

Big ideas embellish small garden

Tight space inspires creativity in backyard near Daly City mall

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Gardens can bring both seclusion and delight, even in tight city lots.

For this home, near the Serramonte Shopping Center in Daly City, the owners wanted a backyard that would make them feel as if they were in a wooded area, with ferns, rocks, foliage and an outdoor water feature.

They hired Katey Mulligan of LiquidAmbar Garden Design to create it.

The challenges inherent in the site were many.

Mulligan says, "The narrow, flat backyard was just 12 by 15 feet deep and 48 feet long. It was dominated by a retaining wall ranging in height from 8 to 15 feet above the ground."

With the wall overshadowing the garden on two sides, and the house on another, innovative measures had to be taken. Additionally, the



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Door to imagination: The "mystery door" in this garden near Daly City's Serramonte Center creates a private, expansive feeling.

property is located in a fog belt, was under a strict neighborhood association restriction to avoid compromising neighbors' drainage, and was exposed to strong Pacific coast breezes.

Mulligan visually extended the indoor rooms out into the garden by dividing the yard into two "rooms." Extending from the kitchen on one side is a flagstone patio and seat wall capped with matching Mariposa

slate. The sculptural wall curves to create a nook for dining, minimizing the need for outdoor furniture. A bubbling wall fountain, framed

beneath a redwood arbor, is centered under the kitchen window. Trees, shrubs, vines and perennials surround the arbor to suggest

a woodland backdrop.

Extending from the dining area, a second outdoor "room" is paved with gravel and accented with mossy boulders, scattered throughout. River birch, Japanese maple and Maytens trees let sunshine in, and espalier podocarpus screens the side of the wall, punctuated by a Cyatheales tree fern. Mulligan added illusion by building a false "mystery door" made of reclaimed redwood and framed by star jasmine, suggesting an entry into another garden.

Mulligan created vertical interest to counteract the small garden space by layering greenery, adding arbors and raising planting areas.

She used shade-tolerant plants and for "mystery" foliage she blended textures, from pieris, camellia, loropetalum and fatsia, to evergreen daylilies, dwarf agapanthus, liriope, geranium Johnson's blue, ferns and baby's tears.

Earthy tones on boulders and slate mix well with blooms in burgundy, bronze and rosy pink of Acer palmatum, heuchera "Chocolate Ruffles" and loropetalum "Plum Delight."

