

Strong design elements merge with lush, vibrant plantings to give this garden sophisticated appeal.

Alison Garwood-Jones

The owner of this Toronto garden, an art director for a food magazine, wanted to be inspired by the colours and textures of nature while working in her ground-level studio. With the help of landscape architect Ron Holbrook and a panel of floor-to-ceiling windows, she clearly has the best seat in the house.

“Most gardens are flat, but this one was on a slope,” says Holbrook, who runs Ronald Holbrook and Associates Landscape Architects Inc. “We took advantage of that, trucked in enough planting soil to make a four-meter incline, then added retaining walls for a series of terraced beds.”

Now, a small area for intimate dining sits off the ground floor of the house, while a stairway leads up to an expansive paved patio for entertaining. The slabs of snow-white Algonquin limestone “are very architectural,” says Holbrook, “but the plantings really soften things up.”

From alliums in spring to peonies in summer and black-eyed Susans in fall, the flowers offer a calming effect, while Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum* cvs.) and Skyline honeylocusts (*Gleditsia triacanthos* forma *inermis* ‘Skycole’) salute the sky. It’s as if the canvas of the garden has been lifted up to meet the owner’s gaze.

NINE WAYS TO GET THE LOOK.

1. Soften the scene. Corten steel planters (pg 41) filled with garden carmint (*Nepeta x faassenii*), fountain grass (*Pennisetum* spp.) and dwarf Hinoki falsecypress (*Chamaecyparis obtusa* ‘Nana Gracilis’) form the visual heart of the garden.
2. To break up the expanse of hard-edged Algonquin limestone retained walls, Holbrook incorporated a water feature (pages 42 and 43) coupled with a delicate red Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum* var. *atropurpureum*) and ‘P.J.M.’ rhododendrons. Holbrook chose alliums for their modern shape. Japanese painted ferns (*Athyrium niponicum*) provide the green canvas underneath.
3. Horsetail grass (*Equisetum hyemale*), although invasive, grows well at the edges of ponds, and here was planted in a sunken container (page 43). It’s rigid form contrasts sharply with a frilly water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*), which unfurls with blue flowers in the summer.



(Click on the image for published article)

4. Erase the divide between indoors and out. A forest of red and orange blown-glass tree trunks by artist Dale Chihuly emerge from the floor of the living room and spread to the balcony outside.
5. To enhance the architectural juxtaposition create a mélange of soft and hard forms. Holbrook contrasted sage-toned ‘Blue Boy’ hosta with a delicate pink spray of heuchera and a dash of graph hyacinth.
6. Leave room for entertaining. The upper patio was conceived to accommodate up to 100 guests. The outdoor kitchen counter, designed by architect Michael Taylor, includes a Viking professional grill and a sink as well as a bar fridge.
7. Give your garden direction. A limestone path takes you past grape hyacinth, ‘Blue Boy’ hosta, heuchera and terraced planters spilling over with garden catmint (*Nepeta x faassenii*). The small patio is just outside the owner’s

studio. In the background, a katsura tree (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*), Scotch pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), service berry (*Amelanchier* ssp.) and eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*) sway in the wind. Japanese blood grass (*Imperata cylindrica* 'Rubra') is starting to sprout beneath tufts of giant Eulalia grass (*Miscanthus x giganteus*), while wintercreeper (*Euonymus fortunei* cvs.) and climbing hydrangea (*Hydrangea anomala* ssp. *petiolaris*) clamber across the expansive sweep of the stone walls.

8. Make use of all the space. Holbrook tucked this three-by-11 metre lap pool at the northern-most edge of the garden so it wouldn't dictate the layout. A European beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) hedge running along the property line turns a gorgeous copper colour in the autumn and really helps to define the space as an outdoor room.

9. Create room for relaxation. Guests gravitate to the Richard Schultz lounge chairs when they hear the hypnotic sound of the water feature.