

2010 BIG DOUBLE ISSUE!

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# dramatic entryway

An elegant walkway connects driveway to entrance

**T**he setting, surrounded by woods on top of a mountain, was idyllic, as was the Colonial-style home. But, there was no logical way to get from an asphalt parking court to the front door. "Guests walked along a narrow, straight path made of pavers. Many had the feeling they would fall off the hillside and into the meadow below because the walkway was so constricted," says landscape designer Matthew Biron of Hoffman Landscapes

in Wilton, Connecticut, who was hired to redesign the front. "Our goal," he says, "was to provide some visual guides or pauses using hardscape elements and soft, native plantings that integrated with the existing architecture of the house." The new walk is textured quartzite, a natural stone with tan and gray color variations that complements the stone on the home's façade. Because of the dramatic grade change, Biron incorporated

Trees add a statuesque grandeur along the walkway from the drive.  
 RIGHT: Bluestone steps set into the lawn lead toward an impressive landing. A bluestone box is planted with lavender and embellished with an urn.

Photography: Matthew Biron, Rich Pomerantz

a set of oversized stone steps to make the transition, framing them in 12" bands of bluestone and creating a landing at one point for a more significant focal point. Color comes from plantings at the landing's four quadrants—a mix of *Nepeta*, cinnamon fern, Oriental fountain grass and daylilies. Four large hornbeam trees at each corner add a strong vertical element, and their compact shape and growing pattern ensure they'll never camouflage the house.



## behind the scenes

**Landscape designer:** Matthew Biron, ASLA, Hoffman Landscapes, Wilton, CT, hoffmanlandscapes.com, 203-834-9656  
**Challenge:** Guide visitors from a side parking court to the front door via a landscaped walkway  
**Best outcome:** Aside from the desired walk, Biron created an extension of the house in the form of a little outdoor room  
**Main plants used:** Sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*); lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*); Sprite astilbe (*Astilbe 'Sprite'*); fastigiata European hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*

'Fastigiata'); Happy Returns daylily; climbing hydrangea (*Hydrangea anomala ssp. petiolaris*); oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*); Dr. Kassab holly (*Ilex 'Dr. Kassab'*); Dragon Lady holly (*Ilex x aquipernyi 'Meschick'*); Minuet mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia 'Minuet'*); Donald Wyman crabapple (*Malus 'Donald Wyman'*); Walker's Low catmint (*Nepeta 'Walker's Low'*); cinnamon fern; Oriental fountain grass (*Pennisetum orientale*); Serbian spruce (*Picea omarika*); Korean spice viburnum (*Viburnum carlesii*)  
**Zones:** 4-6

## Let the site inspire you

Landscape designer Matthew Biron wanted an original front landscape design; he took inspiration from the home's hilltop setting, large scale and stone materials. Other lessons:

- Don't go with a walkway on one level and in one material.** Biron designed a walk in quartzite, a natural stone that complements the gray stone on the home's façade. Because of the site's steep sloping grade, he constructed steps, which also add a sense of adventure. At one point, he built a landing, bordering the step in a textured bluestone; at the center of the landing, he added an herb box in a smoother bluestone.
- Add vivid flowers for more color and to soften the hardscape.** Flowers such as daylilies and astilbe were planted at the four quadrants of the pier and were allowed to tumble over for a natural effect. More native shrubs and trees—flowering crabapples, rhododendron, mountain laurel—were planted by the parking court to add color and visual interest.

# terraced garden rooms

Poor drainage leads to multiple terraces

**F**or a grilling enthusiast who also wanted an outdoor kitchen/dining area, landscape architect Brian Cossari, ASLA, of Hoffman Landscapes in Wilton, Connecticut, designed a series of terraces akin to outdoor rooms. They had to accommodate patio furniture, two large barbecue grills and kitchen appliances—and provide access into the house through four different sets of doorways.

To offer cooling elements, since the terraces face south, Cossari removed the stamped concrete surface of the home's existing terrace and replaced it with traditional brick, which is cooler underfoot. Planting beds set within the hardscape give a sense of definition and a soft separation to the "rooms." The beds also add color and texture, which soften hardscape surfacing. Existing columns at the back of the house were left intact and repeated in a new wisteria-wrapped pergola that helps shade the lower-level dining terrace. Still larger planting beds were added on the outer edges of the terraces to make the transition from patio to the adjacent rolling lawn.



The rear gained multiple spaces for sitting and eating. Good lighting enables the homeowners to use these areas at night, too.

## behind the scenes

**Landscape architect:** Brian Cossari, Hoffman Landscapes, Wilton, CT, hoffmanlandscapes.com, 203-834-9656

**Challenges:** The house had numerous angles and a number of rear-facing doors, so a terrace had to be wide and deep enough to provide access from all exit points; changes in the yard's grade also had to be accommodated; and a wet basement had to be fixed.

**Best outcome:** Because the terrace was large enough and because of the grade change, Cossari designed one large space as a series of outdoor rooms.

**Main plants used:** Lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*); American boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens*); Karl Foerster feather reed grass (*Calamagrostis acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster'); thornless honeylocust (*Gleditsia triacanthos* var. *inermis*); climbing hydrangea (*Hydrangea anomala* ssp. *petiolaris*); munstead lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia* 'Munstead')

**Zone:** 5



The back terrace steps down to accommodate the change in grade; stone seat walls provide division.

Photography: Matthew Biron, Rich Pomerantz

## Incorporating plant materials within a hardscape

Many homeowners are intimidated by mixing the two, but doing so can soften and cool down a hardscape, says landscape architect Brian Cossari:

**Consult a professional.** Cossari is a licensed member of the ASLA, or the American Society of Landscape Architects. [asla.org](http://asla.org)

**Choose materials according to the site's exposure.** Since this landscape gets a lot of sun, plants such as lavender and feather reed ornamental grass were picked. The beds were also made deep and wide enough to be a focal point, yet they are in scale with the hardscape area. Drip irrigation was

added from the start to keep plants flourishing.

**Design the size of the beds and terrace according to the size and scale of the house and yard.** Consider the purpose of the space as well as elements such as furniture and plantings. "There's no point in wanting a place to dine or relax if you don't have room for proper furniture. Think of outdoor areas as you do indoor rooms, with space to accommodate table, chairs and sofas," says Cossari. He advises varying terraces' dimensions and building them on different levels to match the grade and add variety.

**Don't forget illumination.** Since most entertaining occurs at night, be sure to include outdoor lighting. This allows for safe, comfortable use and provides an inviting extension to the home.