

A Los Angeles–Based Landscape Designer Creates a Garden That Gets Better with Age

WRITTEN BY JEANINE MATLOW
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEBBIE GLIKSMAN



Her Own Backyard

Debbie Gliksmán designs outdoor spaces with the future in mind. “Although I try to give my gardens the good bones to last indefinitely, plants are not like furniture that stays as you bought it,” explains Gliksmán, landscape designer and owner of Urban Oasis in Los Angeles, California. “A garden is a living thing with constant flux and change.”

When it came time to tackle her own property, she worked around the large swimming pool that dominated the yard. The pool is original to the house that was built by the understudy of *Esther Williams* (the famed swimming musical actress). Gliksmán likes to entertain and spend time in the garden, but the configuration was far from user-friendly, so function was at the forefront of the redesign.

Gliksmán chose a flagstone that would complement the blue of the water, and she cleared the corners around the pool as much as possible for better traffic flow. “I kept all the paving the same material and went right up to the pool coping to really expand the space,” she says. “I also kept the color palette almost monochromatic with variations of reds and greens.”

She made the most of an awkward corner with a built-in circular bench. “I wanted to soften the lines of the pool by creating a garden with a lot of curves. I had a vision of a corner bench with a tree for shade,” says Gliksmán, who planted three budget-friendly saplings that form a wider silhouette when joined together. They have already shown significant growth in the two years since the installation.



Landscape designer Debbie Gliksmán renovated her backyard in an effort to make the swimming pool a less dominant feature, which she accomplished by changing the elements that surround it. Gliksmán added plenty of neutral foliage, several inviting seating arrangements, and pieces of outdoor decor that personalize the space.

kangaroo paw, *Alstroemeria*, daylilies, and *Calandrinia*. I also used a lot of blue-gray foliage plants such as *Senecio mandraliscae*, blue oat grass, and blue fescue. Lastly, I added red foliage like euphorbia blackbird, New Zealand flax, and dwarf red fountain grass,” says Gliksmán.

Entertaining is easier thanks to a small but efficient barbecue grill that provides ample storage and counter space for cooking. “Nearby [I] have some herbs, cherry tomatoes on the obelisk, and strawberries,” says Gliksmán. “In the front yard, I have two raised beds with vegetables and more herbs.”

Water elements add ambience. “There is something so soothing about the soft sound of water trickling, and just watching the water cools you down,” says Gliksmán, who has two fountains: one in a large glazed container that mimics the color of the pool, and another inside an antique terra-cotta container.

There’s more to this space than meets the eye. Special treasures from her travels, like the mercury glass stars from Mexico and the rocks from various locales, dot the landscape with a deeper meaning. “It makes the garden personal,” she says. ■

A *Euphorbia cotinifolia* was placed after the flagstone was laid. “I wanted to create a sort of screen to add a little mystery by obscuring the view of the bench,” says Gliksmán, who likes to create outdoor rooms. “I find that if you have different destinations, you will pull people out to different parts of the garden.”

Eco-friendly elements abound. Plants are drought tolerant with drip irrigation; paving is permeable to allow rainwater to flow back to the water table; and the concrete that was removed was used for the bench and the raised bed. “My contractor did such a fabulous job on the construction that you’d be hard-pressed to see that they aren’t built of natural stone,” says Gliksmán. The creative designer recycled and propagated plants from previous jobs and her former garden, too. In fact, she only invested \$200 in new varieties.

Though she stuck to a limited color palette for plants, she still wanted texture and color. “I chose high performers like



20 Desert Oasis

Exteriors by Chad Robert, Inc.
Phoenix, Arizona
602-252-6775
www.exteriors-cr.com

26 Plant Life

Terry LeBlanc Garden Design
Victoria, British Columbia
littlemuggins@shaw.ca

30 Making Moments

Groundswell Design Group, LLC
Hopewell, New Jersey
609-466-8100
www.groundswelldesigngroup.com

36 Her Own Backyard

Urban Oasis
Los Angeles, California
323-905-496
www.urbanoasis-la.com

38 History in the High-rise

Alexander Doherty Design
New York, New York
917-740-8768
www.alexanderdohertydesign.com

Design Development NYC
Long Island City, New York
718-310-6100
www.designdevelopmentnyc.com

Resources

february | march | 2014