

Deck, Patio & Pool

SENSATIONAL
SALVAGE
STYLE

PAGE 56

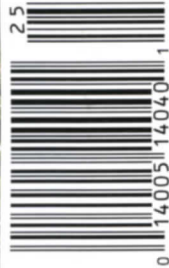
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How to
Landscape
a Slope

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Photography by **Bob Stefko**

Crowning Glory

A long but narrow urban Wisconsin penthouse terrace features a smart mix of plants and furnishings—plus stellar views.



Life looks good from every vantage point of this perch. The terrace that hugs the downtown Madison, Wisconsin, penthouse owned by John Sacia and Rob Bergeman offers incomparable views of two large lakes (Mendota and Monona) and, in between, rows of dollhouse-like mansions tucked within the treetops. The opposite direction offers a striking contrast, with a view of the state capitol a few blocks away. But for the urban duo, the most rewarding vista is what they see on their verdant, expansive deck.

At the moment, John says the terrace is as close as possible to perfection. He's taken a magnifying glass to one of the many "little babies" he's cultivating—succulents that to him "are little living works of art." He always keeps

the decorative magnifier handy for hyperfocal enjoyment of the small wonders, which he masses on an outdoor dining table to create a sweeping, table-high greenscape in miniature. Such thoughtful presentation represents John's overall deck-design philosophy: Make everything count and then some. "I want friends to be drawn in to everything I've arranged here," he says. "I want them to be instantly entertained and at ease."

With the L-shape deck spanning 50x10 feet at the front of the building and 24x8 feet at the side, John's first order of business was to keep the slender but lengthy terrace from looking less like two bowling lanes of plants and more like a cohesive series of cozy, artful living spaces. To tackle the depth challenge, he first anchored

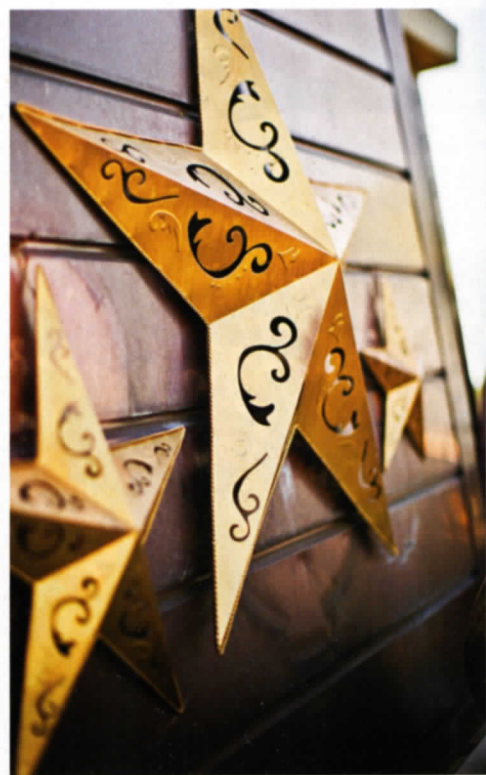
A golden statue of a Foo Dog stands guard over John Sacia and Rob Bergeman's stunning wraparound terrace and their bird's-eye view of nearby Lake Mendota in Madison, Wisconsin.



sections of the terrace with attractive furnishings that are as small as possible while still being comfortable. The pieces are made of teak, which he oiled for a while until deciding recently to paint them for more pop. But painted pieces require more maintenance: Even covered during winter, high winds and piled-up snow give them a beating, leaving them in need of late-spring touch-ups. In hindsight, "all-weather wicker would be more durable, especially when it comes to withstanding these harsh winters, and it's easier


to hose it off," John says. But what he has fits, which counts for a lot. Also, the furnishings are still in good condition. "I'd rather just touch up and occasionally swap out the cushions," he says.

For the deck's many container plantings, John takes a layered approach, combining varying heights and textures in groupings. Taller plants such as arborvitae and palms provide beauty and privacy, with fluffy grass or sculptural jade plants filling in beneath. "Every year I like to try new things and new combinations," John says. But one thing's certain, he adds: More can be more. "I like being surrounded by lots of things," he says. "Some people might take one look and be overwhelmed. Hopefully, though, they'll see everything as vignettes for discovery."



Opposite: A bamboo rug helps define a sitting space enveloped by plants John uses to bring in a captivating mix of colors and textures. The setting is flanked by purple fountaingrass and, in the back, a banana and arborvitae underplanted with a kaleidoscope of coleus. **Left:** Rob and John enjoy entertaining alfresco when the weather permits. **Above:** Metal art found at a crafts show lends star appeal to an exterior wall.





*"I see it as a cozy cocoon
where I can wrap myself
with plants."*

—John Sacia

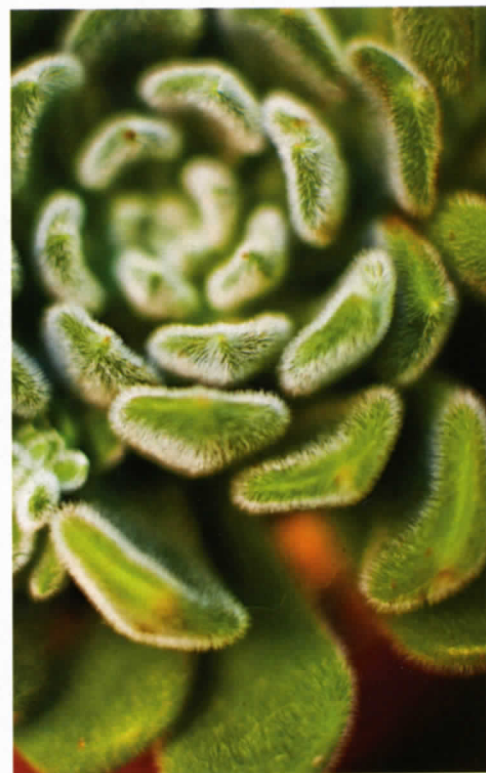
This photo:
The view from
across the street
reveals the
majestic dome of
the state capitol
in downtown
Madison.

A photograph of a garden patio. In the foreground, a wooden chaise longue with a red, orange, and green striped cushion and a solid orange pillow sits on a stone deck. A white, fringed blanket is draped over the seat. To the right, a small round table holds a glass of lemonade with a slice of lemon. The patio is bordered by a wooden railing with string lights. The background is filled with dense greenery, including palm trees and flowering plants. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

This photo: Majestic palms and a firmly affixed umbrella provide shade in a corner where a chaise longue beckons—especially when paired with a glass of cold lemonade infused with rosemary from the garden.

As for John? "I see it as a cozy cocoon where I can wrap myself with plants," he says.

Having a number of large and small containers, most on wheels, allows for flexible design but also lets John bring plants indoors as the area's Zone 5a weather gets cooler to downright frigid. That's where Rob saves the day. "I help with the heavy lifting of getting things inside that we want to keep," he says. "I also provide emotional support for when, say, one of our umbrellas gets upended during the high winds that often pay a visit."



Left: An effusive Boston fern erupts from beneath an old wooden seat for a Buddha meditation statue. **Top:** A wall fountain near the deck's chaise longue not only adds beauty but also lends a soothing sound that's "wonderful while napping," John says. **Above:** *Sedum wrightii* seen up close and personal, the way John encourages visitors to appreciate his collection of succulents. **Opposite:** An old restaurant cart harbors an overflowing mix of plant color and texture.





This photo: An outdoor lamp framed by purple fountain grass illuminates a collection of succulents.

Before moving to the space a dozen years ago, the duo lived in an old house close to downtown that was just a little larger than their current two-level, 1,500-square-foot home. It had architectural charm, but planting space was lacking. "There was a lot of concrete and just a little patch of grass," John says. He and Rob hungered for more room to have plants and entertain guests. "I decided I just couldn't live in a place where I couldn't garden," he says.

The couple found out about their current home when Rob's employer, a property management firm, offered them an opportunity to live in the crowning glory of a new building across the street from where John owns a hair salon. The opportunity seemed too good to be true. Rob and John could have a live/work environment downtown while still being within a two-block walk to one of their favorite locales, the Dane County Farmers' Market. Now, instead of driving to work, they can walk—across the street. "We've been pushing for a tunnel or skywalk, but no such luck," John says with a wink.

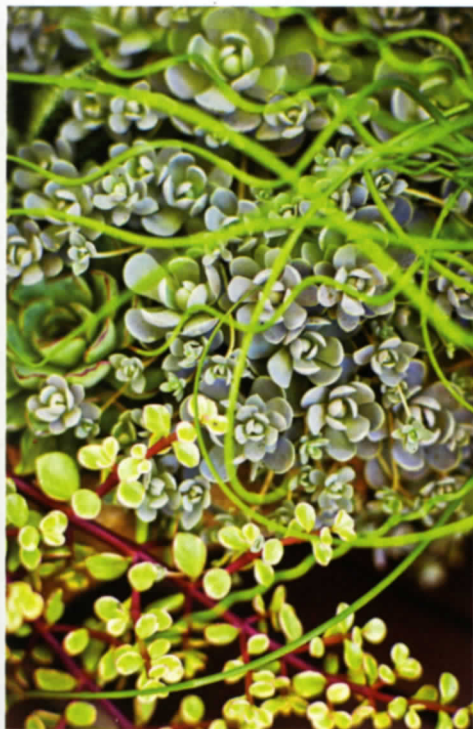
For what they do have, John and Rob count their blessings. "What we love most about

urban living is that we can walk everywhere," John says. "We even get our plant material at the farmer's market, so not much is out of reach." Plus, "green spaces can be enjoyed everywhere thanks to a walk in a nearby park and through neighborhoods," Rob adds, noting that natural beauty is appreciated best on foot rather than via a car window.

John makes his gardening mark at home but also now outside the condo building as well as in the space in front of the building housing his salon. And now he's even developing outdoor-living design plans for friends.

But it's their "tree house" that satisfies the couple most. "Winter is too long up here," Rob says. Nearly every summer evening the outdoor grill is the primary cooking spot, and the dining table is the hearth for good wine and good conversation. It's there that John and Rob can drink in a golden sunset and, later in the evening, unwind at the opposite end of the deck in a hot tub, one that lets them soak in those stellar views.

For more information, see Resources on page 116.



Above left: *Sedum mackinoi* proliferates in a pot and mixes well with other succulents. **Above right:** Drought-tolerant variegated agave and trailing sedum spill out of a glazed container.

Long on Style

John Sacia has become so adept at designing long, slender spaces that neighbors and friends often hire him to maximize the impact of their decks. Here are some techniques he suggests:

Think little rooms.

Break up a large space into smaller conversation areas. "One big seating area can be intimidating," John says. "Smaller ones put people more at ease."

Have a hearth. A warm and inviting central dining or relaxation spot is key to making the satellite areas cohesive. "Where does everyone head when they get to your home? The kitchen," John says. "Have a similar spot outside."

Bring the indoors out. Choose furnishings and accessories, such as table lamps, that look like they could be right at home indoors. "That adds a unique, warmer touch," John says.

Get hip to outdoor fabric and cushions. "In the past, I had to bring in cushions before it rained because it would be days before they dried," John says. And mildew was a bummer, he adds. "Now it can rain, and within a couple of hours we can be right back outside on the furniture," he says. "Plus there are more style choices and patterns now. Have fun with mixing and matching brighter, more vibrant patterns."

Use a good potting mix. "With it you don't have to fertilize, and it will take you through a whole planting season," John says. "That makes a big difference in how you enjoy the space."

Dress in layers. "Combinations of textures and colors create focal points. They'll help draw the eye to different areas and keep things interesting," John says. "Buy a bigger plant to form a backdrop and fill in from there, keeping the shapes and colors distinct so they'll stand out in subtle ways."