds that although many of her clients think grading will hold them back, it actually allows for different levels and separate "rooms."

Farewell did a couple of different designs, and tweaked them according to the Daveys' budget and preferences. The Daveys wanted stone steps going down the side of the house, but Farewell's plans called for something a little more elaborate. "We were just going to do the stairs, but once we saw the plan, we decided to do the whole thing," says Davey, laughing. The "whole thing" included a walkout, flagstone patio — one of Farewell's favourite aspects of the yard. "That's a really labour-intensive patio," she says. "But it's beautiful because we were able to actually cut each piece and fit it really tightly together."

Davey needed low-maintenance gardens, as she and her family are often away at the cottage during the summer. "I love the way they flow over the huge rocks," she says of her perennial-filled beds, "and Kristen's done a good job planting things that attract tons of butterflies and bees."

Among the yard's many plants are dogwoods and a Japanese maple. "A big thing

for the Daveys was that they wanted to feel like they were at a cottage or a really nice, relaxing resort," says Farewell. "We actually installed a firepit at the back."

The backyard was made over very quickly — "from start to finish, maybe six weeks," says Davey. The physical construction was even shorter. Mounsey estimates it took about four days for the deck and two weeks for the landscaping. "We definitely work together as a team," says Mounsey of his and Farewell's respective companies.

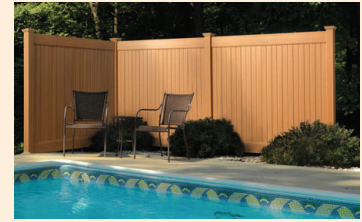
"We've done a lot of renovations in this house and the outside was the easiest," says Davey. "They said they were going to come on a certain date and they came... and there were no cost surprises."

This will be the fourth summer that Elizabeth and Doug can enjoy their space, and their sons, Keith and Jeffrey, will share the barbecue, hot tub and firepit with their friends, who they host often.

The Daveys also host some unexpected visitors from time to time; to the family's pleasant surprise, the renovation has attracted an abundance of wildlife — blue jays, cardinals, hawks, groundhogs and even a fox sunning himself on the back hill. "Everything is proportional to the size of the property, so the garden doesn't overwhelm the rest of the backyard. I like that it all fits together," says Davey. "It works perfectly. We're quite pleased with it." •

Fresh Fences

You've got your dream backyard... Now what? How about some privacy, please!



Toronto-based fencing company Ageless Fence produces quality enclosures in a number of materials, including vinyl, aluminum and PVC stone. Why not use old-standby, natural wood? Unlike wood, Ageless materials last decades with little-to-no maintenance; are termite-, fungus-, and dry-rot-free, and are graffiti resistant. Best of all? No need to repaint!

PVC fencing is already a mature industry in the United States, but it's just recently started to catch on in Canada. It's still difficult to convince us Canadians to build with something a little more durable than pressure-treated wood — even though we live in the harshest of climes.

"When the snow melts people wake up," says Ageless Fence owner, Doron Opher. "In Canada we have extremes in moisture and cold, snow and wind — and yet you're putting the worst wood outside to deal with all that."

Yes, there is the issue of cost: for an Ageless Fence PVC product, you're looking at about \$45 per foot (as opposed to \$25 for wood). But the long-term benefits are impossible to ignore. With a wood fence, you'll have an old product in five years — not to mention the maintenance and that most abhorrent of chores: painting the picket fence, endured by both real people and fictional characters like Tom Sawyer and Archie Andrews.

What's the number one reason people are still buying wood? Lack of awareness, says Opher. But it's hard to make cost-saving excuses anymore, knowing that there's a product out there with a lifetime warranty. Opher sums it up for busy homeowners in one sentence, "The way the fence looks when we're done is the way it looks forever." Music to our ears.

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