

Split Decision

DIVIDING A GARAGE ADDS A MULTI-PURPOSE ENTERTAINING SPACE TO A ONCE-BARE TORONTO BACKYARD

Like so many city properties in the heart of Toronto, the backyard of this traditional home, enjoyed for nearly 30 years by the same owners, was a blank canvas. “There was a two-car garage back there, but it was a ramshackle waste of space,” recalls the homeowner. “We never used it other than letting the dog out.” After discovering the beautiful overhaul of a friend’s garden by PLANT Architect, the homeowners met with PLANT partner Mary Tremain to discuss the possibility of a garage make-over and overall backyard revival.

Though the homeowners were very open to suggestion, there were a few special considerations: keep a lovely old apple tree that was smack in the middle of the yard and preserve half of the garage’s concrete slab floor for a carport. The to-do list soon became clear: increase the size of the garden and create areas for dining and lounging, while maintaining a space for the car. And it had to be low-maintenance.

Because the owners were a one-car family, Tremain decided to get creative with the garage space. Three sides of the garage were taken down, while one wall was left intact. Half of the garage space became a covered carport, the rest a dining area under a wooden framework covered with wisteria that provides lovely purple blooms in spring and shade in summer. Construction of the framework was managed by Bill Kelly, a friend of the homeowner. Low-key materials included pressure-treated lum-

ber for the new posts, pea gravel and flagstone on the ground, and corrugated plastic for the ceiling of the carport and a half-wall between the carport and dining space. Inexpensive and hard-wearing, the plastic casts a warm glowing light on the garden.

“We use that dining area all summer. One rainy night, we put the car onto the street and moved the table under the carport. It was so amazing, like eating in a solarium and our guests loved it. We’ll do that again this summer,” the homeowner says.

Beyond the dining area, the yard is bisected by a >

A simple corrugated plastic half-wall divides the carport and dining area. OPPOSITE PAGE: Wisteria climbing over the beams provides a shady canopy while ferns and hostas surround diners with cool greenery.



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