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and what's
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Restaurateur
Nick Freshman

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ALL DECKED OUT

These outdoor spaces got a lot of use during the pandemic, in all kinds of weather. Now spring has sprung.

BY RINA RAPUANO

STACY ZARN GOLDBERG

Michael and
Melinda Winn's
backyard paradise



The lower terrace is framed by a “gravity wall,” an old-school form of masonry in which the weight of the stones holds them in place.

A TALE OF TWO STYLES

“Out of all the clients we’ve worked with, I would say the least common route that people take is to tear down the house they’re living in, rent and rebuild a new house [on the same lot],” says Joseph Richardson, a landscape architect based in Arlington.

But that’s exactly what Michael and Melinda Winn did to their 1950s home in McLean a few years ago. It makes sense when you consider that Michael owns Winn Design + Build, based in Falls Church. Major construction projects don’t faze him.

Once the original home was gone, the empty lot gave Richardson a chance to address the site’s topographical problem areas—including the steep slope that dominated the backyard, which he deftly wrangled with stone retaining walls. But the couple came up against another stumbling block

that had nothing to do with drainage or permitting: blending their two very different style sensibilities into one perfect family sanctuary.

“We always say, at least in my industry...that every degree in architecture should come with a minor in marriage counseling,” jokes Michael. “I think that’s probably true for Joseph and his field, because there’s a little bit of trying to play the counselor and trying to find a good, happy place.”

Richardson’s diplomatic challenge was to mingle Michael’s love of symmetry and structure with Melinda’s desire for elements that reflect her Korean heritage. The solution: a relaxed zen garden that serves as a bridge between a more structured dining area at one end of the backyard and an outdoor fireplace at the other end. From inside the house, this connective stretch of

pavers and organic plantings becomes a focal point, providing beautiful views from the living room.

“I think the moment we unveiled that concept, everyone was like, ‘Oh, wow! Well, this is it. We’re all happy,’” Richardson says. “A big part of that was [considering] how do these spaces interact? Do they flow, and does everyone feel like their preferences and goals have been appreciated?”

Since the onset of the pandemic, Michael says his family has used some of those outdoor spaces more than ever. The loggia (a screened-in porch attached to the house) is where you’ll find him reading the paper on Sunday mornings. The leveled upper yard surrounded by stone walls is a prime spot for outdoor movie nights, thanks to a projector, and fierce family badminton tournaments.

Melinda gathers with girlfriends by the fireplace for socially distanced catch-up sessions, and the couple’s two young kids use it to toast marshmallows for s’mores.

In case you were wondering, Michael also got just about everything on his wish list—including his beloved symmetry.

“One of the features that I quite like is that you could draw a completely straight line from the street to the back of the house, as you go up the main [steps], through the front door, down the hallway, out the back door, through the loggia and up another set of stairs and through the hardscaping, and it’s all perfectly laid out,” he says. “It seems very orderly, which I appreciate.”

Joseph Richardson
Landscape Architecture
jrichardsonla.com

STACY ZARIN GOLDBERG

STACY ZARIN GOLDBERG



Offset stone pavers in the zen garden create an informal look, whereas the lounge areas at either end are more structured.



Landscape architect Joseph Richardson used retaining walls to transform the formerly sloped yard into two level tiers.