

---

A dark blue rectangular banner with a faint cityscape background. At the top, the text "HOUSTON★CHRONICLE" is displayed in white, with a yellow star between the words. Below this, the text "As low as \$1 per week / Unlimited Digital Access" is written in white. Underneath that, in a smaller font, is "HoustonChronicle.com | App for iPhone and iPad | eEdition". At the bottom center of the banner is a bright orange rectangular button with the word "SUBSCRIBE" in white capital letters.

HOUSTON★CHRONICLE  
As low as \$1 per week / Unlimited Digital Access  
HoustonChronicle.com | App for iPhone and iPad | eEdition  
SUBSCRIBE

# Homeowners want their landscapes to stand out on the block

**Homeowners want their landscapes to stand out on the block**

By Diane Cowen | April 7, 2017



Photo: Courtesy Of The Garden Conservancy

---

#### IMAGE 14 OF 21

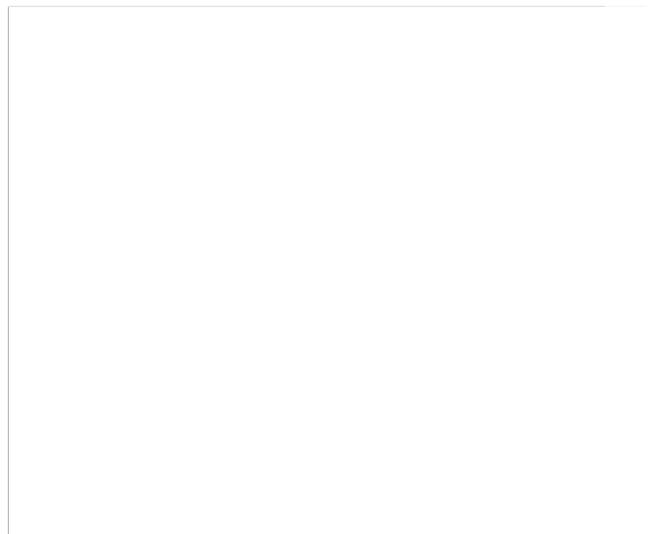
Briarwood Court House: The gardens at a private home on Briarwood Court range from highly structured architectural spaces to loose planterly compositions; intimate spaces, to large formal gathering areas.

---

Welcome to the new world.

The backyard was once just about having trees, shrubs and annuals for pops of color. Today local landscape architects and designers say that stylish outdoor spaces are getting as much consideration as the homes they're attached to.

Modern architecture is on the rise, and



homeowners want their yards - front and back  
- to be in synch, said Johnny Steele of Johnny Steele Design.

"I met with clients the other day in Memorial, and it's not the typical brick, Georgian or Mediterranean style home that we might have seen a few years ago," said Steele, a landscape architect.

The result is an opportunity to rethink plants, hardscapes and structure.

"It's cleaner in terms of the lines ... we're using fewer types of plants in a design - six or seven instead of 15 varieties or species. That's definitely a trend that I'm seeing," Steele said.

When considering the wow factor that his clients are looking for, less may actually do more. "I can do that with one bold strike here and two bold strokes there," he said.

Houzz - which offers remodeling and design ideas - recently released a report on trends in home landscaping.

Survey results supported local observations: homeowners want a distinctive look, great plants, natural stone and professional design help.

At Curtis & Windham, landscape designer Frank Brown III has been busy turning parts of soft green lawns into functional sources of food.

"Organic vegetable gardens," Brown said. "I've never done so many in my life. Almost every client is asking for one now."

---

#### TRANSLATOR

---

To read this article in one of Houston's most-spoken languages, click on the button below.

Select Language ▼

---

#### STYLE

---



**Eating and drinking along New Orleans' new restaurant row**



**Five fashion trends to try for a glam Mardi Gras this year**

Some are small herb gardens in window boxes or patio pots. Many, though, are raised beds filled with peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, squash and zucchini.

"First it was with people who had children, but now it's everyone just wanting good food," Brown said.

More attention is being paid to lighting, with clients ditching harsh light in favor of warmer tones that feel more like indoors and can be operated via remote control or on an iPad.

Azaleas and camellias are hardy Southern favorites, and Brown said that his clients still want plenty of them.

Steele plants those shrubs as well, but works with often-used plants in different ways. Rolled steel becomes a clean edge for a border that may be filled with gravel or stone, tying in with the lines and materials in modern homes.

He'll use agave plants, giant bamboo, bald cypress and dwarf yaupon. And while many might have gravel on a walkway or in accent garden areas, Steele is using it as ground cover.

Zoysia grass is something else people are leaning toward for a soft, shaggy lawn.

Their clients also are looking for options that are easier to take care of, require fewer chemicals and maybe even require less water.

"I've had clients who have abandoned rose gardens or are moving to drift roses or knockouts, which don't require the (chemical) spraying. It's about being a better steward



**For genuine Mardi Gras experience, consider heading to Acadiana**



**Fabulous finds with palm prints for an early spring**



**Uptown Park fashion boutique celebrates 40 years**

---

of the land," Steele said.

Here are highlights of the Houzz landscape survey:

Stand out in a crowd: Rather than wanting to blend in, 41 percent of homeowners want their front yards to look distinctly different from their neighbors.

**Go-to plants:** More than half of those updating their front yards say that beds or borders (47 percent), shrubs (29 percent) and perennials (28 percent) are most important.

**Motivation:** More people buying homes are taking on outdoor projects. The 2017 survey reports that 33 percent of new homeowners want to get work done outdoors, compared to 25 percent a year ago.

**Light it up:** It's not enough to improve your front yard, people also have to see it. That's why 45 percent of people working on outdoor projects are updating lighting, with 73 percent opting for LEDs and 20 percent adding "smart" lighting that can be controlled remotely.

**Go for it:** Homeowners with projects underway are going big: 37 percent are doing a complete overhaul while another 48 percent call their projects "major renovations."

**Professional help:** Those who have completed their projects are fairly evenly split on hiring experts: 34 percent hired a landscape contractor, 34 percent hired a landscape architect or designer and 32 percent hired stone/concrete specialists.

**What to build:** More renovating homeowners are opting for patios or terraces (38 percent) over arbors, gazebos, pergolas or trellises (26 percent) or decks (20 percent).

**On the ground:** Hardscapes (pavers, stone, etc.) are the top choice (66 percent) over garden beds (60 percent) and other ground cover (55 percent). Brown said that blue stone is the most commonly used stone among his clients; Steele shops all over the world for various stone treatments. When a client asked for white marble, Steele produced samples from the U.S., China, Mexico and Italy. "The variety of materials is almost limitless," Steele said.

**Take a seat:** Purchases for renovated outdoor space include outdoor lounge furniture (36 percent), a fire pit (32 percent) or outdoor dining furniture (28 percent).

**Spending:** The breakdown of spending ranges from under \$1,000 to more than \$50,000. Here are some numbers: 73 percent of projects cost \$5,000 or less; 23 percent spent \$5,000 to \$15,000; and 4 percent spent more than \$15,000.



**Diane Cowen**

Home Design Writer,  
Houston Chronicle