

ASIAN INFUSION

A couple turn their bland backyard into a Japanese-inspired sanctuary

By Crystal Zuzek

NEIGHBORHOOD
CRESTVIEW

ACRES .33

SQUARE FEET 2,389

BEDROOMS 4

BATHROOMS
4 FULL, 1 HALF

LANDSCAPE DESIGN FIRM
AUSTIN OUTDOOR DESIGN



It's a chilly Austin evening, and Joshua Ganderson and Stacey Swinehart are soaking in their gorgeous outdoor view from the toasty comfort of their hot tub. Ganderson installed hundreds of outdoor lights so he and Swinehart could enjoy their backyard at all hours.

"At night, the illuminated pathway lights look like fireflies in the distance, lighting up the different areas of our yard," he says. "When we're not in the hot tub, we like to sit in the backyard with a book and a cocktail or at our outdoor bar with friends. It's a whole new world as soon as dusk hits."

The Japanese-inspired sanctuary that enfolds the married couple's midcentury modern Crestview home wasn't always so grand. Jose Roberto

Corea, design principal and founder of Austin Outdoor Design, characterizes the former home's exterior space as a "sea of concrete." The backyard had a grassy slope adjacent to the patio, where the pool and hot tub reside. Ganderson describes the former front of the house as "bland," with some xeriscaping and a paved walkway to the door.

Ganderson and Swinehart had lived in the home since 2014 and took their time deliberating on the type of outdoor space they wanted to create.

"We wanted a lot of different areas that function in specific ways," he recalls. "We didn't want things that were commonplace around town."

So Corea and his team set out to replace the concrete and generally underwhelming outdoor aesthetic with a garden fit for meandering

TILT/SHIFT STUDIO



and with points of visual interest at every turn, as opposed to big, open spaces covered in grass.

“Joshua pushed us to do things that didn’t come natural to us,” Corea says. “When you look at the body of our work, this project stands out. We’d never approached a project with as much intentionality as this one.”

For the entryway courtyard, Ganderson drowned out some street noise by incorporating a tranquil, flowing water feature. Gracilis bamboo lends a sense of seclusion.

A mix of six different gravels ranging in color from cinnamon brown to dark gray and black Mexican beach pebble surrounds the rock water feature. Rustic steel edging lines the entire area. Ganderson planted aquatic mint, ferns, creeping Jenny, cattail, society garlic and bulbine in the courtyard. A young ginkgo tree will one day tower above the front of the home.

To reach the front door, visitors cross a bridge made of exotic mas-saranduba, a South American hardwood with a rich brown finish.

“This part of the yard is flat,” says Corea, “so creating that vertical distance that would allow for construction of a bridge makes this area unique.”

In keeping with the Asian theme, Ganderson chose to install Japanese-style overlapping boards for the walkway around the curated garden, which features Mondo Grass, bulbine and dwarf ruellia.

Just past the gate to the backyard, a babbling stream flows downhill, pass-



ing under a steel trough loaded with silver ponyfoot and Berkeley sedge. The stream dumps into a small fish pond inhabited by several brightly colored koi. A narrow aluminum bridge over the pond provides passage to the pool and outdoor kitchen area, ideal for the small parties the couple throw.

When they have time off, they enjoy getting outside and relaxing in various parts of their outdoor retreat.

“On a nice spring day, we may sit next to the stream and read a book,” Ganderson says. “In winter, we’ll bundle up with a hot drink at the bar. If it’s raining, we hang out under the patio roof. If it’s warmer, we spend time in the pool.” ■

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