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URBANE JUNGLE

A pair of gardens nestled into Bittners' downtown campus is an urban oasis.

Written by Bridget Williams / Photography by Robert Burge

"They are simple spaces for clearing the mind," said landscape architect Jeff Skelton about a pair of gardens he designed for Bittners' Main Street campus in collaboration with Douglas Riddle, President and COO of the 166-year-old interior design firm.

Riddle and Skelton, a project manager for Frank Otte Landscape & Design Group, have collaborated for years. Their first project, Riddle's own home, was featured in the September/October 2004 issue of *Sophisticated Living*. Though the projects were executed sixteen years apart, then, as now, Riddle's mandate of simplicity and serenity remains constant. "When Douglas calls me about a project, it's because we have a wonderful way of bouncing ideas off of one another, and he knows I can execute his vision," said Skelton, who has gone on to work with several interior designers at Bittners.

The distinct green spaces at Bittners consist of a courtyard garden between two wings of the building defined by patinaed bricks laid in a herringbone pattern, along with a Zen garden at the rear of the property. In the former, described by Skelton as "too busy" before the makeover, orderly symmetry now reigns, inspired by a photograph of a similar space Riddle snapped on a trip to Chicago. Cushion colors on the wonderfully weathered teak furniture call to mind the amped-up hues a child would use to depict blue skies, green grass, and sunshine. Carefully manicured, Riddle marvels how the Boston ivy now wholly covering the masonry walls started with a "small twig" planted a decade ago. While undoubtedly beautiful, the verdant cover also helps to insulate the building.





Inside, a wide connector acting as a bridge between two showrooms has been reconfigured as a sunroom. Zanzibar Trellis wallpaper from Schumacher is apropos for a space with direct access to the courtyard. The wallpaper's classic fretwork pattern, executed in jade green, was first introduced in the 1970s and inspired by Elsie de Wolfe, who is exalted as America's first decorator. Riddle furnished the sunroom with antique garden furniture in a variety of styles. The room is illuminated by a pair of gilded iron Ré flush mount ceiling fixtures from Visual Comfort; their name is aptly derived from the ancient Egyptian sun god. Stunning in its simplicity, the sound of running water adds to the Zen garden's

feeling of tranquility. An existing trough used by the furniture shop was converted into a simple fountain. Skelton remarked that the Boston ivy-covered walls lend a sculptural quality to the simple architecture, while "bringing the buildings down to scale." Similar in style to the courtyard garden, the landscaping is purposefully restrained and limited in color.

Riddle said that he regards gardens as a complete expression of the interior design process. "Working with professionals like Jeff allows outdoor spaces to function as a continuation of the interior environment. What better way to demonstrate this than in our own backyard at the design campus?" 