

## A New Beginning



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Extreme Makeover: Home Edition” comes to eastern Pennsylvania”””



Trisha Urban’s new landscape, courtesy of “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition,” as well as many volunteers and community members.  
PHOTOS COURTESY OF MATT DAVENPORT.

Tragedy struck Trisha Urban on February 5, 2009, when her husband, Andrew, died of a heart attack nine hours before the birth of their first child, Cora. From this tragedy, ABC’s “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition” picked this family to have their home and landscape renovated in July 2010. The show aired on October 24, 2010.

Urban lived in a 300-year-old log home in Berks County, Pa., that she and her husband were going to renovate. After his untimely death, Urban and her infant daughter were relegated to living in one room because the rest of the home was uninhabitable.



A view of the pond and gazebo.

### **Once-in-a-lifetime opportunity**

Matt Davenport, a registered landscape architect with Watkins Architect Limited ([www.watkinsarchitect.com](http://www.watkinsarchitect.com)) in Fleetwood, Pa., was hired as lead landscape architect for the project. Davenport landed the gig because of his working relationship with Matt Breyer of Breyer Construction and Landscape in Reading, Pa., who is a member of the board of directors for the Berks County Home Builders Association ([www.hbaberks.org](http://www.hbaberks.org)). “I responded to Matt’s request at the end of the work day on Wednesday, July 7, and was attending my first coordination meeting the following afternoon. When I walked into the HBA boardroom and saw the assemblage of builders, contractors and business owners, I knew that this was going to be a significant project,” says

Davenport.

## **Family time**

At that initial meeting, Davenport learned he needed to be report for duty July 29 through August 5, 2010, right in the middle of his family's Florida vacation. Originally, Davenport and his wife thought he would make it for the final week of their vacation, but that wasn't the case.

"As July passed and the installation date drew near, our final preparations securing materials and arranging for delivery and staging of all materials became a significant undertaking. My communication with the show's design producers, the installation team and our suppliers extended into the early hours of the morning. It wasn't uncommon for a flurry of e-mail activity at 2 a.m. before drifting off to sleep for a few hours. I explained the significance of the scope of the project with my wife, and she willingly accepted that I should stay to see it through," Davenport says.

## **Designing the landscape**

Davenport worked with Senior Design Producer Kim Lewis on the landscape design for the home, which has an English cottage garden theme. Lewis and her team provided Davenport with design element photos. Some of the elements they wanted included a rustic fence, a topiary, stepping stone walkways and overgrown planting beds. Davenport researched English cottage gardens for a week while he waited for the final site survey drawings.

"The signature of an English cottage garden is an amalgam of plant material growing together to create a profusion of colors and fragrance in a small space. We're not speaking of large, formal gardens with trimmed hedges and fountains, but rather the intimate walkways enveloped in plant material with seating areas for reflective thinking. This type of design was achieved through the planting of large trees to create a canopy for flowering understory and foundation plantings with perennial plants providing seasonal interest year-round. This type of design encourages a more unkempt look, but we all know landscapes require maintenance regardless of the type of design," Davenport says.

He did have to tweak the plans a little due to the temperature difference between eastern Pennsylvania and the British Isles. Great Britain's Hardiness Zones are 8 to 9, while eastern Pennsylvania's are 6 to 7.

"Research of the garden style and the availability of plant material from local suppliers steered my design decisions to incorporate plant material appropriate for our climate, while remaining true to the English cottage garden style. Fragrance was important, while I also wanted to utilize plant materials to attract songbirds and butterflies to create an amazing outdoor experience for Trisha Urban and her young daughter, Cora," says Davenport.



Trisha Urban owns farm animals, so the show's producers incorporated a large, backyard design to accommodate them. Here is the Peacock Pen.

This project was the largest landscape installation in the show's history. Urban owns farm animals, and the show's producers incorporated a large backyard design to accommodate them, in addition to property improvements on the front and side yards, which included a pond.

"When we presented our list of plant materials to the show, they couldn't believe the number of trees, shrubs and perennial flowers that were being provided for the installation. The list we supplied didn't include the Irritrol irrigation controller and valves, piping, signal wire and Toro sprinklers, Escort Lighting path lights, Kichler accessory lighting fixtures, Otterbine pond aeration equipment, Belgard hardscaping and base materials, soil mixes and more than half-acre of turfgrass," explains Davenport.

## **Volunteer vendors**

According to newspaper and news channel accounts, Berks countians and beyond gave generously to this project. Specifically, Davenport contacted vendors, with whom he developed a relationship with over the past 10 years, and got plant donations. He also visited area growers to create a palette that complemented the design. An anonymous grower donated half of the perennials required, and three other perennial growers donated the rest, while nurseries provided mature shrubs and trees. Time was of the essence, and Davenport was fortunate that the donors could provide plant materials on short notice.

"As our install date approached, I had difficulty locating a critical design element: large, upright trees for the front entry walk. Spayd's Nursery of Fleetwood, Pa., answered my request by graciously providing large Armstrong red maples, as well as a few oaks to meet one of our final project needs.

"The final item I desperately needed, a specimen, Paperbark maple, required me to make an appeal to Gregg Robertson, president of the Pennsylvania Landscape Nursery Association. An e-mail went out, and within a few hours Sheldon Dubrow from DuBrow's Nursery in Womelsdorf, Pa., contacted Gregg to let him know he had a few in the field that he would be willing to dig for the project. I arranged to visit his farm early Monday afternoon where I selected a tree. It was dug and delivered to the project site midmorning the following day," Davenport says.

Davenport says the team started contacting local sod suppliers early on in the project. "Looking for sod in the middle of the summer was a real challenge. It wasn't until Hoopes Turf Farm in Potter County, Pa., agreed to supply us with a truckload of sod that we were able to breathe a sigh of relief. As the project grew closer, and we realized that we would need more sod, Sporting Valley Turf Farm of Manheim, Pa., met our final project needs for the remaining sod. I can't begin to tell you how much I was overwhelmed by the willingness and generosity of our local nurserymen to provide the plant material used on this very special project," says Davenport.

"The time we spent game planning our installation process paid dividends in the end, as we were able to send everyone home late Tuesday for some much needed sleep to return on Wednesday morning to wrap up the landscape beds, lay sod and apply mulch," states Davenport.

If he could change one area of the project, he says it would've been for a longer time frame for the installation. "This past summer was one of the most extreme summers we've had in terms of heat. To complete this install the first week of August caused us many anxious moments, as we knew that many of our large trees were field dug just a few days prior to the install, transported to the job site and planted within hours of arriving on-site. Post-installation follow-up care required many of us involved with the job to visit the site throughout August and early September to make sure that the irrigation system was working properly so that all of our efforts installing the plant material and sod were not in vain," says Davenport.

Davenport says the community support was the most rewarding aspect of the project. More than 2,000 people donated their time on the job site, and others visited the site. "When the calls went out in our community, so many people answered and often gave beyond their means," Davenport said.

Trisha and Cora Urban now have a home with an English cottage-style garden, and Davenport had a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

A member of the Garden Writers Association, Komancheck writes about agriculture, family, and the green industry from her home near Ephrata, Pa.