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Gardens create modern simplicity

By [Marsha Fottler](#)

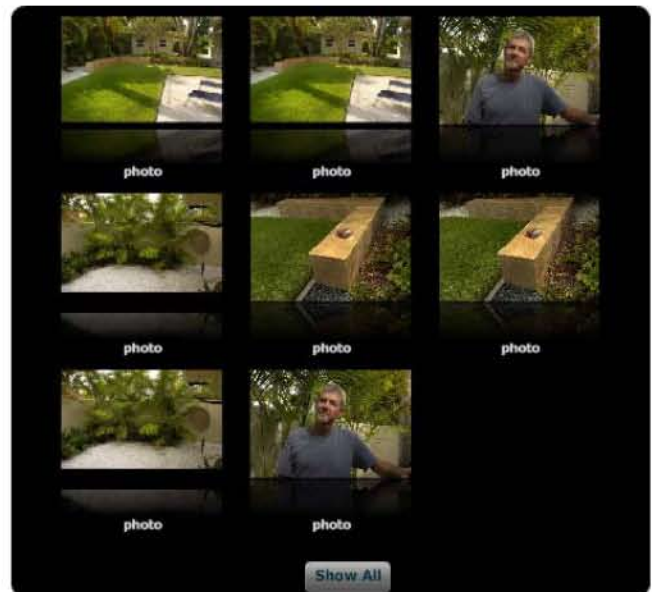
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Two of garden designer Richard Anderson's clients live in a 1951, Ralph and William Zimmerman-designed Sarasota school of architecture house that has been designated as "historically significant" by the City of Sarasota.

THE ROSTER

What garden designer Richard Anderson planted for a low- maintenance modern landscape:



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Foxtail palm, cabada palm, sabal palm

Bougainvillea

Citrus

Cocoplum

Beach creeper

Holly fern

Dwarf podocarpus

Zoysia turf grass

A few years ago, the homeowners -- a couple from the Northeast who use the home as a vacation retreat -- commissioned Seibert Architects and Ball Construction to renovate the house and build an addition. Then they asked Anderson to mirror the geometric planes of the house when fashioning three modernist garden rooms that would expand their enjoyment and use of the property.

The house sits on a leafy street near St. Armands Circle, where it is secluded behind a stucco wall and shaded by a jacaranda.

"My clients don't live here year-round, so they don't want high maintenance," said Anderson. "I chose dwarf and slow-growing plant material. I wanted the dwarfs anyway, to support the clean, simple lines of the house and the low roofline. The house has walls of glass on two sides that open into the garden so the outside and the inside merge. That meant using some of same materials inside and out. My intent was always to link the landscaping to the house; the natural to the man-made."

To bring the polished travertine of the living-room floors to the outside, Anderson constructed an L-shaped travertine seating wall in the back yard that defines the dining court and draws the eye deep into the lawn with an architectural element. He added a half-hidden concrete border to identify the patio, but also to keep a lawn mower from chipping the marble wall.

There was already a concrete patio in the back, so Anderson enlarged it and clad it in shellcrete. He banded the patio with a narrow trench of large black Mexican beach pebbles to help with drainage from roof runoff and to add visual appeal. The homeowners use this large patio for dining and entertaining.

Anderson's clients discovered the area in 2003 when they saw an advertisement for the Ritz-Carlton, Sarasota, and decided to fly down. "We had never been to the west coast of Florida before," said the wife, "but we just fell in love with Sarasota. We drove around all weekend; we couldn't believe we'd never heard of this city."

Subsequently, the couple rented a house and returned for a month-long stay. "By the end of the month we had bought this house," she said. "We didn't know much about the Sarasota school of architecture, so we did research. We became fascinated with these Sarasota-school homes, and we were thrilled to get this one. We love the connection between the inside and outside, and we appreciate the simplicity, serenity and the openness of the design."

But the property looked like a jungle. "In a way, we liked that wild and natural feel," said the wife, "but the landscape was overgrown and had no order to it. It needed a plan. When we met with Richard, he presented his concept and we thought it was fantastic, and told him to go for it. But when the garden rooms were actually installed, my husband and I thought the landscaping was nothing short of amazing. It looked so complete and so beautiful from day one. And, it's just enough for the house."

The couple uses the garden daily. "We're out there all the time," said the wife. "We eat our meals in the garden; we entertain friends out there; and sometimes we just sit in lounge chairs and look up at the sky. Day and night, we use the garden rooms like they were rooms of the house."

For the grassy area at the St. Armands property, Anderson installed Empire Zoysia turf, which he said is soft, drought- and salt-tolerant and resistant to diseases and insects. A large schefflera was already thriving at one corner of the back yard, and Anderson trimmed it substantially. To fill out the space, he installed plants and trees that yield a mix of color, privacy and architecture to anchor and define specific areas that surround the house.

The entrance court replicates the geometry of the house and plays off artistic, cypress lattice-style garden gates that were designed by architect Michael Epstein of Seibert Architects. "The landscape theme is almost Zen-like at this house," said Anderson, "and it has proven durable and low maintenance while complementing the lines and angles of the home's architecture and supplying color and form to the outdoor spaces. And that's just what the garden should be doing."

In a modern garden, nothing is randomly placed. Because restraint is a guiding principle, every single thing that goes into a modern garden -- plants and hardscape -- needs to be justified in terms of color, form and texture.

As part of the installation, the garden designer included night lighting both for security and to enhance the setting. "I'm not a great fan of a lot of dramatic uplighting," said the expert. "Instead I like to use a soft wash of downlighting from the trees, and bronze pathway lights so that people can see where they are going when the garden rooms are used for entertaining at night."

Anderson's advice for creating a modern garden is almost the same as his advice for creating any landscape. "Less is almost always more," he observed. "Too often gardens become a confusing mélange of features, so start with a clear theme and then organize. Restraint is difficult, but the smart gardener learns to exercise it."