

A large project is more likely to be assured of success both financially and aesthetically when split into phases.

Jeffrey Fisher (Ask Jeffrey)

Hi Jeffrey,

My husband and I bought a 100-year-old, 4,000-square-foot home a few years ago. We absolutely love it and have spent the time since moving in concentrating on the interior. We've refinished the floors, updated the bathrooms, wallpapered and collected some lovely furniture. We love the juxtaposition of mixing our modern tastes with our Victorian home.

What we have completely ignored in the backyard.

The kitchen is at the back of the house and we have a standard door that leads into the backyard. We would like French doors and we have the space because the back of the house is 20' wide with the door and a window. Other items on our wish list are a hot tub and outdoor cooking and entertaining area.

The difficulty that we're facing is not being able to afford everything we want all at once. Do you have any suggestions on how we could stagger this project over a couple of years so we don't have to compromise on design. Also, any ideas for a clean-lined French door to open up the back?

Thank you, Ruth.

Hi Ruth,

It sounds as if you and your husband share my patience for taking the time to do a project correctly. I would rather do my project in phases and end up with exactly what I want than compromise and have the watered-down version.

That said, I think by doing your backyard in two phases, you can achieve your goals without feeling as though your outdoor life is on hold until it's complete.

Phase 1 involves putting the structure into place so that you can build on it with Phase 2.

First, I would prioritize the wall that leads to your backyard. You mention French doors, but I recommend investigating floor-to-ceiling doors and windows that give the illusion of a glass wall. Think of how this will completely change your kitchen and back of house with all the light streaming in.

The photo I am showing for inspiration is from the award-winning Toronto architecture firm, Taylor_Smyth Architects(taylor Smyth.com).

I'm not suggesting this is the width or style of your house but I do believe you could achieve the overall look of this outdoor area by choosing the correct patio doors and windows. You mention the juxtaposing styles of your interior and I think you could carry that theme through to your backyard and exterior for a Modern-meets-Victorian feel outdoors as well. The windows and doors used in the Taylor Smyth project are from Pro Tec (pretecwindows.com) and I believe worthy of investigating in.

If it were my project, Phase 1 would include the installation of the oversize doors and windows along with the decking.

At the same time, run your gas line and electrical for the outside kitchen that will be installed with Phase 2. You probably currently have a propane barbecue and can make do (like many of us) for another summer.

You mention wanting a hot tub. This too is probably on the list for Phase 2. Specify the actual unit you wish to place so you know what to plan for, and speak with a dealer to ensure it won't be discontinued next year when you go to purchase.

As I'm sure you're aware, outdoor furniture comes in all price ranges. If your tastes run to the expensive, I suggest waiting to take advantage of end-of-season sales. I assume you have been getting by with some kind of furniture and if you don't have your ideal pieces this summer, so be it.

And remember, Ruth, feel no shame and make no excuses to your friends for your two-year backyard project. You're operating with the master plan in mind and fine design is worth the wait!

Jeffrey.



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