

GREENER PASTURES AHEAD

Landscape designers help bring tired looking properties back to life

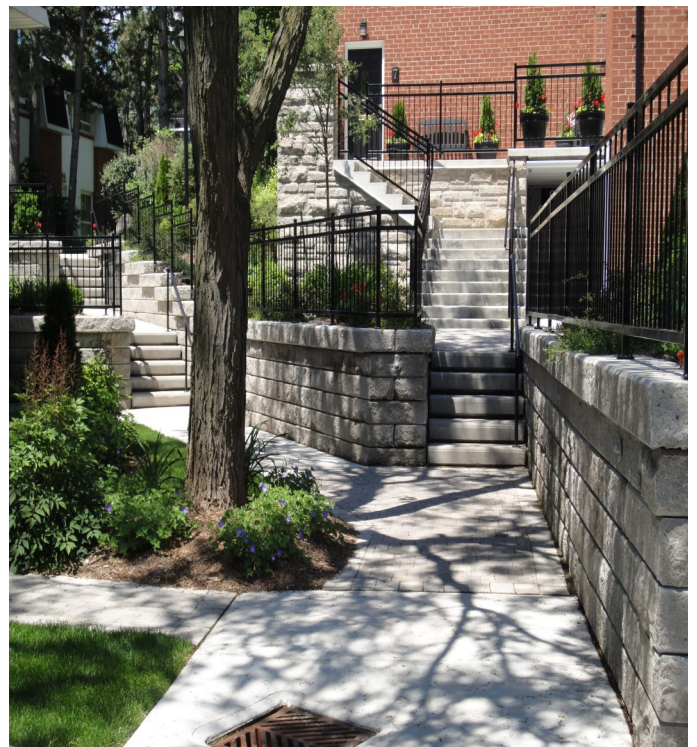
Property owners/managers and condominium boards often overlook the importance of landscape design and, consequently, its ability to improve a building's curb appeal. Thus adding value to a property. Many regard it as merely horticultural makeup—cosmetic decoration applied to a site to enhance the appearance of a building—when, in fact, it involves developing practical and pleasing outdoor spaces. As a result, they tend to take a piecemeal approach to improving their building's landscape. With no clear vision of the end result, nor understanding of the costs associated with proper landscaping, property owners/managers and condo boards are left with little more than a hodgepodge look—one which is sure to leave a lasting impression, albeit probably not a good one.



BEFORE

Evaluating the Site

Property owners/managers and condo boards that are planning to renovate or restore a building's landscape should consider retaining the services of a qualified landscape designer. Not only will they reap the benefits of a professionally designed landscape but it will save them time and it could potentially be a money-saver in the long-run. The first step in any landscape renovation/restoration project is to conduct a site evaluation. The purpose is to identify any site issues(existing or potential) that will need to be addressed before the "pretty" can be put into the landscape. Possible site problems that may be overlooked by an inexperienced eye include: drainage issues, overgrown or dead shrubbery, dead or decayed trees, sidewalks that have heaved or shifted, interlocking stone that is out of place, poor conditions and/or appearance of the building entrance and the structural integrity of the timber or unit stone retaining walls. With regard to the latter, both construction materials present safety concerns. Over time, timber will decay and a unit stone retaining wall will start to lean. These types of problems developed between 1970 and 1990, particularly where timber was used for retaining walls, steps or other site structures.



AFTER

Setting the Scene

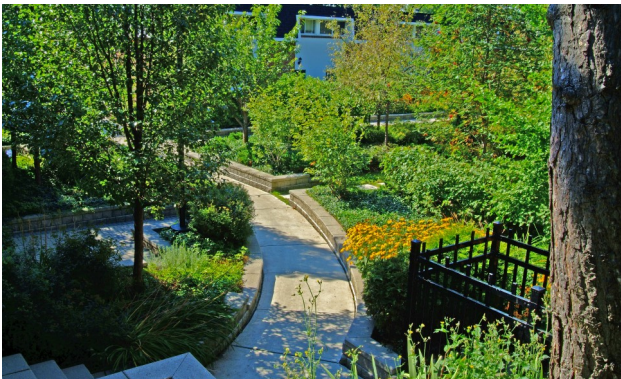
Once the site evaluation is complete, the designer will create a document that summarizes, categorizes and prioritizes all identified problems. This will form the basis of the scope of work, which will describe, in detail, the actual work to be done.

A list of 'like to have' landscape elements may be added to this document. While property owners/managers and condo boards may wish to retain certain plants, most if not all, will be replaced, the exception being any dominant trees. Experience shows this is the most viable approach to take during a landscape renovation/restoration. Putting the right plants in the right place will ensure that they will perform well with limited additional input. The designer will provide guidance in the selection of budget friendly, location appropriate, hardy, colourful shrubs, trees and perennials.

Following this, the designer will return to the site to take measurements. This information, along with notes on existing site features and elements, is used to create an architectural drawing or plan. Considerable design time can be saved, however, if site survey plans are available as well as any original building architectural drawings.

From here, the designer will create a site conceptual plan, and put together an estimated budget. Both are then presented to the client for review and acceptance. Often, the conceptual plan is modified prior to presentation until a suitable solution is found that meets the needs of the client and is acceptable to the designer. Even then, the plan may undergo further revision based on the client's feedback and/or designer's recommendations.

The plan itself should include section and elevation views. These two-dimensional drawings are particularly necessary to show specific structures (existing and/or to be constructed). The plan may also include some form of 3-d imaging and walk-through views that convey the "landscape story". Most designers now use these in place of traditional plan (aerial) view drawings, which can be difficult for some people to read.



RESIDENTIAL GARDEN

The Master Plan

Once both parties are pleased with, and sign-off on, the conceptual plan, the designer will generate a master plan. This should include an overall site plan, planting plan, dimension plan, hardscape plan and a construction plan. Ideally, the master plan should show all details related to the project. This gives successive building owners/managers and condo boards a clear vision of the landscape design as well as a script to follow in case some of the work is not completed due to budgetary constraints. It also means a contractor could build from the master plan without the designer's oversight. However, it's often in the best interests of the client to retain the designer to provide project management during the construction process. This ensures that what has been designed is actually built.

At this time, the designer may also write and issue a tender on behalf of the client to determine a build price for the project. The tender proposals are then reviewed by the client and designer, following which a contract is awarded.