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CLIENTS **GRANT AND WENDY BURCHAM**
LOCATION **WARD PARKWAY**
LOCAL RESOURCES **THE GREENSMAN**
STORY BY **KATE LEIBSLE**
PHOTOS BY **TALIS BERGAMANIS**

the secret garden

There's an old saying: "How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice, practice, practice." In the gardening world, the saying takes a different spin: "How do you have a beautiful garden in the spring? Plan, plan, plan."

That's the mantra of Kristopher Dabner, owner of The Greensman (7213 Troost Ave.) and architect of some of Kansas City's premier gardens.

"December and January are the perfect time to plan," Dabner says. "You really have time to sit and think about what you want. Then, in March, you're ready to move, to hire the contractor, and get ready to go."

Oh, but where to start? Dabner has clients fill out a questionnaire that helps them understand what they want their outdoor living space to be: Will there be a lot of entertaining? How many people? Are children involved? Are there pets to consider? What colors do the homeowners like? How much ongoing maintenance is the homeowner comfortable with?

The other big question: How much money does a homeowner want to spend?

"That's really important to know upfront," Dabner says. "A lot of people are afraid to give that number, but it's important. If a job is really \$25,000 and you only have \$15,000, there's a problem. To get the most bang for the buck, you have to know your price point."

Dabner is quick to emphasize that it's important to have a budget and that beauty can be achieved at any price point.

One of Dabner's creations sits along Ward Parkway. It is a good representation of what anyone can do with a backyard that needs to be utilitarian for entertaining, kids and pets, while also being aesthetically pleasing.

Once a homeowner determines what he or she wants in an outdoor living space, Dabner sets about drawing out a plan. "It's about spatial design," he says. "If you have a nicely designed space, it doesn't matter what it's made of. You can go to a place that's very high-end that doesn't flow well."

During the planning stage, it's important to be aware of scale, Dabner says. For instance, a home such as his Ward Parkway project needed much larger and more expansive beds in front than it originally had (left).

When a homeowner is planning a new landscape or garden design, one of the critical decisions is the ratio of annual to perennial flowers and plants that will be used. There are obvious pros and cons to both.

Annuals are a mixed bag—they are beautiful, but only for one year. On the other hand, if you plant an annual and don't like it, you're only stuck for one year. Perennials are easier to maintain—once they're planted, you're good to go. On the other hand, if you end up not liking something, you have to pull it out and start over.





At the Ward Parkway project, Dabner worked on the layout to meet the homeowners' desires to be able to see much of the backyard from inside the house and to take advantage of as much of the space as possible.

A large gazebo covers a patio for dining, but it's within eyesight of the pool, so parents and children can be in the same space without being in one another's way. That was important here, as the homeowners enjoyed entertaining other families.

They wanted enough destination points so that everyone could be accommodated, but not have to be bumping elbows. There are multiple seating areas, so the kids' table has as much panache as the adults'.

A corner of the yard also houses a large treehouse and play area. This family has children at various stages of growing, so it was important to have areas that accommodated those still wanting to play on a slide and those able to be in the pool alone.

The answer? By spreading design elements out, parents can see what's happening from anywhere in the yard or inside the house, and another of Dabner's themes is fulfilled—use your whole yard.

"Have different destination points," he says. "Maybe instead of just one patio, you want a dining patio and then do a second one with a fireplace or a living room set.

"Really think about how you will use the space. Maybe you won't entertain outside but want a great cutting garden—where should that be?"

Another tip to a great outdoor living space in the spring, Dabner says, is to get friendly with neighbors and others in the community who love to garden. "Ask them what works, what doesn't," he says. "Real gardeners love to trade plants and to share their knowledge."

Yes, there are trends in gardening and landscaping as with any creative endeavor. But some have more staying power than others. Fire pits are always popular as are fountains, both of which these homeowners wanted to incorporate into their outdoor space (second spread, right).

But by far the most important thing for homeowners to keep in mind when planning a landscape: Garden and outdoor living space is for their own enjoyment, Dabner says.

"[Choose] what will bring you the most joy, not what's in style or what Martha Stewart says you should have," he says. ■





Best Backyard Garden The Greensman

PHOTOS BY TALIS BERGMANIS

The large family living in this classically styled Ward Parkway residence wanted a comprehensive outdoor living space that would also provide a distinct sense of place for children and adults when in the various "rooms." Designer Kristopher Dabner divided the backyard with three pergolas, scaled to the size of the house and unified by their consistent use of materials and detailing inspired by the house's architecture. The L-shaped space begins with a fountain original to the house as the central feature, seen through the house from the front door. An antique paver brick and bluestone patio connects the elements, including a dining area, seating area and fireplace. A sport pool was designed with two shallow ends for the kids to play volleyball and built-in benches for the big kids to relax with martinis.

Resources:

Pool: Swim Things; *Masonry:* Meyer Masonry

Judges' Comments:

The overall design is timeless and coherent, and the hardscape of brick and stone paths, the elegant white arbor and pergolas complement the style of the home. The plants fit a soft and tranquil color scheme, making it the perfect atmosphere for outdoor relaxation and recreation.

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