

A Rooftop Retreat

A landscape designer turned an unusual space into a little slice of paradise for these homeowners.

By **Debby Larsen**
Photography by **Robin Stancliff**

Dale Dacquisto and David Crowley's stunning rooftop deck was created by Shelly Ann Abbott, of Landscape Design West, with input from Jason Boen, of In Place Architecture. Its elevation offers city and mountain views, and Abbott's carefully selected plantings make it an attractive venue for entertaining.

Dale Dacquisto and David Crowley moved to Tucson from Phoenix and fell in love with the central foothills area. They found a mid-century modern home that seemed perfect, nestled among native desert on a mountain slope and elevated just high enough to get city views through floor-to-ceiling livingroom windows. But there were elements about the house that needed a makeover. The entry area and a small garden had latent potential, but the couple was unsure how to go about making it functional, and perhaps even fabulous.

They hired Shelly Ann Abbott, MLA, owner and principal of Landscape Design West to tackle the project, which would create a link between indoor and outdoor spaces.

A special feature of the home was that the stepped elevation of the garage — lower than the home — allowed its roof to be utilized in the makeover. Abbott's plan included a rooftop deck and surrounding garden.

The project required rigorous planning for Abbott, who worked in collaboration with Tucson architect Jake Boen, owner of In Place Architecture. The first order of business was to convert the garage roof, with its parapet walls, into a viewing deck, while ensuring that the structure would support the deck and hold more than 100 guests at times.

On the rooftop garden, Abbott used large Corten steel planter boxes as the main perimeter barrier. Steel cable hand railings secured with industrial steel bolts were added by Boen. These elements

had rust finishes, serving as distinctive accents while providing perimeter safety barriers.

For the plantscape, Abbott filled the raised planters with sun-loving and low-water-use cacti and succulents, selecting species that add year-round color and textural interest. These include lady slipper with golden and red barrel cacti groupings. In surrounding garden

Above: Specimen Mexican fence post cacti flank the stairway to the upper level. Custom metal art fabricated by Smitty Built Co. holds dozens of glass vases with LED tea lights.

Opposite Top: An old quartz gristmill stone was repurposed as part of a fountain by the front door.

Opposite Right: Steel cable handrails were installed to provide perimeter safety barriers between the planter boxes.



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areas, a variety of plants were installed, including Sierra Star fairy duster, purple trailing lantana, desert milkweed and chuparosa. These plants invite pollinators and hummingbirds to visit. Other specimens include Parry agave, Queen Victoria agave, Thorncrest agave, Moroccan mound, claret cup, ocotillo, Mexican fence post and desert spoon.

The stairway to this rooftop oasis was enhanced with rock planters filled with sculptural Mexican fence post. Custom night lighting turns this garden into a marvel of texture and color. A custom art piece designed by metal artist Smitty of Smitty Built Co., was installed with dozens of LED tea lights in clear glass vases.

In an area located near the front door, Abbott included a space for a water feature. Instead of a typical splashing fountain, the

homeowners wanted the water flow to be subtle, yet add interest. They found an old quartz gristmill stone, quarried in France, that was perfect! The water bubbles up eight inches and cascades down the centuries-old stone furrows. Kino Blue rock mulch, accented with hints of turquoise, provides a ground cover.

Opposite the elevated rooftop deck and adjacent to the front door, wire grids on metal frames with a rust patina were planted with shade-loving star jasmine vines. This green wall adds a delightful scent while screening an unattractive storage area.

The couple is thrilled with the finished result, reveling in the transformation of an unusable space into a welcoming spot for relaxing and entertaining. **II**

Above: The entire landscape and deck can be viewed from the living room. Right: Low, wide steps allow easy access from the lower garden to viewing deck. The floating deck and steps of concrete were left gray for an industrial fusion with mid-century aesthetic.

