VANCOUVER SUN

JHA Architecture transforms dated White Rock poolscape into a Riviera-style retreat

The three-acre property backs onto the White Rock waterfront, with edge-to-edge views of Pacific Ocean

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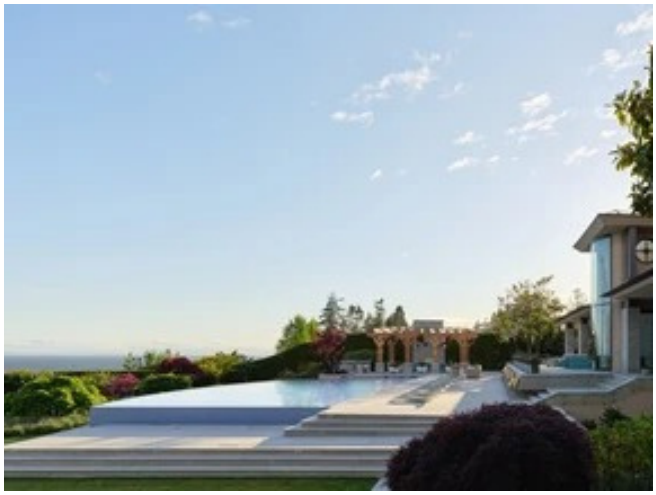

At this waterfront White Rock estate, a homeowner's desire to replace an aging pool became a sweeping and HAVAN-award-winning outdoor transformation, rooted in modern Mediterranean elegance. The design team balanced the site's grandeur, the homeowner's global inspirations and a series of unexpected requirements, including extensive geotechnical work and soil preparation. PHOTO BY ANDREW LATREILLE /@latreillephoto

A glass-topped cedar pergola shelters an outdoor dining space with a built-in fireplace. A large glass dining table —Altopiano — Paola Lenti — pairs with ocean-inspired turquoise Frame chairs, also by Paola Lenti (sourced by Livingspace Vancouver), under soft-lighting pendant lights (Hubbardton Forge Hibiscus Pendants). PHOTO BY ANDREW LATREILLE /@latreillephoto

"We were standing on the balcony overlooking the existing pool, and told them we felt like this could be in the Mediterranean," says Joy Chao of an early site visit to her client's property in White Rock.

JHA Architecture's husband-and-wife duo, lead architect John Henshaw and lead interior designer Chao, had just returned from a holiday in Italy, and the property's oceanward slope and shimmery water views felt familiar.

On hearing this, the homeowner lit up. She'd spent some time in the south of France herself and loved the seed of inspiration for her home's outdoor-space renovation. "The landscape really dictated how we ended up designing this outdoor space," adds Chao.

Meticulously shaped garden beds feature densely planted lavender, maples, fruit trees and other shrubs. PHOTO BY ANDREW LATREILLE /© Andrew Latreille

The overhaul would be major. The three-acre property backs onto the White Rock waterfront, with edge-to-edge views of Pacific Ocean. But its original pool and landscaping — drab beige, 1990s-timestamped and enclosed-feeling — didn't live up to the setting.

The homeowner's prime motivation to renovate was the home's aging and leaking pool, which she dreamed of enjoying with her family and grandchildren. She knew what she wanted to do with it, too: she told Chao and Henshaw about the infinity-edge pools she'd dipped in at hotels around the world, determined to build something similar here. "She was very inspired by travel," says Chao.

Tiered concrete-tile patios follow the natural slope of the landscape, separated by large planters to break up the expanse and create seating, dining and relaxing zones. PHOTO BY ANDREW LATREILLE /@latreillephoto

An infinity-edge pool and hot tub were inspired by the homeowner's love of hotel pools around the world. Sculptural Paola Lenti recliners add a modern Mediterranean flare, usable in-water or at the poolside. PHOTO BY ANDREW LATREILLE /@latreillephoto

With that agreed, they embarked on planning, confident they could finish up within six to eight months, in time for summer. But then COVID hit, stalling work and deliveries, and stranding the homeowner overseas, with communication limited mostly to email.

A few months later, they ran into permit issues. What was expected to be a straightforward building permit ballooned into a full development application. "By then, we had already pre-ordered most of the material in anticipation that the permit would only take a few months," says Chao. Site assessments turned up issues with drainage and soil stability, due to the design age of the property.

The project would ultimately stretch to four- and-a-half years total — an admittedly frustrating timeline, made bearable only by the stunning final result.

Consulting on plant selection with Yong Xu Yu of Point Landscape Studio, JHA nailed the Mediterranean brief. Garden beds carved into manicured lawns feature dense stands of lavender, punctuated by red maples and tight-leafed shrubs. Apple, cherry, pear and other fruit trees dot the landscape, though their harvest mainly feeds wildlife. It's a welcome trade-off for the proximity to nature, says Chao. Eagles nest in the surrounding evergreens and even drop down to bathe occasionally in the pool. "The view is phenomenal and different almost every day. In the spring, when it's cool, you see mist coming off the water. [The homeowners] enjoy it tremendously," she says.

On the west side of the property, a water fountain circled by rockwork patters away softly in front of a hedge-lined cutting garden, planted with seasonally cycling crops of blooms.

On the west side of the home, a cutting garden, surrounded by hedges and a wrought-iron arch, blooms seasonally with range of flowers, opposite a trough-style water fountain. PHOTO BY ANDREW LATREILLE /@latreillephoto

Surrounding the new infinity pool and hot tub, tiered concrete patios follow the natural slope of the lands, forming built-in seating zones, while rows of statuesque planters break up the visual expanse.

An alfresco dining pavilion under a glass- topped cedar pergola creates weather-flexible space to entertain, with an outdoor kitchen, barbecue, fireplace and a long dining table positioned to catch the sunset, under soft pendant lighting.

Turquoise Paola Lenti dining chairs add a spot of Mediterranean colour and character, special-ordered by Vancouver luxury furniture retailer Livingspace at the height of COVID shipping delays. “She waited quite a bit to get that beautiful, colourful furniture that she really wanted, taking inspiration from the ocean and water,” says Chao.

Poolside, a row of sculptural Paola Lenti loungers and ceramic side tables carry the modern Mediterranean theme, in front of an outdoor living area with more pops of bright turquoise.

Although she wasn’t ready to undertake a full home renovation at the time, the homeowner decided to include one element of the house as part of this project: the back windows, where seals had started to fail, letting in drafts and moisture. Recent advancements in glass technology allowed for replacement of multiple narrow panes with storey-high seamless curved glass panels — custom-manufactured in Belgium; sourced and installed locally via Summit Glazing — to improve the home’s energy efficiency and widen views.

As part of the project, the client opted to replace the home’s aging back multi-panel windows with storey-high curved glass panes manufactured in Belgium. PHOTO BY ANDREW LATREILLE /© Andrew Latreille

It was a fitting cap-off for the project, connecting the outdoor design and bringing the view indoors. But Chao’s high point was the spirit of trust and collaboration they fostered. We don’t just design something, hand it over and walk away. It’s always a very collaborative relationship between the designers, the architect, the contractor and the homeowner,” she says.

The approach clearly paid off — the project recently earned a 2025 HAVAN award for Best Outdoor Space, in the $1 million-plus category. And they’re still fine-tuning, working with the homeowner, says Chao: “I think the biggest takeaway is that it’s an ongoing conversation.”

Project design:JHA Architecture
Construction: Teragon Developments & Construction Inc.