

A CLARK-SMART SPACE

Take it from the King of Cheap—sometimes a splurge is worth it

By Allison Weiss Entrekin

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BELTON CHAPPELL, HAIGWOOD STUDIOS

He adores \$12 polyester shirts. He advises people not to buy new cars so they can save for retirement. His two pugs are named after his favorite bargain locales: QuikTrip and Costco. But enter the backyard of Clark Howard and you'd never know you had arrived at the home of Atlanta's most notorious penny pincher. A gorgeous, glassed-in porch opens onto a Crab Orchard stone patio, where a row of stairs lead to a glittering swimming pool. A cast-iron fountain fills the air with the sounds of trickling water,

and the tree-filled backyard is so expansive, it's easy to forget you're in the heart of Buckhead.

Has Clark, a consumer advisor and nationally syndicated talk-show host, forsaken his own thrifty advice? No, he's simply paid attention to the advice of someone else - his wife, Lane. "I'm cheap to a fault, and I never would have done this, ever," Clark admits. "But Lane really makes me loosen up, and now I love this backyard." Lane, an actress, producer and model, is a stylish, outgoing yang to Clark's admittedly starchy yin.



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The Howards' glassed-in porch opens onto a trickling cast-iron fountain.



The Howard family enjoys a warm afternoon in their backyard.

Together, they have two children: Stephi, 7, and Grant, 1; Rebecca, Clark's 17-year-old daughter from his first marriage, is also a member of the eclectic brood.

When Clark and Lane were hunting for a home after their 1995 wedding, they settled on an unlikely choice: a three-story bachelor pad situated on a piece of property shaped like a hatchet. "The guy who had lived here was single, and we called it the fraternity house," Clark says. "And the property is oddly shaped

because the original owner had apparently purchased the backs of other people's land. I think we have about 16 neighbors because of it." Still, the 2.5-acre estate is home to more than 700 trees, and an on-site rock quarry and mule trail remind the Howards that they are living on a piece of history. "We loved this home's Civil-War heritage, and it was so private," Lane says. "But it needed some work."

And work the Howards did - tiling the kitchen floor and even adding a fit-

ness center and a home theater. Today, they are still making improvements on their home, with a current project calling for the addition of a front entry hall and a new master bath. Still, the strides they made on the interior did nothing to ease the problems afflicting the exterior. "The patio was basically a cement slab," Lane says. "It looked like a driveway." And though the Clarks loved their tree-shaded backyard, their patio's lack of seating options ruled out the possibility

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of outdoor entertaining. Frustrated, Lane knew it was time she and Clark turned their attention to the backyard, but she also knew she hadn’t married a man who would agree to a major expense on a whim. “So, I found a *SmartMoney* article that said to spend 15 percent of a home’s worth on its exterior,” Lane says. “Clark is always reading financial magazines, and when I showed the article to him, it definitely helped.”

With Clark on board, Lane met with Rob Harrison of The Long Cane Group and told him her vision for the backyard. “She wanted something simple and clean - no fluff,” Harrison says. He laid the patio’s stone flooring, then lined the edges with a 19-inch wall of stacked Tennessee fieldstone accented by matinee lights. He then rebuilt the pool and added a fountain to the patio at Lane’s request. “I love, love, love the sound of a fountain,” she says. “It’s such a relaxing noise, and I’ve always wanted one.” Then came the crowning achievement: the addition of a cozy, glassed-in porch that opened onto the patio. “We decided to do glass because Clark wanted it to be a year-round room,” Lane says. “It is my absolute favorite room now.”

The entire project took just 60 days to complete - and during much of that time, the family was out of town at their beachside condominium in Florida. “We left town for a few weeks, came back, and it was done,” Clark says with a smile. “That’s my advice for people renovating their homes - leave town.”



Lane Howard says her porch is her favorite room in her home.

Artwork by painter David Arms mingles with consignment-store furniture in the Howards’ porch.

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Another piece of wisdom Clark likes to impart is the importance of compromise. “When I met Lane, she didn’t know there was a word other than ‘retail,’ and I didn’t know a thing about class,” he says. “Now we’ve adjusted to each other, and we’re ‘discount class.’”

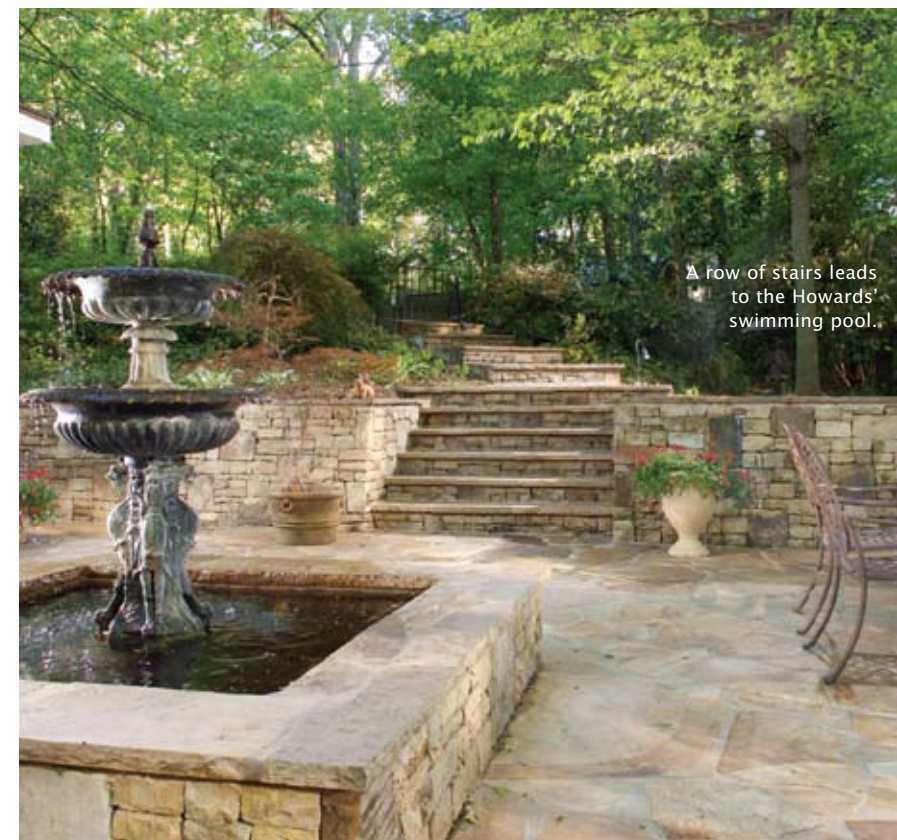
The merging of Clark and Lane’s disparate sensibilities is evident in the porch, where consignment-store chairs mingle with a pricey David Arms painting. A small table was a gift from one of Clark’s listeners, and the Tiffany-blue throw pillows “are brand-new,” Lane says in a mock whisper. The result is a room Lane considers her sanctuary, and one Clark knows better than to enter without first knocking. “This is ‘her room,’” Clark says, smiling. “It’s all her - I’m just allowed to live here.”

Kidding aside, Clark says their backyard has been transformed from a place of neglect to a center of activity. “The kids love to play out here,” he says. “And we grill out a lot - actually, Lane does the grilling; the only thing I can cook is microwave popcorn. But we also have about five parties a year, and the outdoor

wall is the perfect height for people to sit on. I think the renovations really let us use this space; they married it to the beauty of all the trees.”

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As Clark walks the grounds, pointing out the potted Japanese maples he bought on clearance from Costco, his satisfaction with his family’s purchase is evident. “In my book on real estate, I really hammer that the first reason to renovate your home is to enjoy it,” he says. “This backyard is a perfect 10 for me. I have no idea how many cents on the dollar this will bring back to me, but I do know I really enjoy this whole area now.”



A row of stairs leads to the Howards’ swimming pool.

Recipes

Lane’s Lemon- or Orange-Glazed Cake

“This is a recipe from my sister-in-law’s mother, and it was a closely guarded family secret for a long time. When I saw this cake coming, my mouth would start watering, it is so delicious. I prefer the orange cake, but my mother’s favorite is the lemon cake.”

For the cake

1 box yellow cake mix
1 box instant lemon pudding mix
4 eggs
3/4 cup water
3/4 cup canola oil

For the glazes

Lemon:

2 cups powdered sugar
2 tablespoons melted butter
1/3 cup fresh lemon juice
2 tablespoons water, if dry

Orange:

2 cups powdered sugar
1/2 cup, plus 2 tablespoons orange juice
2 tablespoons melted butter

In a large mixing bowl, beat cake mix, pudding mix, eggs, water and oil at low speed until moistened (approximately three minutes). Beat at medium speed for two minutes, until well-blended.

Pour batter into greased and lightly floured 9" x 13" pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 to 35 minutes.

While cake is baking, mix the ingredients for the lemon or orange glaze in a small bowl.

Immediately after removing the cake from the oven, prick holes in it with a long prong fork. Pour lemon or orange glaze over cake until well-absorbed. Allow cake to cool, then sprinkle with additional powdered sugar.

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