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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 a re-imagining of the property. Unifying the interior and outdoor 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 pavilion 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.

PHOTO: GUY AROZ/PHOTO



Traditional style homes continue to be commonplace in the neighborhood and this property significantly contributes to the established neighborhood character. Both the landscape and residence were outdated and not equipped for the needs of modern life. The existing home was segmented into small dark rooms with low ceilings and limited connections between the home's interior and the landscape. Substantial grade change at the rear yard resulted in the existing landscape being fragmented into two separated areas, an upper area along the back of the house, and a lower lawn and tennis court in disrepair.

Having admired the property for years, the clients finally had the opportunity to purchase the 2.45-acre estate in 2013. The estate's new owners demonstrated an interest in preserving the rich historic character of the property, while developing an open family oriented home and landscape that would meet their needs. They were also interested in taking advantage of parts of the property that were currently underutilized, strengthening the connections between the spaces to produce a landscape and home well-suited for large gatherings.

“Linear hardscape and cascading outdoor rooms draw the user through the garden...”

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 renovated driveway and foundation planting. 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. Each level of the cascading landscape becomes



Above: With its disc-shaped silhouette, this WAC fixture offers a wide distribution of light output and is adjustable for directional lighting.

Above: Down lighting within the pool house provides ample light for function. The goal was to create an architectural space in harmony with the outdoors. Lighting within the space is adjustable allowing the user to select the appropriate intensity to fit the occasion.

PHOTO: CHRIS WOOD PHOTOS

Left: Shopped terraces take advantage of the estate's natural slopes. Embracing the grade change through the implementation of broad stairs and cascading spaces promotes openness within the garden. Path lights mark the paved walkways within the lawn stairs which are flanked at each end by stone planters.

PHOTO: CHRIS WOOD PHOTOS

Middle: The pavilion serves as a transition space. It is a central element serving both the formal dining and event spaces, as well as the informal active recreation spaces of the pool and sports lawn. The landscape flows seamlessly through the pavilion. A horse sculpture is prominently situated to be viewed from all interior and exterior spaces. The artwork becomes a landmark within the garden and adds a whimsical quality to the property.

PHOTO: CHRIS WOOD PHOTOS

Project Team
 Landscape Architect:
 Dan Gordon Landscape Architects
 Architect: LDA Architects & Interiors
 A/E Specialist: Boston Audio Video
 Electrician: Bond Electric
 Landscape Contractor: R.P. Marzilli and
 Companies
 General Contractor: Sea-Dar Construction

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 Pool Cabana: Ceiling pendants
 CHARGE LEDIME Quick Connect Fixture
 as manufactured by WAC Lighting
 Smart LED

All fixtures are 12 volt with a mix of halogen and LED luminaires.



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.

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.

PHOTO: JERRY GIBB/PHOTO

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.

PHOTO: JERRY GIBB/PHOTO

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. —



British Vell Astilbe
Astilbe x arendel
"Bridal Veil"



American Holly
Ilex opaca



Green Sheen Japanese Spurge
Pachysandra terminalis
"Green Sheen"



Common boxwood
Buxus sempervirens



Oakleaf hydrangea
Hydrangea quercifolia
"Snow Queen"