

Entertaining yard smarts for small lots

Karen Secord

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In Caroline and Marc Deschamps' comfortable Barrhaven neighbourhood the wickedly warm days of summer are best served up with a heaping dose of friends, food and fun.

"We love to entertain," says Caroline, a nurse practitioner. "There are always people here. And when there aren't, we laugh about there being a vacancy sign above the door."

The Deschamps' 2,400-sq. ft. Richcraft home is a year-round gathering place for friends and family. When the weather is cold and snow fills the backyard, a hot tub provides a welcomed diversion. In the summer, the entertainment hub moves from the expansive Great Room at the back of the house, to a cleanly designed and well equipped backyard.

Extending their living area outdoors meant using the limited space wisely, identifying the features most important to their young family, purchasing quality materials, and using professional contractors dedicated to customer service.

Excited by the possibilities, Caroline and Marc tackled the task of personalizing their small (50x35 ft) yard with flare, determination, and what they believe was good financial sense.

When they bought into the fast growing Ottawa suburb, nearly seven years ago, their goal was to create a welcoming space using the best materials and workmanship they could afford. But with only a couch in tow - a relic from their university years - shaping the ambiance they desired required a plan.

That's when they decided to join DirectBuy.

"We became DirectBuy members shortly after moving in and have probably furnished 80 per cent of the house through them, including the upgrades we made," notes Marc, a dentist with a Barrhaven practice.

Without hesitation, Marc estimates that their decision to purchase a

DirectBuy membership has saved them about \$80,000, increasing their purchasing power significantly.

DirectBuy is a members-only shopping anomaly. Here the retailer is eliminated from the sales equation. Customers pay a fee to access below-retail price points, and only products from name brand manufactures and their authorized distributors are promoted in their catalogue and showroom.

"The backyard is really an extension of the house for us," explains Marc. "Almost everything there was purchased through DirectBuy."

The Deschamps' backyard paradise works because of its efficient layout. It features a huge 42 inch Vermont Castings grill (www.vermontcastings.com), which sits in its own stone island and is hooked into the gas for the house. It is smack dab in the centre of the yard, with enough room to spread out the fixings for a buffet meal.

The stonework, by Regal Landscaping (www.regallandscaping.supersites.ca), flows from the kitchen - steps to the grill on one side and to the Canadian built Heidt (www.heidtproducts.com) patio set on the other.

Landscaping contractor, Ralph Schutz, was recommended to them by DirectBuy.

"Ralph did a lot of great work for us," says Caroline. "He comes back and checks his work and if he doesn't like something, even something little, he will do it over."

The Beachcomber hot tub is, according to Caroline, a backyard must-have. Indeed, it was one of their first purchases, before the cedar-look shed and the high-end Rainbow play structure.

"Soon the shed is going to be a playhouse," notes Caroline, as three-year-old Justine climbs a western red cedar plank and glances across a sea of backyard fences.

The Rainbow Play Systems (www.rainbowplay.com) structure gives the Deschamps' backyard escape a kid-friendly feel. Unlike less expensive brands, this Mecca of fun promises a long lifespan and to retain its natural beauty.

"We knew that for this small yard we had to find something complete," notes Caroline. "We felt confident in the quality of this play structure."

And quality is what Caroline and Marc wanted for their first house.

On a breezy spring day, Caroline surveys her backyard and smiles as she waits in anticipation for warmer weather. Entertaining weather. Steak and baked potatoes on the barbeque weather. Whooshing down the slide with Justine weather.

She is comfortable that quality is what they have achieved.

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