Lessons learned at Chelsea can grow here

HOME AND GARDEN EDITOR AND WETA RAY CLARK

Tucked into sloping ground, the Webb Dotti House is divided into two sections, or volumes, and then shifted slightly apart.

A glass vestibule joins the two halves. A small terrace extends a welcome to visitors at the main entrance, where a tall alcove offers shelter.

The vestibule, a transition space between the entry and the home's various sections, leads to the main living areas.

The home's design incorporates a number of sustainable features, including drought-tolerant herbs and plants from a garden in London.

Hardscapes for hard times

When drought threatens and global weather chaos seems likely, a backyard hardscape can be just the ticket for enduring beauty and utility.

Drought-tolerant plants, such as those featured in the Webb Dotti House, are a key component of sustainable outdoor design.

Hardscapes, such as concrete and stone, provide a base for plants and create a durable surface that can withstand weather extremes.

By Jessica Johnson

The story of the Webb Dotti House starts with an architect-designed home. Frustrated with the house options available to them, Francesca Dotti and Frank Webb decided to find a lot and build a house to their own specifications.

The house is designed by Xanthe White, who evokes New Zealand's black sand beaches in her glass structures for the Chelsea Flower Show in London.

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Hardscapes, such as concrete and stone, provide a base for plants and create a durable surface that can withstand weather extremes.
The overall design creates an indoor/ outdoor connection between the house, site and landscape. It illustrates how a simple rectangle can be thoughtfully integrated into a home’s design. “The Walsh Family Home, says the House of the Month panel, “handles the site well and is studied compact.” Site issues “problems may not be the right word,” says Gomes) that affected the design began with the sloping site, which was not wide enough to accommodate the footprint of a true courtyard home. Fairly steep, it has a slope of about 16 percent. Before construction, Gomes and Staub worked together to help identify the best placement of the house. Ultimately the house was split into sections and nestled into the sloping land so that the homeowners could remain on the ground as they walked in and out of their home.

“We were trying to avoid having the homeowners be segregated from the landscape by the house,” says Gomes. “We put it on the back of the house so that the house opens out to the front of the site.” By combining exterior ground and wall surfaces into the interior, the architects connect the landscape and the house. Surfaces and voids, line and mass — the plan and the exterior ground and wall surfaces — are used throughout and outside the house. “It is an expression of unity.”

The use of concrete, wood and metal with glass as a secondary element, create what the design panel characterized as “a refined elegance” that is “sleek and very clean.” Gomes explains that the materials used and the construction logic that parallels its aesthetic qualities. The components of the design — the concrete, the mass, the voids, line and mass — are used where construction meets the earth. “You create the best of both worlds,” says Gomes. “There is a harmony and balance.” The goal was to link the two so that you are always aware of the exterior, even in the interior,” Gomes says.

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Says Gomes: “Cars are put in the back of the house. Indoors and out are on land, not on a deck looking down.”

The terrace
Warm, calm hues soften the clean lines and surfaces of the living room. The ceilings of the living space are separated from the walls, creating what architects call a “reveal.” Light fixtures are located around the perimeter of the room. “The idea of the reveal was to give the living room a feeling of more volume and to also conceal the light fixtures and smoke detectors,” architect Francisco Gomes explains. “It makes for a cleaner look and washes the walls with light.” A large window lets in natural light and views of the landscape below.

The kitchen
White cabinets and stainless steel surfaces, with halogen lighting and a glass backsplash, create a simple environment for cooking and eating. Materials used in the kitchen and vestibule represent the elements used throughout and outside the house — metal, wood, stone and glass.

The bathroom
Modern European fixtures are paired with natural stone and wood surfaces for a calm, refreshing ambiance.

The living room, to the right in the single-story block, and master bedroom, to the left in the two-story block, open out to the garden terrace, which overlooks the landscape below. The single story block contains the family gathering spaces. The two-story block houses the sleeping quarters and a carport below. The house, says architect Gomes, is “not monumental ... Even though it’s glass and has natural materials, it blends in because of its material makeup.” Concrete, wood and metal in the form of walls, walls, siding and framing converge inside and out to create a close connection between building and landscape. “The goal was to link the two so that you are always aware of the exterior, even in the interior,” Gomes says.

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