



THE INSPIRED HOME IS...  
**A CREATIVE RETREAT**

A DOWNTOWN BACKYARD BECOMES A CHIC, GLOBALLY-INSPIRED COURTYARD, COMPLETE WITH ARTIST'S STUDIO.

Text by **STACY LEE KONG** | Photography by **DONNA GRIFFITH**

You'd never know it looking at the lush, romantic courtyard in interior designer Theresa Casey's Toronto backyard, but for years, it was a "bumpy wasteland." "There were weeds and vines that were covering everything," she says. "It was rocky, and just very sad." But then, inspired by trips to Europe and India, Theresa and her husband, graphic designer Robert Gray, hatched a plan to turn the underutilized space into an urban oasis like the courtyards they saw on their travels. A beautiful yard wasn't the only goal, though—they also wanted a more functional living space and a clearer connection between the front and back yards. In addition, their garage, previously just used for storage, was transformed into a creative retreat for Theresa. Today, the yard is a welcoming space with multiple living zones.

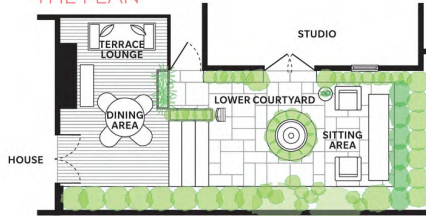
LEFT: A row of swamp cedars (far left) give the yard privacy (and replaced a falling-down fence), while tendrils of ivy everywhere add a romantic note.



Toronto interior designer Theresa Casey in her eclectic back garden.

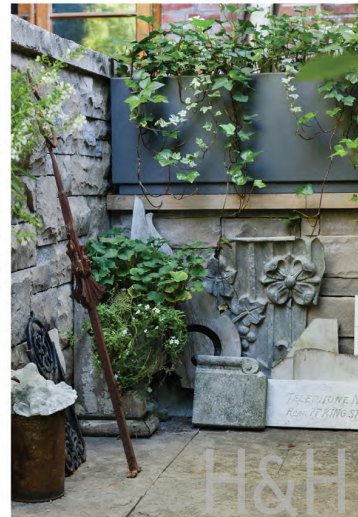


THE PLAN



< PLAN THE ZONES

The first thing Theresa and Robert did was figure out how they wanted the 25' x 50' space to work. Looking at different options, the couple eventually landed on a configuration of four zones. The terrace, which is just off the house, is used for everyday dining. Theresa chose Bertou chairs and a Saarinen table as modern counterpoints to the yard's old world romance. "Injecting those contemporary elements brings it into the now," she says. A lower courtyard is great for mingling during dinner parties, a second sitting area at the back of the yard is a cool escape during hot summer days, and the studio is a haven for Theresa. **Design, pillows, Casey Design/Planning Group; landscaping, Design Landscape Contracting; table, chairs, Quasi Modo.**



A MIX TEXTURES

Theresa achieved a rich, layered look by incorporating a variety of materials, including stone, brick, wood, peeling paint and lots of foliage. "It makes for a visual treat when you're back here, because it's not just one material or one configuration," says Robert. A vignette of architectural remnants by the entry gate gives the space a greater sense of age. The weathered stone is a nice contrast to the clean metal planter that tops the terrace's retaining wall above it.



*"The studio is my place to write or paint or play piano. It's a sanctuary where I can really be creative"*

> CHOOSE ELEMENTS WITH A SENSE OF HISTORY

Incorporating vintage finds into the design plan helped create a collected feel. The fountain was originally a planter, but Theresa was determined to have it as the centerpiece of the garden, so she retrofitted it with a hose to create a water feature. At the shady foot of the yard, juniper bushes frame a long stone bench. During the day, the couple lounge back here, reading or seeking refuge from the sun, but during parties, they can move the wicker chairs and set up a table to create an outdoor dining room. **Fountain, Decorum Decorative Finds; bench, Casey Design/Planning Group.**



With the chairs replaced by a dining table, this area can seat 20.

A ADAPT INTERIOR STYLE TO OUTSIDE SPACES

The peeling paint and weathered hardware on the doors leading into Theresa's studio make them look like something straight out of *The Secret Garden*, but they were actually made in Egypt in the 1920s, when the Art Deco movement was going strong. "It's perfect because our house is Art Deco. Inside is much more refined, whereas the garden is very textured, but the link is that they're from the same period," says Theresa. **Doors, The Door Store; chair, ChairTableLamp.**



RIGHT: A galvanized steel bucket and rusted chair have an appropriately weathered look. **Flowers, Sheridan Nurseries.**

> WORK WITH EXISTING ARCHITECTURE

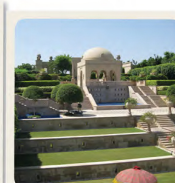
Exposed brick and wood beams hint at the studio's past as a garage, while the walls are adorned with found objects, postcards and artwork that Theresa has been collecting for years. A new skylight floods the room with light, enhancing the welcoming atmosphere of the space.

BELOW: A haunting black and white image from the 1930s sets off an ever-evolving display in Theresa's studio.



Old clay tiles, from France, & a rustic touch to the studio.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIR Theresa Casey's urban courtyard was inspired by her travels.



During trips abroad, Theresa snapped photos of design details that would add old world charm to her garden. Her influences include the lush foliage and high walls of a courtyard in Jaipur (far left) and natural stone at a public garden in Agra, India (center), and wrought-iron details in a private Sicilian garden (left).

