

The Remake of 1100 Constitution Avenue NE

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY DEREK THOMAS

Just over three years ago, Barry And Donna Brauth packed up their lives and trekked south from Albany, New York to spread new roots in the heart of Capitol Hill. Donna says, "I wanted to move to Washington for the weather and lifestyle. City living was attractive to me. I wanted to be able to walk to stores, restaurants and markets." And for Barry the move to Washington was a long anticipated one, "all my life I wanted to live here," says Barry. Their search for a new home took the couple to many Washington neighborhoods, however when they discovered Capitol Hill they knew they were finally home. "What we loved instantly about the Hill was it's tranquil and sedate village look with a small town feel, while still being very urban. I knew we'd found home," says Donna. Barry felt it was a beautiful part of the city and thought he would have no problems adjusting to the type of city living the Hill had to offer.

A Home on the Hill

After looking around the Hill, the home at 1100 Constitution Ave. NE was instantly the



Barry and Donna Brauth enjoy their new garden on a perfect Capitol Hill afternoon

one for the couple. The home had been renovated and the couple felt right from the moment they crossed the threshold. This feeling would last throughout all the untimely repairs that popped up over the next few years. "We encountered all the "This Old House" worries with in the first few years," says Donna. Leaking roofs and a multitude of fixes and repairs did not discourage the

couple, for they had found a new home. As the months turned into years, the couple knew they had to do the garden and in the summer of 2011 they jumped in feet first. You see theirs is a sprawling corner wrap around garden with planting areas on both Constitution and 11th Street.

A time to garden

The garden at 1100 Constitution Ave. NE is in fact quite large, very public, and has all the micro-climates that most massive estates are in envy of. The Constitution Avenue side faces south and bakes and blisters in the summer sun. This space pushes around the corner to 11th Street where street trees begin to offer dappled sunlight and a taste of reprieve from the sun's onslaught.

As the garden continues along 11th Street, the sun fades away behind the shade of mature hemlocks, dogwoods and hollies. The street trees assist in transforming the harshest western exposure into a shaded oasis where moss and lichens would be perfectly, unexpectedly at home. The spaces were originally landscaped with masses of liriop



Before the seas of liriop overpowered even the harsh cement pavers



After the garden flows and drifts through its many microclimates

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cement steppers. A minimalist's rendering of "since I don't know what to do with the space, let's plant it out with seas of indestructible liriopé and hope for the best," style of landscaping.

Perhaps the only source of joy the garden squeezed out for Barry and Donna during their first years was the rose who, in spite of the couple's forced neglect, bloomed. Oh, and the badly – no, really badly – pruned Crape Myrtle. So, the couple started the interviews for the



A foxgloves' petals perches upon the peeling bark of a Kousa dogwood

designer who could take their green sea of liriopé and transform it into a garden that was theirs. In fact, during the forced interior repairs they were researching the differences of gardens in the Mid-Atlantic compared to their former New York State. Donna was checking out the plants that would work for her tastes and thrive in the multi-climate garden. Barry felt, "being a corner lot we have a bigger obligation to do our garden, and do it right."

At first, many of the designers were not able to grasp the garden, the neighborhood, and the style and aesthetics that



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Even the tree box's new resident is a show off in Barry and Donna's new garden

work on Capitol Hill. "Some of the designers wanted to put in plants that would make me feel like we were back in the suburbs. I did not want this," says Donna. When they met their designer they knew the fit was right. "We decided fairly quickly that this was the one," says Barry.

The Renovation

Over the next month the drawings and plans came together, the brick walkway to the main entry and the broken up cement driveway gave way to European inspired pavers. The seas and seas of lirioppe were tamed and repurposed into the tree boxes. Iron hair-pin tree box fencing was added, and the massive amounts



A rose frolics along the restored iron fence

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of iris that once fought and vied for earth in the main garden was transplanted into the newly renovated tree boxes. The rose who fought for survival for the past few years was put into the south west tree box with a second surviving rose who had been planted under the cover of a second story bay and had survived. The cement pavers gave way to large field stone steppers that helped to break up the straight, staid lines of the former paths. The garden was planted with drifts of plants that would normally not be found in the same garden together. Due to the multi climates, Barry and Donna's garden has hosta and hydrangea, playfully existing with Christmas Ferns and foxglove. Camellias and dwarf Nandina joust with topiary boxwoods and drifts of pansies. Otto laurels and Nandina show off berries in winter and spring. Hummingbird mint and iris play off the cool leaves of coral bells and cone flower. The once solitary rose has been replaced with a proper English rose garden that is built around the stately structure of a specimen Crape Myrtle. Large mature Nandina and chindo viburnum help to soften the southeast corner of the home. The new garden flows and ebbs in a tranquil display of coy and subtle navigation from harsh sun, to part shade, to dense understory shade, seamlessly and unpretentiously. In a very similar replication to the cool, self-assured folks who now call the entire space, garden and house, home.

Derek Thomas is principal of Thomas Landscapes. His garden designs have been featured on HGTV's "Curb Appeal" and "Get It Sold." His weekly garden segment can be seen on WTTG/Fox 5 in Washington. He can be reached at www.thomaslandscapes.com or 301-642-5182. You can find and friend us on Facebook at Facebook/Thomas Landscapes. ★

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