

LIVING WELL IN THE TWIN CITIES

spoices

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SPRING! 2013

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**A SUN-KISSED
LESSON PLAN**
Learning a whole
new way to garden.

IN EVERY ISSUE GREAT PLACES TO EAT SHOP PLAY



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SIMONS LANDSCAPING



From bare to blooms

It took several phases and a few years to layer a South St. Paul yard with flowers and color, but a family team pulled it off.

BY MOLLY GUTHREY

For David Simons, gardening is a family affair. "I worked at Zywiec's Garden Center, which my uncle owns, when I was in high school," says David. "I did minor landscaping projects — planting trees or whatever came through his doors. That's when I learned I liked being outside way better than being inside."

The seed was thus planted for his career path, which continued at Gerten's and now at Simons Landscaping in South St. Paul.

David, 33, has operated his own landscaping business in his hometown since 2000. But when it came time for Simons and his wife, Tara, to renovate their own yard, they didn't work alone: They called on his mom.

"It was definitely a collaboration," David says.

Actually, David didn't need to literally call his mom: She is one of his employees at Simons Landscaping.

"Yes, I am employed by my son," says Patti Simons. "It has been my best career choice — and I knew that this project was not only going to be creatively rewarding, but one I could also personally enjoy after it was completed."





phase 1: demolition

phase 2: 1,000 square feet
of tumbled paver patio

phase 3: sweeping circular drive

SUMMIT AVENUE & SOUTH ST. PAUL

The property — a home on 2½ lots in the city of South St. Paul — had some issues.

"It was pretty bare, not very appealing at all," David says. "Plus, the sidewalks were basically next to the house. The concrete was poured in a way that every time it rained, water would flow right along the foundation. The home was built in 1946, so water easily found its way into the house."

The house itself, though, was exactly what the couple wanted.

"I've always wanted an all-brick house and Tara always wanted to buy an older house and re-do it," David says. "This one sort of fell into our laps: I was doing a landscaping project at a neighbor's house and noticed it was for sale in the fall of 2004. We purchased it and moved in in February 2005."

"Before that, I was living in a townhouse in Woodbury," says Tara. "We were newly engaged and intrigued by older neighborhoods and older homes. We were eager, but totally naïve about what it would involve."

First, David set about evoking the style and formality of Summit Avenue, the magnificent Victorian boulevard in St. Paul.

"I've always liked that style of house and style of landscaping," David says.

Of course, this wasn't a Summit Avenue manor, but a more modest structure in the working-class suburb of South St. Paul.

"I would describe the feel of the garden as having an 'informal English' slant," Patti says. "There is formality with some of the plant material selection and placement, but a more casual approach in other areas."

PAVERS & PATIOS

The new yard emerged in phases. The first phase, in 2005, involved addressing the grade issues, tearing out sidewalks and adding an elaborate window well system with prep for egress windows.

"We started over with a clean palette," Patti says. "There was nothing on the property that had been there before except the front stoop, which leads to a curved and charming staircase designed by the original

homeowner's wife. Even the trees had to be removed. We were starting fresh."

If the first phase was demo, the second was the rebuild:

"We put in a patio in 2006," says David. "It's a tumbled paver patio."

This is where Tara had some definite opinions to share with the professional landscaping team of her husband and her mother-in-law.

"The only request I had was that the patio be large enough," says Tara, an interior designer who works at Creative Lighting in St. Paul.

"We have so many gatherings in the summer, I wanted to make sure the patio was like an extended part of the house — like an extension of our living room," Tara says. "It needed to be large enough for multiple pieces of furniture. We also plan to add an outdoor kitchen, so we designed it to be large enough for the expansion."

The patio is large — large enough to complement the lifestyle of a family with two small children and one big dog.



phase 4: plants!

Arborvitae and boxwood evergreens provide a backing for the white tones of tardiva hydrangeas, a Pee Gee hydrangea tree, rose mallow and anemones that line the driveway and the brick house.



"It's roughly 1,000 square feet, big enough for the kids to ride their big wheels and bikes on," David says. "We have a dining area, and off the dining area, we have a circular, built-in fire pit."

Besides its large footprint, the style of the patio's Interlock Concrete Products paver — a buff-colored, weathered look — complements the exterior of the brick home.

In 2007, the third phase brought a circular driveway, built with another style of Interlock pavers.

"Part of the reason the backyard was appealing to me was that there was just enough room for a turnaround driveway," says David. "The kids like to pretend it's a track, and I like the charm of it."

Tara likes the practicality: "Our home has a detached garage, like so many of that era. With a circular driveway, I can park closer to the house when I'm unloading groceries."

HOLLYHOCKS & ROSES

David relied on his mother's expertise for the fourth phase, the plantings. "It was easy working with my mom on this project since

we already work together daily," says David.

It was easy for Mom, too.

"My job was to incorporate the plants to provide color and beautification which would enhance the hardscapes and provide low maintenance," Patti says, "and to provide privacy which was an important requirement for Dave and Tara since they live on a main street in town."

Evergreens were part of the solution: Black Hills spruce, Skyrocket junipers, Pyramidal and Yellow Ribbon arborvitae provided an elegant, natural fence.

"They wanted that classical Summit Avenue appeal, which I felt I brought in with the evergreen material that was chosen," Patti says. "The Skyrocket junipers are a backdrop for a very traditional, classic water fountain. And, since I wanted year-round green, the driveway is lined with boxwood, and so is the patio."

There's also an oak tree and an autumn blaze maple tree. Plantings close to the house were selected with particular precision.

"It's a red house, so we didn't want to put reds or oranges against it," says Patti.



"The plant material complements the house, like creams and whites, yellows, evergreens. Tara, with her background in lighting and design, has a real knack at mixing colors and textures, which is especially important for the container gardens."

The containers are not just for accent — they are a substantial piece of the landscape.

"I do all of the freestanding planters, which usually are quite a project for me, because we usually have 25 of them in the summer," Tara says. "The funny thing is, I did not have a green thumb at all before I met David. He and Patti had to teach me everything."

The container gardens "are very romantic and draping, with complimenting colors like chartreuses, yellow, creams and whites," Patti says.

That fits in nicely with the rest of the landscape: The plantings are reminiscent of a bygone era — old-fashioned hollyhocks, roses, lilacs.

"Things you'd see in Grandma and Grandpa's garden," says Patti.





PIG ROASTERS & TIKI TORCHES

Now the family is concentrating on interior renovations of their home.

"When we bought the house, I wanted to focus on the interior — of course — but David — of course — wanted to concentrate on the outside of our home, especially since that would represent his business, which is based in the town where we live," Tara says. "This is why our yard looks so amazing. Now we're working on getting the interior to match. It's a work in progress."

Unfortunately, this is not as much fun for David.

"The outside is a lot easier for me, because I know what I'm doing out there," David says.

His mood lifts immediately when he is asked about future phases for the grounds.

"We entertain a lot, so I'm having a custom outdoor pig roaster grill built in our garden area," he says. "I will have a bar built into the side of the garage which overlooks

the patio so when you sit down at the bar, you'll be looking into the man cave/garage."

The garage isn't so pretty now — but it will be, says David.

"I will tear off the vinyl siding," he says. "We'll replace it with natural stone and cedar shakes."

But, for now, there are many other pretty things to look at in the garden.

"When you come onto the property, there is something pleasant to view '360,' from the curb to the alley," Patti says. "From the mail carrier walking up to the front of the house to the garbage man in the alley — everyone has a great view. I love to create environments that are beautiful from all angles — when I'm designing a patio and I know there's going to be a round or oblong table there, I think about the view for each person sitting at that table. I want to make sure they all have something nice to look at."

"I like to 'cocoon' hardscapes areas with plant material that will look gorgeous in

close view for most of the season and not look tired and expired," Patti says.

The family's business specializes in "landscape makeovers" and Patti has experienced the magic of rethinking her own yard, too.

"Outside living is so limited here, it's so nice to be able to truly enjoy our outdoor spaces," Patti says. "I have lived on my property for 30 years, but I have never enjoyed it as much as I have since putting in a patio 12 years ago."

"It's been totally life-changing. We've hosted many special events — graduations, birthdays, wedding and baby showers, large and small family and neighborhood parties. But probably my favorite occasion is when I get home from work to find my husband has lit the tiki torches and party candles and has a glass of wine waiting for me. It's our little escape." ■

Molly Guthrey, a Pioneer Press reporter and columnist, is a frequent contributor to Spaces.



**“Things you’d see
in Grandma and Grandpa’s
garden.”** – PATTI SIMONS

Top row, from left on opposite page: Rose mallow, blazing star, foxglove, black-eyed Susan, hollyhock

Bottom row, from left: Autum Joy sedum, Fireglow sedum, blue-eyed grass and bugleweed