

# LIVING LUXE

## SUMMER IN THE CITY

LORI MORRIS

Welcome to the big, bold world of this design maven

OUTDOOR LIVING

Fall in love with a spectacular backyard

A FRESH TAKE

A unique spin on transitional-chateau style

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Summer Issue



# ENDLESS SUMMER

It's not just interiors that deserve to be designed. Canadian summers are short, and they're best spent enjoying our yards and gardens. Here's how designer Lisa Aiken created this perfectly picturesque outdoor oasis for her clients.

By Lisa van de Geyn  
Photography by Brandon Barré

The back deck and patio looks out onto this pretty fish pond in the yard.

Designer Lisa Aiken, the founder of Terra Firma Design Inc., met the owner of this spectacular yard several years ago when she was putting together her flowerpots and container arrangements. Their first meeting — loading her client's car with plants in an underground garage — was the start of something truly special. Knowing Aiken's work was exquisite, the homeowner enlisted the designer to do her backyard — a spacious property outside of her east-end Toronto home. "Before they met me, they just had a deck — I was doing all of their urns in those days," Aiken remembers. Since then, Aiken has transformed the yard into an oasis in the city — a place where her clients can cook, entertain and unwind.

To successfully construct this extension of the family's indoor living area, Aiken chose to create various spaces, each designed to offer the family a different experience. She also opted to go with what she calls a "lush" style, which is evident in the lavish flowers and greenery she carefully hand-selected and planted. She says this yard is traditional in a sense, with its wicker furniture and high-end umbrellas and accessories, but it also has a modern flair that really suits the owners' personalities. "It's whimsical with an easy-going feel. I listened to the clients and knew what they needed from their backyard. They wanted to barbecue in their outdoor kitchen and eat in their dining area, plus they were looking for

several areas to sit — both in the sun and in the shade — where they could see their annuals and perennials in their gorgeous garden," says Aiken, adding she determined the placement of these areas based on layout, sunshine and flow. "I'm a designer who puts myself in my clients' shoes. I sit in every seat and take note of how I'm feeling and what I can see. I pay close attention to how the client will use the space. The areas I create have to have distinct purposes but look flawless when viewed as a whole."

As a professional who's mastered the art of designing the great outdoors, Aiken (who does pergolas, custom firepits, hot tubs, artificial walls and custom containers, for example) was quickly given carte blanche to create the space. She went to work conceptualizing the yard and soon had a plan for the layout, which includes several seating areas. She put a pretty bistro set that overlooks the dining table on the first tier of the deck, as well as a comfortable loveseat and chair — the perfect spot for the couple to enjoy a cold drink on a hot day facing their garden. On the second tier is their large dining table, as well as a more intimate dining area with an umbrella. There's also a couch that has a flowy white cover overtop and to the sides, perfect for when the homeowners want to stay out of the sun. On the patio below the deck is an outdoor kitchen, along with another cozy loveseat and chairs. Aiken also added a special spot ▶

**RIGHT:** There's plenty of room (and shade) at the outdoor dining area, perfect for family dinners and entertaining.





**LEFT:** The patio has a phenomenal outdoor kitchen and grilling area. **RIGHT:** There's no shortage of seating. This setup is on the lower deck.



where the family could sit and read or relax away from the main seating areas — she put a covered daybed next to the rocky fish pond. Each of these spaces are full of lush greenery and flowers — there are even potted palm trees to really create that breezy, retreat feel.

Of course, Aiken also chose the beautiful, bright palette. “I wanted something that would really offer great impact; something that would pop,” she says. When she told the homeowner of her intention to go with hues of red across the seating areas and for the flowers in the garden, the client was ecstatic. “They painted the back of their kitchen doors red to go with the yard,” she says. “When I’m doing a garden, I always pick plants I love that go together well. I tend to gravitate toward exotic plants, but I also used more common ones in this garden, like the red geraniums in this space. I love flowers that add drama and a wow factor.”

It goes without saying that the homeowners were overjoyed when Aiken did the big reveal. “She’s delightful and perky and she screamed; she was over the moon. He had a big smile on his face, which was the reaction I was looking for,” Aiken says with a laugh. They were both so pleased with the space that they hired Aiken to do their home’s interior design. “I started with the outside and then moved inside, where I brought in some of the red. I really brought a piece of their outdoors in.”