Shining a Light on a New England Masterpiece

By Peter Stephens, Dan Gordon Landscape Architects

Originally designed and built in the 1930’s, this Tudor style home is set within one of Boston’s fast-growing suburban neighborhoods. As is common in Boston’s older suburbs, this neighborhood has seen change in recent years with many of the original homes being razed and properties subdivided to make way for newer larger homes, which meet the needs of today’s contemporary family.

Left: Located in the small suburban hamlet of Wellesley, Mass., this project sought to modernize a historic neighborhood estate. Openness and connectivity were the driving forces that inspired the imagination of the property. Linking the interior and exterior spaces was accomplished by introducing glass walls that extend the interior rooms to a series of cascading outdoor rooms. The glass walls along the length of the home and the open passageway allow architectural light to spill out into the landscape. Illuminating the garden, while lights within the garden reveal the unfolding landscape from within the house. Outdoor lighting was a key component of the design and facilitated the creation of a variety of spatial experiences.
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In conceiving the transformation of the property, the clients expressed a desire to incorporate a pavilion with a fireplace and changing room, swimming pool, generous dining terrace, grill, event space, sports lawn, enhanced privacy plantings, and a rectangular driveway and foundation plantings. The design team worked closely to develop a concept of breaking down the walls, which divided the interior rooms of the house and pavilion from the landscape. It was a primary goal of the design team to embrace the landscape as an extension of the architectural space, thereby enhancing the spatial experience, unifying the property.

Unification of the interior and exterior spaces was accomplished by introducing glass walls that extend the interior rooms toward a series of cascading outdoor rooms that gently descend the site. The glass walls along the length of the house and the open pavilion create a strong connection between the interior and exterior spaces. Majestic oak trees create a ceiling over the dining terrace and event space, facilitating the creation of a variety of spatial experiences. Both levels of the cascading landscape become...
Above: Lawn stairs present a challenge when it comes to lighting. The lack of vertical elements to place fixtures on, and the lack of planting to place the fixtures within, makes it difficult to provide lighting that is not overly invasive.

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Top Right: Bluestone walks interrupt the lawn treads providing well defined paths for movement between spaces. Where paths are flanked by planting, Excelsior path lights are used. The design of these fixtures, further adds to the linear expression within the garden.

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more open as it descends the site. The terraces culminate in an infinity waterfall at the pool, enhancing the visual connection between the house, terraces and lower lawn. The clean and elegant lines of the modern design are softened with a restrained planting, and open lawn stairs provide edges for the spaces while maintaining a strong connection between them. Linear hardscape and cascading outdoor rooms draw the user through the garden while maximizing the connection across the site.

Construction details were developed that uniquely addressed the site-specific conditions of ledge and mature vegetation. Preservation of the oak grove not only informed the design, but also required the implementation of a plan, which focused on tree health during construction and responded to post-construction impacts. From perforated footing design of paving which promotes aeration and porosity, to amended soils and de-compaction treatments, the construction methods were largely driven by tree preservation. Working with a structural engineer, a strategy was developed to anchor the terraces and structures directly into the bedrock ledge just under the surface, while a sophisticated drainage system captures and recharges the perched groundwater and surface runoff.

The significance of this project is its sensitivity to the historic nature of the site while successfully melding two contrasting design styles to create a modern landscape renovation that sits comfortably within a traditional neighborhood.