

Taking the FLOWER SHOW Home

By Daniel Moise



Inspiration sometimes comes when you least expect it. When Center City residents Heather and Michael Ascher attended the Philadelphia Flower Show in 2006, they didn't anticipate that a certain exhibit would inspire a major home renovation.

"The Flower Show has always showcased the possibilities of interior gardens, and in the past I had always left with an idea or two," Heather recalls. "But that year, the instant I saw the Meadowbrook Farm exhibit, the wheels in my head began to turn." The display was of a walled garden filled with hardy plants and adorned with hanging baskets. Heather wondered, "Could I create such a setting in my own home?"

For years the Aschers craved a private outdoor space, but this luxury seemed unrealistic for their townhouse at 22nd Street and St. James Place (part of what's called the English Village). Heather says the property's original design did include a small, shared lawn, but homes had expanded since then, leaving the Aschers with only a narrow parking spot.

What if the parking space could become a garden room? Before leaving the Convention Center that day, Heather and Michael decided they had to try.

For a project this big, the Aschers knew they couldn't do it alone. Heather's first call was to John Story, director of Meadowbrook Farm. John helped create the Flower Show exhibit that had inspired the Aschers, so he seemed like a logical choice for selecting the best plants for the space.

Due to the unorthodox dimensions of the planned room, the Aschers knew whoever they hired to construct the greenhouse-like ceiling would have to be the type who embraces a challenge. Fortunately, they found

Robert J. LaRouche of Glass Enclosures Unlimited. Rounding out the team was architect Tim Kerner of Terra Studios. His role was bringing the outdoors inside while maintaining an open, airy feel. Heather sings Tim's praises, saying, "He is a genius when it comes to space. You can have the best ideas, but to see them realized you need to have the expertise of professionals."

The long construction period is a distant memory now as the Aschers revel in their new room. Tim says he's most pleased with the way the space makes the adjoining dining room and kitchen far brighter than before. For her part, Heather gushes about the fresh air provided by a set of louvre windows (glass panels that tilt to a near-vertical degree).

As for Michael, he is elated to have the opportunity to garden year-round. The room is equipped with a beautiful bronze sink with a spigot tucked below for watering plants, and heating coils under the tile floor help regulate the temperature.

To stock the room, John Story had invited the Aschers to visit Meadowbrook Farm, PHS's affiliate located in Abington Township. There they not only purchased their plants, but had them potted as well. After that, Mark Petteruti of Botanical Expressions helped lay out where the plants would go. Some of Michael's new-found favorites include two varieties of begonia, 'Defoe' and 'Palomar Prince', as well as 'False Aralia' (*Schefflera elegantissima*), 'Ming Aralia' (*Polyscias fruticosa*), and 'Tweed' (*Anthurium polychistum*).

As they putter around their indoor garden, the Aschers are visibly delighted. Heather sighs, "Many talented people contributed many, many hours to complete this project; I'm so appreciative. And to think, it all started at the Flower Show." 🌱



Photos by Margaret Funderburg

Left: The completed garden room

Below: Architect Tim Kerner (left) with Heather and Michael



Left: The architect's rendering of the new exterior.

Below: The former parking spot is now an extension of the home.

