

Urban gardens

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Denise Lindsay is a gardener at heart. When she and husband, Hal, downsized from their three-story Eastover home to a condo near uptown, she still wanted to look out the window and see something green. So with help from a landscape design firm, the Lindsays have created a hip, urban garden – built on a bed of concrete.

WITH A LITTLE INGENUITY, CONDO OWNERS FIND WAYS TO PLANT ON THEIR TERRACES

“It’s great for entertaining,” Denise says, looking out the glass door onto her 2,000-square-foot terrace. “In summertime this door stays open, so this is basically an extension of the living room.”

As more empty-nesters opt for condos, and more young couples and singles choose uptown living, they’re learning to get the most out of terrace gardens. And they’re learning it’s possible to have fountains, shrubs, cooking herbs and grassy spots for pets right alongside their skyline view.

The Lindsays moved from a home with a pool. So they asked Rick Solow of Solow Design Group for a cascading fountain, which gives a stylized



Cascading fountain.



A patch of surprisingly real-looking artificial turf.



Sectional sofa in all-weather fabric.



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— DENISE LINDSAY

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Denise Lindsay and her husband Hal on their terrace with uptown Charlotte as a backdrop.

splash of water while masking city noises at their condo at the Metropolitan complex. Solow also designed areas for outdoor seating, cooking, dining — even a patch of surprisingly real-looking artificial turf. This 12-by-18-foot “lawn” was originally intended for the Lindsay’s three dogs. But it looked so good once installed that they now take the dogs downstairs for street-level relief instead.

GREAT FOR PEOPLE-WATCHING

The first thing to think about when planning a terrace garden, Solow says, is how you want to use the space. For Denise, a potter, and Hal, a businessman, entertaining was their top priority. But they had to

solve the problem of the terrace’s sloping concrete floor, which was practical for drainage but not for parties. They chose an elevated floor made of pavers on pedestals that allow water to drain through to existing catch basins below, while creating a level surface above.

Weight restrictions are an important factor when planning terrace gardens. Thirty large pots made of lightweight fiberglass that looks like ceramic hold plants including ornamental grasses, dwarf butterfly bush and black bamboo. The pots, along with three planters, provide screening from neighbors and define separate spaces for a bar, dining table and outdoor living room complete with sectional sofa

in all-weather fabric. Jeff Triece, formerly of Urban Landscape Design and now owner of Elegant Space Design, installed the Lindsay’s plants. Celtic Masonry did the masonry work and installed the floor pavers.

Four fuchsia pots on the Lindsay’s terrace echo the modern décor and sofa color in their living room. Gray outdoor pavers complement the concrete flooring inside. Solow chose plants with high tolerance for heat and wind, both of which are magnified on a terrace. He also designed the space to maximize views of the uptown skyline, Little Sugar Creek Greenway and a nearby pavilion where bands play during warm weather. “We can stand at the railing and



Barbara Branch’s condo terrace in Eastover includes a sculpture of a five-foot phoenix.

listen to music and people-watch,” Denise says.

SMALLER SPACE, DIFFERENT PRIORITIES

Barbara and Twig Branch had a smaller space than the Lindsay’s and different priorities when planning their terrace at Fenton Place Condominiums in Eastover. Instead of maximizing a skyline view, they wanted to draw the eye away from transformers on a power pole outside their back door. Barbara also wanted an herb garden and greenery that were easy to maintain.

“Year-round, I just can’t cook without fresh herbs,” she said. But Barbara, a homemaker, and Twig, a retired insurance

executive, didn’t want to worry about plants needing water when they were on vacation. And their condo association rules don’t allow irrigation systems. So Jared Sweet of The Royal Gardens designed a plan that included two concrete planters and two large terra-cotta pots filled with a mix of soil and moisture-retaining crystals. The planters hold rosemary, thyme, sage, parsley, oregano and pansies. The pots, lined with plastic for extra help with moisture, are filled with juniper and sedum. “The juniper never needs watering,” Barbara says. She says she rarely has to water the herbs either.

To focus attention on the terrace instead of the electrical transformers beyond, the

Branches put a five-foot iron sculpture of a phoenix near the center of the 210-square-foot space. With wings outstretched and beak open, the bird is the first thing you notice when stepping outside from their Asian-influenced living room.

The sculpture is by Pittsburgh artist William Wessel. It stands behind a small glass-top table and two wrought-iron chairs where the Branches like to enjoy a glass of wine on spring evenings. “We realized we can’t really hide the ugly parts,” Barbara said of the backyard transformers. But with a little ingenuity, Sweet and the Branches have created a space that’s both functional and appealing to the eye. **ES**