

SMALL WONDER

A RETIRED COUPLE AND A DESIGNER FRIEND TEAM UP TO TURN A TINY AFTERTHOUGHT OF A YARD ON MERCER ISLAND IN WASHINGTON INTO A GARDEN IN FULL.

Beth Baumgardner wanted a billowing wraparound garden of fragrance and color for a new island property she bought with her husband, Lee. His want-list was shorter: No maintenance and no lawn. He likes gardens, but he also likes to enjoy the couple's entry into early retirement. "There couldn't be any lawn," Lee says. "I haven't had grass since I lived in California in the 1970s, and I wasn't going to start now."

The site itself had limitations as well: It was exceedingly small, and it was on a nasty slope. "The lot was so steep you couldn't even walk up it from the front," Lee says. "It was an overgrown lump." >> on 62

Retaining walls were instrumental in carving out level, usable spaces from what was once a difficult slope (*above*). Such terracing is crucial here, because space is at a premium in Lee and Beth Baumgardner's postage-stamp-size yard.

BY CRAIG SUMMERS BLACK PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREW DRAKE PRODUCED BY LORALEE WENGER

Problems, yes. But enter Seattle garden designer Lisa Pfeiffer, and they found the problems could be solved. The three of them had worked together on a previous garden and, as Lee says, "She knows what Beth loves and what I will put up with from a maintenance point of view. I'm probably the only client she fights with."

Early on, the team decided upon designing an entry court out front to accommodate both parking and entertaining. And they devised retaining walls, raised beds, stone planters, and pavers to create level surfaces that could be used for roaming and relaxing. Pfeiffer and Lee nailed down the design, while Pfeiffer and Beth selected the stone. The walls are concrete with stone facings and sandstone caps. The pavers are Pennsylvania bluestone. And the design unifies the front entry, pocket patios on both sides of the house, and a walled mini courtyard out back.

The sunny east-side patio overlooks Lake Washington and is now Beth's favorite spot for reading. Lee had outdoor speakers installed so she can listen to music as she basks.

The other side patio is just off the dining room and kitchen, and this outdoor spot is where the Baumgardners barbecue and serve Sunday brunch or evening cocktails. "But when we entertain," Lee says, "sometimes the women tend to disappear over to the other patio to talk."

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Highly textural plantings fill in cracks between pavers, spill over flagstone, and flow over walls. “We didn’t want any more wall than we needed,” Lee says, and a landscape in layers does much to soften the hardscaping and reduce its mass. “They like a garden that is full,” Pfeiffer says. So now Lee has the perfect yard for kicking back with the morning paper and planning a day to do almost anything—anything, that is, but mow the lawn. 🍷

The entry garden, with a contemporary waterfall and tiered plantings (above), is where the Baumgardners receive guests, often lingering long enough to have a glass of wine. A dining patio hewn from the hillside (below) was conveniently located by the kitchen. Steps (right) connect the sunny patio to the rear courtyard.



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