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MARCH 2016

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SPRING 2016

FRESH TAKES

Debut spring decor,
nature-inspired interiors,
and gorgeous gardens





Landscape designer Sara Furlan created a low-maintenance scheme for the downtown mid-rise condominium, since plants and supplies must be brought up 12 floors. This includes specially selected sun- and wind-resistant plants, grown in lightweight aluminum containers.

Secret Garden

A Gold Coast terrace gets an update with plants that provide privacy and shade.

BY KARI RICHARDSON

Sara Furlan's clients were elated to snag the penthouse unit in a building off the Mag Mile. Among other things, the 12th-floor residence offered some 2,700 square feet of outdoor living space, which they planned to use for grilling, entertaining, doing yoga, and exercising their dog.

"The home has a beautiful wraparound terrace and great views of Lake Michigan," says Furlan, design director for Lake Bluff-based Mariani

Landscape. "It kind of has everything." The residence was remodeled by Morgante-Wilson Architects after the purchase, and now the indoor space reveals terrace views on three sides.

As a veteran of urban landscape design, Furlan was no stranger to the nuances of rooftop gardens—the exposure to the elements and the need to deal with the structural issues of weight limits and water drainage. She removed existing concrete



pavers, stained the new ones to match the limestone detailing on the building, and placed them on a pedestal system that controls water removal.

Alas, this new arrangement revealed a problem. The rooftop was at a lower elevation than many of the surrounding buildings, including a hotel, making it feel exposed. Furlan's goal: to create a private outdoor oasis where the owners would feel comfortable relaxing.

Furlan carefully chose and arranged plants and other items to foster a sense of seclusion. An iron pergola brings scale and intimacy to the space, for instance, and serves as a frame for fabric shades that block sun and prying eyes. A water wall flanked by plants and smoked glass panels behind a grilling station also amp up the privacy.



Top: Seasonal plantings that spill out of urns mark the three doorways to the residence. In the background, a patch of synthetic grass offers a convenient place for the owners to exercise their dog. Left: An iron pergola makes the seating area feel more intimate and anchors the lighting and fabric shades.

As for the flora, flowering honeysuckle vines form a thick web of greenery on the east pergola, while a group of Wintergreen arborvitae serves as a screen. Serviceberry bushes, with their intense fall color, create a border on the southern terrace. “You need to select plants that are a little more durable on a rooftop,” Furlan says. “They are in the blazing sun, and as you might imagine, it also gets pretty windy up there.”

Other sturdy choices included the Rozanne geranium, John Creech sedum, and Green Gem boxwood—all of which grow in a variety of zinc and aluminum pots that are lightweight, insulated, and equipped with lights and irrigation.

Another ingenious solution to the challenges of sky-high living: areas of faux grass, arranged in a pleasing pattern, reduce trips down the elevator with the dog. Furlan says the synthetic material, which can be hosed down after use, mimics the look of thatch.

In their quest for a sheltered space, the owners didn’t want to lose the specialness that characterizes a penthouse. The finished design includes strategic areas where it’s possible to drink in amazing views of Chicago. “There are a couple places where we purposely did not put a planter,” Furlan says. “We wanted guests to be able to come up to the edge and have that ‘wow’ experience.” ●

Though their aim was to create privacy, the owners were mindful not to lose awe-inspiring views such as this one.

