

backyard challenge

THE CLIENTS

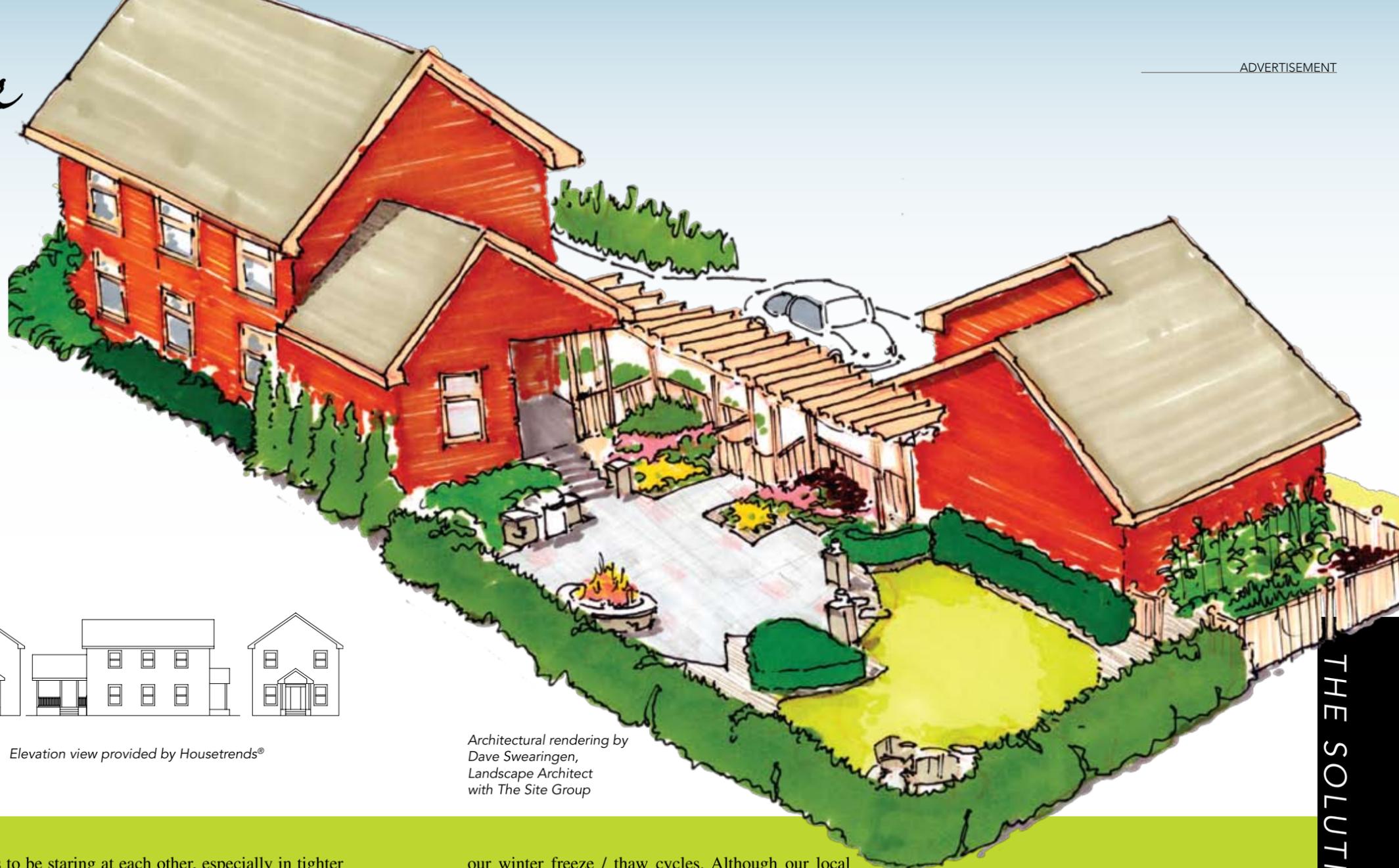
- Empty nesters
- Enjoy entertaining, dinner parties for 10-20, mostly adults and older children
- Environmentally aware – recycling, water conservation, etc
- Are interested in investing in their home, but not in a lavish way
- Want low maintenance, but are willing to “garden”

THE SITE

- An older home in a neighborhood with small lots
- Basically a flat site
- Close, friendly neighbors on each side



Elevation view provided by Housetrends®



Architectural rendering by Dave Swearingen, Landscape Architect with The Site Group

THE SOLUTION AND LANDSCAPER

Even though the owners of this home chose the vibrancy of the city over a roomy lot in the suburbs, they still want a custom designed outdoor living space with amenities selected to fit their lifestyle. In this age of varying savings accounts and unstable markets, the “nesting” feature of home still makes it an investment priority. However, many customers are not as concerned with a room for every purpose, and are more interested in flexible space that offers the backdrop for different size groups and occasions. Making the most of their small backyard and investing in sustainable, yet classic materials can help them get the most value out of their investment.

In such a small yard some priorities must be set. You can't have, for example, a nice-sized patio and a volleyball court, too. In this case, we are choosing the patio and allowing the yard to be minimized. The challenge is creating the flexibility to be an intimate space for a small group and still be large enough to accommodate a larger dinner party. In terms of overall layout of this property, privacy is paramount. Although they get along well with their neighbors and will probably host them on their patio, no

one wants to be staring at each other, especially in tighter yards where conversations can practically be heard back and forth. In keeping with the green and low maintenance theme, a medium height hedge is my recommendation to give screening and privacy. I also like the idea of a classic picket fence to separate the driveway from the yard. This gives a sense of enclosure, narrows down the access points into the backyard, and defines the edges of the entertaining space.

Small yards and patios, however, don't have to be poorly designed or minimally detailed – especially on a property with lots of character and history. Classic surfaces like natural stone are making a comeback. Pavers are becoming more common and the price premium to go to a smooth natural stone has become more affordable. I am recommending a square cut, gauged flagstone for this patio. The natural material has enduring appeal and timeless value, so they won't feel like tearing it out and going with the next trend that comes down the pike in five years. I would, however, recommend laying it on gravel if possible to eliminate the problems that concrete can have because of

our winter freeze / thaw cycles. Although our local flagstones are mostly too rough for patio furniture, there are some smoother options available in the local market from adjoining states. A natural stone veneer would reintroduce a classic material on the grill counter, fire pit walls, and decorative columns – making them look like they were always designed to be there, not an afterthought.

Since the clients are environmentally aware, I would like to suggest a couple of items for them to consider. Behind the garage, where it will get a great deal of sunlight, would be a great place for a vegetable garden. Sometimes veggies can get a little unruly, so having them out of sight, but easily accessible, would be best. Along with the garden would be a compost area, where the owners can throw their green waste for a season, then use it to enrich their garden soil. There are also various collection systems available for rainwater storage. Rain could be collected off of the gutters and stored underground, then reused for bed irrigation or garden watering. I would also

suggest a couple of shade trees to provide scale and shade the patio, although I did not show them in the sketch for clarity. Hardy, disease resistant plant varieties would help them eliminate future sprays and chemical applications.

As customers' appetites for debt are changing, people are looking for ways to get more value for their dollars. Our homes, however, are still the largest investment most of us will make. Creating a hospitable feeling and providing activity space for each member of the family will make memories that will give this family a lasting return on their investment.



THE SITEGROUP

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