

THE BACKYARD BECKONS

Luring the owners of a new Ridgewood home outdoors, a landscape design satisfies on several levels.

Design by **Thomas Flint** Photography by **Adam Pass** Text by **Haley Longman**

Thomas Flint Landscaping turned this “torn-up” corner lot in Ridgewood into a year-round outdoor masterpiece, with four tiers of stonework that include a covered patio with a fireplace, a pool, a spa and multiple seating areas.

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It's all in your point of view. For the empty-nester owners of a beautiful new-construction Ridgewood home (they'd knocked down the existing house on the property and rebuilt to their liking), their neglected backyard was a frustration—it sloped from one side to the other with no grass, deck or patio. But for Thomas Flint of Waldwick-based Thomas Flint Landscaping, retained to enliven the uninspiring outdoor space, it spelled a creative opportunity.

One must on the homeowners' list was a pool, but with their kids out of the house, it didn't need to be huge. Flint describes the cocktail pool they requested as “a small yet pretty pool that they could heat up quickly and use into the fall and winter.” And small was in the cards anyway; zoning issues pretty much ruled out a larger pool. But what the pool now lacks in square footage it makes up for in beauty, thanks to a distinctive curvilinear shape and an infinity edge that

faces a grassy area in the back. “It looks like the pool was built around the rocks,” says Flint, rather than the other way around.

That lawn area was another requirement. “We wanted to create some flat, usable space,” the designer says. And so was the intimate hot tub. This spa positioned close to the house has an urn that overflows with water, reclining benches contoured to the clients' bodies and the ability to heat to up to 104° Fahrenheit in 15 minutes. The owners can turn the spa on and off remotely from an app on their phones, thus it's ready for them when they get home.

To create the ultimate entertaining space that could be utilized all year round, Flint and company focused on function. “The upper dining patio has a covered area with a fireplace and an outdoor kitchen,” he says. The middle tier with the spa has another, smaller dining area and a pair of lounge chairs,

This page: A flat lawn area was a redesign requirement for these homeowners. Now they use it for everyday lounging or for overspill when hosting large parties. Opposite: One tier down from the covered patio with a fireplace, grilling and dining area is an intimate spa with a water feature and custom reclining seats.



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and on the pool level is a firepit that fosters togetherness. There's ample space for hosting large parties, but the separate entertaining areas make it feel intimate too.

There are lots of stairs—partly because of the land grading and partly for aesthetic purposes. Flint's team used the steps and boulders as outcrops, and key pieces in the landscape are large, natural bluestone boulders, same as on the walls. "Some are constructed into the wall, some are used as retaining wall," he says. "The boulders break up the monotony of the stonework and bring a natural element to the landscape." Each slab of natural stone was hand-cut and hand-laid, creating what Flint calls "a piece of art."

To soften it up even more, the pros chose a simple array of plantings that's not overly busy and reflects well off the pool and the spa. This home is on a corner lot, so privacy was a concern too. Flint's team strategically placed large evergreen

trees around the perimeter of the property and planted large, mature crops to make it seem as if the pool and the house had been there for decades. The flowers' repeating textures in shades of pink and purple add a sense of cohesiveness and a pop of color from mid-April until the season's first frost.

The project took about six months from start to finish, not much time in the scheme of things for a backyard one can use forever, 365 days a year. "Our goal was to pull the clients into the backyard and make the property inviting and functional," Flint says. "They say they spend a lot of time outdoors now, along with time just looking out the window."

The designer notes that this backyard has an aesthetically pleasing detail for every time of year, whether it's watching the snow fall or catching the summer sunset. And naturally, the couple's grown kids now want to visit more often.

Says Flint: "Isn't that always the case?"

This page: Each piece of natural stone, including the boulders used on the steps, was cut and laid by hand. A lot of steps were needed in this four-tiered backyard. Opposite: Across from the petite, infinity-edge pool is an all-seasons firepit with seating for four. The curvilinear table follows the same shape as the pool, the spa and the hardscaping.



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