

SECRET IN SEATTLE

AN OUTDOOR SANCTUARY PROVIDES A SAFE HAVEN FOR ITS OWNERS AND THEIR EXTENSIVE COLLECTIONS

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The first time Seattle landscape designer Daniel Lowery saw the backyard of Tony Nahra and Rand Babcock's 1912 Seattle bungalow, all he could think of was the word "desolate."

"Nothing was usable. There were bare slopes, weeds, overgrown hedges, and sloping lawns that you couldn't stand up straight on. A little old lady had lived there prior, and both the house and the garden were sadly neglected for years," says Lowery. "First, Tony and Rand lovingly restored the house, and then they called me in to complete the garden."

The owner of Queen Anne Gardens and a member of the Association of Professional Landscape Designers, Lowery is well-known for his landscape designs that turn ordinary yards into imaginative, colorful, and useful spaces that fulfill the practical needs of his clients.

Nahra and Babcock travel internationally with their partnership in Legacy Creations, a home décor and accessories design business. They specialize in finding artifacts, antiques, architectural salvage, and odd pieces to use in their designs. On one of their trips, they found ten white terra cotta architectural fragments that had been rescued from a building after an earthquake.

"Tony and Rand had three requirements for me to fulfill in the design," says Lowery. "First, they wanted privacy—a series of outdoor rooms that would be a quiet place for them to unwind when they came home after long stretches on the road and give them a gracious spot to entertain. The second was to incorporate edibles into the landscape—they were interested in doing a bit of foraging in their yard. The third was to incorporate the historic terra cotta pieces effectively."

Lowery's first challenge was to provide a barrier between the neighbor's window and the area designated as the outdoor dining room. A square dining patio, connected

with a circular patio that is furnished with a classic black-and-white striped sofa, chairs, and coffee table, form the backbone of the design for lounging and dining. The spaces are now enclosed by thick English laurel hedges that create a serene backdrop to the furnishings, much like a rich green drapery of leaves. The terra cotta pieces appear throughout the garden as counterpoints to the hedge work, and all the designated rooms share a floor of tumbled Roman pavers, cut and set in a custom pattern.

But the most delightful spot in the garden area is actually inside the house—although it can be accessed only via a pair of French doors from outside. A tiny ten by ten foot room that was once a storage shed is now a lushly furnished garden hideaway, immediately adjacent to the teak outdoor dining table.

The original intent of the room was to provide a secluded spot to read a book or catch an afternoon catnap on an antique iron daybed, but once friends discovered the jewel box space, it became the most requested destination for candlelit dinner parties.

Stepping inside is like walking into a kaleidoscope of European treasures. A giant gilt-framed mirror hangs on richly textured plaster walls, reflecting the greenery outdoors and creating the illusion of doubling the space. Family heirlooms, flea market finds, and keepsakes from Rand and Tony's travels are artfully arranged. A vintage crystal chandelier with tiny linen shades hangs in the center. Brightly hued silks, brought from Asia on a buying trip, cover masses of plump pillows. The extraordinary design talent of Babcock and Nahra is obvious, as they have combined all of their foraged collections into an interior that is as comforting as it is sophisticated.

Outside again, Lowery extended that tapestry effect with a variety of low ground covers, from *Cotula* 'Brass Buttons'







to 'Blue Star Creeper', *Lamium*, and Corsican mint, which spill into one another and carpet the space surrounding the paved areas. Edibles include blueberries, strawberries, and herbs like rosemary and lavender.

Since the garden is relatively small—only 100 by 120 feet—Lowery employed the trick of exaggerating scale by placing throughout the garden several enormous pots and urns, which are dramatically planted with centerpieces and seasonal color.

"Indoors, we're limited by the height of the ceilings and the enclosure of the walls," he comments. "But outdoors, the

sky is our ceiling, and nothing looks better in a really small space than a huge vessel. Besides, larger containers make happier homes for plants, and less work in the long run." Lowery also strives to make his gardens sixty percent evergreen for year-round structure and interest.

Commenting on the final product, Lowery notes, "I know a garden is successful when owners go outside to eat or drink. If they only go outside to toil, maintain, or work, then that's only half of the experience. I tell them, 'Go outside in the garden and live!'" ■