

Garden & Home

Can't dampen the spirits of this garden

Serenity inherent in Vancouver landscape architect's studio lets you know it's OK to relax

I Optimistically peeked outside, hoping against all odds that the rain had stopped. It was still pouring, and to make matters worse, a cloud of fog had settled over the city of Vancouver.

Definitely not garden touring weather, but I had been looking forward to meeting landscape architect Senga Lindsay for some time now.

I pulled on my raingear, grabbed an umbrella and tucked a spare towel in my camera bag.

"You can't miss our place," Lindsay had said. "Look for the ornamental grasses; it will be obvious."

Only a dedicated garden enthusiast would give directions that included the plant palette rather than a house number.

This was going to be fun.

Lindsay, principal of SLA Inc. in North Vancouver, grew up in Niagara Falls and began her career at the Niagara Parks School of Horticulture. She decided to follow a career in landscape architecture on the advice of her instructor, a landscape architect, who felt she had a knack for design. It's a decision she's never looked back on.

I was introduced to Lindsay last year when I was interviewing architects and designers across Canada for a magazine project. At the time, she impressed me with her down-to-earth ideas:

"We've just finished renovating our studio and designing a garden for the space the studio overlooks; the garden includes many of our favourite design features. The garden has two benefits: it provides a healthy environment for staff, which in turn may increase productivity; and it's also a place to showcase the value of outdoor rooms to our clientele, many of whom are developers. We can show them the value of a more human-



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istic design and how it can be adapted for multi-family developments."

At the end of a quiet, tree-lined street, a postwar, two-storey grey residence, trimmed with charcoal and decked with a flat roof and large windows, rose silently above waves of glorious bronze, buff, blue and green. Based on a palette of ornamental grasses, bamboo, native shrubs and colourful Japanese maples, the garden seemed to radiate its own soft light on that dreary afternoon. This had to be the right place.

We started the tour in her studio. Generous windows invite the warm colours and textures of the back garden into the workplace. The young garden is carpeted with a delicate tapestry of shade-tolerant perennials, each chosen for its exceptional foliar texture and colouring: delicate silvery blues and splashes of burgundy-red looked wonderful in this hazy light. A chipped cedar pathway, lined with Redbud trees (*Cercis canadensis* Forest Pansy), leads us to a bubbling fountain in a huge black ceramic container. As we approached the corner of the studio, rectangular slabs of grey stone were set horizontally to create a walkway leading to a secluded dining area.

One step up, and the space opened to



Above: Lush and richly textured plantings soften the front walkway to landscape architect Senga Lindsay's North Vancouver residence.

Right: Variegated dwarf moor grass, blue oat grass and carex create soft pillows of colour along a walkway lined with young Japanese maples in the front garden.

Below: The secluded outdoor dining room is screened by a wall of lush bamboo.

Bottom: Screened from the roadway, but visible from the dining room, this front yard gravel courtyard will eventually be furnished with a fireplace wall and outdoor seating. Edged in lavender, the space was deliciously fragrant, despite the misty evening visit.

an outdoor room paved in slabs of grey-blue stone. The generous space, overlooked by the kitchen window, easily accommodated a teak dining table, seating for six, and a generous black umbrella. A young bamboo hedge softened the edges.

Upstairs, the guest room overlooked an experimental green roof, now in its second year. The garden's practical gravel edging offered a service path for maintenance, while encouraging rainwater to drain toward the downspouts located in the corners of the flat roof. Built atop the studio, the roof-top garden was planted primarily in sedums and succulents. It reminded me of the alpine gardens of northern Italy that softened the rugged mountains.

"In terms of cost savings, incorporating a green roof on a large warehouse will save capital costs in the long run. It will have a cooling effect and last longer than a conventional roof," Lindsay said.

The rain miraculously let up, so I grabbed my camera, tucked a spare towel in my pocket (eyeglasses and camera lenses aren't much good covered in raindrops) and headed out to photograph the front garden.

The front garden sweet itself from the house right out to the roadway, where taller grasses, shrubs and blowy perennials created a rich tapestry of colour against the deep green protected woodland that lies beyond the road.

Despite the garden's soft, naturalistic design, there is a sense of ordered discipline as the plantings approach the more formal stone walkways and the pea gravel courtyard.

The effect is calming. The space exudes feelings of serenity and contentment that belie its tender age. Everything is in order; it's OK to relax.

As I work to capture the garden's mystical West Coast flavour, pea gravel crunches underfoot and a soft mist carries the gentle scent of lavender and rosemary.

The rain becomes persistent once again, and reluctantly, I tuck my camera away. In relaxed West Coast style, freshly blended margaritas and a chance to share ideas about gardens, design and life followed.

"My studies at the Niagara Parks School of Horticulture really gave me credibility," Lindsay said. "This opened many doors for me with the municipalities here in British Columbia."

She continued, "I believe a client knows if you really care about them, if it's coming from the heart."

Looking over her garden as I loaded my gear in the van, I took a deep breath of energizing coastal air and noticed the scent of impending autumn. This truly was a garden with a heart.

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