

Backyard Bliss

SOCCER CLEATS AND SAVOIR FAIRE MIX IT UP IN A GRACIOUS SAMMAMISH BACKYARD

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PROJECT TEAM:

Architect:

PLACE Architects

Landscape Architect:

Johnson-Southerland

Landscape Contractor:

Steven Bruns, Inc.

If you're ever lucky enough to visit Tammy Steele and Jeff Stewart's backyard, you're likely to be struck by the peacefulness of the scene: a broad expanse of lawn flowing into stands of cedar, maple and wild cheery. Two classical stone urns flanking a handsome verandah. A boy whizzing by on a suspended steel cable.

Wait a minute. What's a pint-sized aerial adventurer doing in an Arcadian setting such as this?

As it turns out, the zip line (a handled pulley attached to an inclined cable that allows kids to fly through the air with the greatest of ease) that streaks across this bucolic one-acre expanse is all part of a master plan. "We wanted a place our kids would want to hang out in with their friends," Steele explains. "It's our strategy to keep them around as they get older."



Architects Heather Johnston and Samantha Beadel, of PLACE Architects, worked closely with Steele and Stewart in creating their design for a playful retreat where boys--as in the couple's three sons, Torey, 12, Jake, 10, and Max, 6--can be boys, entertaining is hassle-free and there's always room for another guest, or 11 (as in a soccer team).



Johnston and Beadel's style packs graphic punch, but beneath the criss-crossed and cartwheeling timbers lies a straightforward commitment to indoor-outdoor living. In a new entertainment room, custom fir-framed glass doors fold neatly away, inviting a breezy game of billiards. The French doors of a charming gabled guest cottage open to the musical burble of a garden waterfall just outside. Created with Easter brunches and birthday parties in mind, a barbeque area adjoining the kitchen features stainless-steel storage and a slate-topped buffet counter that doubles as extra seating. Framing it all, a spacious raised patio acts as a bridge that links old and new, inside and out.

Shades of gold and red add sparkle to a host of refined details. A copper rain-chain adorns an alcove of etched Italianate tiles. Upholstered in saffron, a cozy half-moon loveseat catches the earth tones in a circular ledgestone fire-pit, while sunlight streaming through a glass-covered trellis glints off slender metallic torchieres. The style here is unfussy, but unmistakably elegant. It takes the rock-and-roll floating from six outdoor speakers to remind you of the soccer net and swing-set across the yard.

The lawn's manicured perfection represents a decisive victory in a nine-year battle against the mud endemic to these lush wetland woods. Stewart spent an entire summer (literally) in the trenches, digging a drainage tunnel around their backyard bog. When the boys still trooped in for dinner looking like aspiring mud-wrestlers, Stewart and Steele gave up. Shelving their waders and their lawn-mower both, they opted for Dream Turf, artificial grass with wetland-worthy drainage and the look and feel of the real thing. Steele likes the fact that it doesn't require chemical fertilizers that can harm pets and wildlife. Equally important, she says that the springy stuff is easy to fall on. In other words, it's the perfect pitch for the place; an oasis of graceful living with room for the rough-and-tumble crowd.

