

Bright pillows, tablemats and fresh-cut flowers soften hard surfaces.



The second episode of the popular HGTV show *Decked Out* begins with a dilemma: Kendall and Crystal installed an elaborate interlocking brick patio in the backyard of their suburban Oshawa home — then realized what they really wanted was a deck. Enter Paul LaFrance, founder of Pickering-based Cutting Edge Construction and Design and host of *Decked Out*.

“Nine out of 10 deck builders would just come in and build a no-brainer platform,” Mr. LaFrance says. “But the idea of putting in an upper level deck didn’t fly with me — it would steal light from the house, block the view and take up a lot of space.”

And space was tight, especially as the couple wanted to install a hot tub and still have room for a barbecue station and dining area. So, Mr. LaFrance designed a two-tiered deck off to the left of the house — one that would meet all the couple’s outdoor entertaining needs and still give them an obstructed view of their kids playing in the backyard.

SECOND OF FOUR PARTS

HECK, NICE DECK

How one family’s yard went from tired to terrific

By Sydney Loney

“Using the left side of the house instead of the focal point directly ahead when you walk out prevented the deck from making the yard appear smaller,” he says. And adding a landing rather than a straight staircase also helped optimize the space — and was a safer option for a family with small children. “Plus, it just looks cool,” Mr. LaFrance says.

Despite some of the challenges of designing a deck for a small space, one advantage is you don’t have to give up your backyard for an entire summer. “It typically takes seven to 10 days to do a project like this,” Mr. LaFrance says. To start, the crew ripped out the existing deck, which wasn’t big enough for a barbecue, and carefully preserved the patio that was already in place, removing it brick by brick (a chore that quickly turned into a game of hot potato). They later replaced the bricks to create a separate sitting area down below.

Then, construction began. For the floor, Mr. LaFrance chose a durable composite material that has the warm feel of real wood, but

>> OUTDOOR DESIGN

without the maintenance. Around the hot tub on the second level, he designed a natural cedar privacy screen and added a curved decorative beam to help make the area feel like its own little nook. “We softened the angular, hard lines of the deck with a curved aerial feature,” he says. “It adds dynamics to the design, but it’s also functional because you can hang plants from it.”

Then, Heidi Richter, the show’s stylist and owner of Toronto-based HR Design, stepped in to pick up where Mr. LaFrance left off. “The decor had to be cost effective because, as often happens, the budget was low after the deck design was done,” Ms. Richter says. She chose basic, assemble-it-yourself furniture from a big box store to cut costs and picked a mix of materials for the frames to create an eclectic look.

In addition to a cast aluminum dining set that could seat six, she added a teak table and

A quirky, cozy and pretty cool deck

resin wicker lounge chairs for the seating area below. “In a small space, people often think they need small-scale furniture, but larger furniture actually expands the space,” she says. Custom pillows and placemats added a personal touch. Ms. Richter took her colour cues from the interior of the home, choosing green as the predominant colour to create continuity from indoors to out.

“Decks are hardscapes,” she says, “so it’s important to bring in pillows and greenery to soften it.” She also added a water feature (from Home Depot) with candle lanterns on either side. “I took an ugly, functional wall that was built to hide a storage area and made it a focal point instead,” she says.

When the finished deck was presented to the couple at the end of the episode, there were hugs and handshakes all around. Mr. LaFrance was also pleased as he surveyed the end result. “It’s quirky, it’s cozy — and it’s pretty cool.”

