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IDEAS

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# captivating warmth

A spec house's cozy sitting area helps stage a sale

**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT** Stephen D. Prassas, RLA ASLA, Prassas Landscape Studio LLC, Chicago, IL, 773-879-9048  
**PHOTOGRAPHY BY** STEPHEN D. PRASSAS

**D**ESPITE THE SLUMP IN THE ECONOMY, SOME BUYERS STILL GRAVITATE toward large, pricey homes—like the traditional brick houses that developer Middlefork Capital LLC constructed in Chicago's Lakeview area. Landscape architect Stephen D. Prassas, ASLA, was brought in to maximize all outdoor areas, including a rooftop deck and this smaller side yard. Located by the breezeway that links the garage and house, the side yard offers privacy and a sense of enclosure. Prassas and Burns + Beyerl Architects envisioned it as a place where family and friends would gather. The architects decided to tuck a firebox into the garage wall; they made it large enough to burn several logs and framed it out in the same limestone used to accent the brick. To save money and emphasize a casual feel, Prassas put down a “floor” of crushed pea gravel with some large paver stepping-stones. “We knew...that this would help make [the house] appeal to buyers,” he says. He also planted boxwood, viburnum, geraniums and variegated hostas, most of which will stay green year-round and survive Chicago's cold, long winter.

## >> Behind the Scenes

**>> CHALLENGE:** Appeal to a wide variety of tastes, since home was originally built as a spec house  
**>> SOLUTION:** Finished space links house and garage, and includes a casual sitting area with a fireplace and plantings  
**>> SPECIAL FEATURE:** Fireplace

with chimney fit into back of garage  
**>> MAIN PLANTS:** Eastern Redbud, Wintergreen Boxwood, Compact Korean Spice Viburnum, Sarcoxie Upright Wintercreeper, Biokovo Cranesbill  
**>> ZONE RANGE:** 5A–5B

## ideas we love

- 1 **LOOK OF FIREPLACE** Firebox and chimney have a built-in look
- 2 **DESIGN SIMPLICITY** Pea gravel ground cover and a relaxed ambience will appeal to a wide range of potential homebuyers
- 3 **SENSE OF SECLUSION** Tucked along a side yard, the space provides a sense of privacy from neighbors and street sounds
- 4 **DRAMATIC LIGHTING** Sconces on house and uplights to illuminate trees



# rooftop magic

## >> Behind the Scenes

**>> CHALLENGE:** Gain private outdoor living and garden spaces in a busy urban area that has lots of neighbors nearby—particularly those able to view the space from other high-rises

**>> SOLUTION:** Created canopied pergolas that effectively divide and shield areas from neighbors and sun

**>> SPECIAL FEATURES:** Fire pit; koi fish planter; traditional English-style cutting garden; area set aside for a shed to store bicycles, gardening tools and outdoor furniture

**>> MAIN PLANTS:** Honeysuckle Vine, Papyrus, Japanese Silver Grass, False Indigo, Five-Leaf Akebia Vine, The Rocket Ligularia, Black-Eyed Susan

**>> ZONE RANGE:** 5A–5B

## Country charm meets city style in this Chicago rooftop, complete with pond, fire pit and English cutting garden

**J**UST BECAUSE THEY MOVED TO DOWNTOWN CHICAGO, that didn't stop a native Arizonian and his wife from wanting a slew of outdoor amenities: a fire pit; koi pond; English-style garden; and spaces to sit, eat and relax. Luckily, the deck off their two-bedroom condo offered the space, and landscape architect Stephen Prassas knew how to fit everything in as well as make the garden thrive in the often windy, cold climate. Since neighbors had outdoor spaces that looked down on the deck, Prassas needed

to ensure privacy—without closing off views or light. Steel pergolas separate “rooms;” a canvas covers the dining section. Floor surfaces were built atop a drainage board for protection. Because there was no lawn to plant flowers, Prassas constructed large planters—one for the water garden, with koi; one as a divider between the dining and living areas, with shade-loving plants; and one for the English-style cutting garden, a special request of the wife. Throughout the deck, Prassas interspersed clay pots planted with annuals.

**DESIGNER** Stephen Prassas, ASLA, Prassas Landscape Studio LLC, Chicago, IL, prassas.net, 773-879-9048  
**PHOTOGRAPHY BY** MARTIN KONOPACKI

## ideas we love

- 1 **HIGH-RISE SURPRISE** An English cutting garden thrives in raised beds that are also easy on the back
- 2 **OUTDOOR ROOM** Clever design allowed for a koi pond, fire pit, and separate dining and living areas
- 3 **STORAGE SHED** houses bikes, garden tools and furniture in the winter months
- 4 **CANOPY-STYLE PERGOLAS** separate zones and stylishly protect from sun and rain



## problem solvers



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# no more flooding

From city lot to Japanese rain garden with pavers and pebbles to eliminate flooding

**T**HE TINY YARD CAUSED A BIG PROBLEM: basement flooding when it rained heavily. “The water had nowhere to go,” says landscape architect Stephen Prassas, ASLA, who was hired to solve that problem. The homeowners also wanted a Japanese feeling suggested through simple materials and plantings. Prassas laid bluestone and left spaces at the sides of the site for river pebbles and plantings. In between, he inserted ribbons of more pebbles to help the water seep into the sandy earth. He also connected the existing downspout from the roof to four rain barrels, so water can be recycled.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT **Stephen Prassas, RLA ASLA**, Prassas Landscape Studio LLC, Chicago, IL, prassas.net, 773-879-9048 PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDA OYAMA BRYAN

## >> Behind the Scenes

**>> CHALLENGES:** Harness storm water runoff; incorporate a host of functions into the garden, despite its small footprint

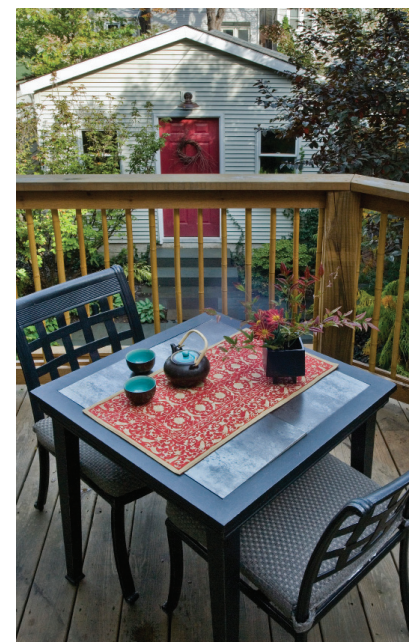
**>> SOLUTION:** Created rain garden with pebbles, stone pavers, rain barrels, bamboo spout and an underground cistern

**>> SPECIAL FEATURES:** Paving with river pebbles in different sizes and linear design; cistern that recirculates water with the flip

of a switch; plants that work well in shade and also help to soften the landscape; raised deck with bamboo railing

**>> MAIN PLANTS:** Kousa Dogwood, Mikkeli Rhododendron, Variegated Solomon's Seal, Cutleaf Staghorn Sumac, Horsetail, Japanese Forest Grass, Geranium

**>> ZONE RANGE:** 5A–5B



## ideas we love

- 1 **CALMING RIVER PEBBLES** control excessive water flow, while also contributing to the Japanese theme
- 2 **APPEALS TO THE SENSES** A bamboo fountain spout produces trickling water sounds, while new plants add bursts of unexpected color
- 3 **RECIRCULATING WATER** When the rain barrels are full, a spout sends water to an underground cistern to be recirculated
- 4 **BAMBOO DECK** Open railings afford better views of the garden below and feel connected to nature