



WINDOW TO THE WORLD

WITH GLASS WALLS AND A FOUR-SEASON GARDEN,
A VANCOUVER, BC, URBAN RETREAT INVITES THE OUTDOORS IN

WRITTEN BY ROBYN ROEHM CANNON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBERT STEFANOWICZ PHOTOGRAPHY

Every once in a blue moon, a residential property comes along that is so extraordinary, there is literally a handful like it in the entire world. This luxury condominium, in the heart of Vancouver, British Columbia, is one such spot. Breathtaking panoramas of snowcapped mountains, an active waterfront and seawall, a historic city park, and an endless skyline are all within arm's reach in the space.

But the real drama lies just outside its floor-to-ceiling glass walls, where sophisticated interiors blend seamlessly into a four-season tapestry of mature trees, evergreen shrubs, bamboo hedges, myriad groundcovers, and select perennials. It's hard to believe that this luscious private world sits just three floors above street level in the hip,

reclaimed urban neighborhood of Coal Harbour, once an industrial area riddled with train tracks for land transfer of goods from cargo ships.

"We call this type of property 'front row,'" states Judy Henderson, principal of Inside Design Studio Inc., who orchestrated furnishings that would enhance the views and exterior space. "The residence is extremely rare because it sits at 'podium' level—an architectural concept that allows it to have an expansive outdoor garden before the building steps back into a slimmer tower of condominiums above.

"There's a theory that once you get past the seventh floor in a high-rise, you are completely separate from the outside world," continues Henderson. "Here, though, it's just the

opposite. The seaplanes are departing and landing. The pleasure craft, cruise, and cargo ships go in and out of Burrard Inlet—it's a vibrant, working harbor, and it's very entertaining to sit next to the glass wall and look outside."

The exterior space, at 4,000 square feet, is nearly twice that of the interior. "On a beautiful summer day, this really becomes one space when the sliding walls are pushed open," notes Henderson. "This is a very dense neighborhood, but the garden is amazingly private. It comes right up to the interior—not at all like viewing a garden from a framed window. We respected that feature by keeping the furnishings simple and pulled away from the glass. In the springtime, the garden is so vibrant, it creates a magnificent backdrop to our neutral palette with splashes of color."

Blair Guppy, senior landscape architect for the Vancouver-based landscape architectural firm Phillips Farevaag Smallemberg, was involved during the preconstruction phase of the building to design the garden and plan its installation.

"This terrace was intended as a series of exterior accompaniments to the interiors," notes Guppy. "We utilized specific materials and different textures to define the 'rooms' and visually move you from the private terrace adjoining the master suite out into a more open, expansive space, which takes full advantage of the views."

A reflecting pool with large basalt stepping stones leads to an ironwood deck with chaise lounges just outside the master

suite. When approaching the space from inside, the deck appears to be suspended in air. A small strip of deep-blue LED lighting installed beneath the deck creates this dramatic modernist detail.

An adjacent building wall is obscured by a hedge of bamboo that provides a tranquil backdrop for a 1,000-pound basalt column, cored and cut at an angle for water to bubble from its top and recirculate through the pond. A seven-foot pane of frosted glass is mounted behind the column, dramatically diffusing an ever-changing rainbow of colored light at night.

Choosing trees of appropriately large scale was a major design consideration for Guppy. Mature 'Red Dragon' Japanese maples and *Magnolia grandiflora* 'Little Gem' were planted in huge containers. Sculptural-quality Japanese black pines (*Pinus thunbergii*) were imported from a specialty grower who had trained the trees in bonsai for 35 years.

Several microclimates and light conditions—from shade to part sun—exist in the garden, and ornamentals like rhododendrons, camellia, azalea, and western sword ferns share space with mosses, iris, black mondo, lily turf, and Japanese forest grass. Because of Vancouver's excessively damp climate, Henderson specified vinyl-wrapped rattan with water and sun-resistant fabric cushions. "This is an amazing place to entertain," she says. "Under the awning next to the fireplace is absolutely where you want to have dinner in the evening." ■

