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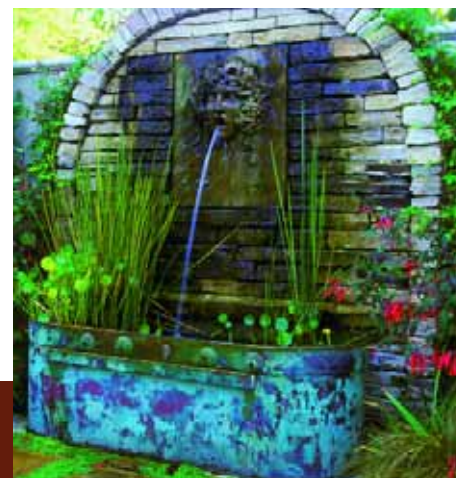


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Pursuit of Perfection

By Eric Herman

Through the years – but particularly within the past two or three – one of the comments I’ve heard with the greatest frequency is that *WaterShapes* is improving dramatically with respect to the content it presents.

I’m always happy to hear any kind of positive feedback, but I’m also curious to know what about our coverage seems to be improving the most and usually ask those who are making these comments to tell me more.

What comes back when I ask for specifics is quite simple: The projects we’re covering nowadays, they say, are superior to those we held up as examples of excellence in years past. What they’re telling me, in other words, is not that *WaterShapes* has gotten so much better; rather, it’s *watershapers* who’ve stepped up a couple levels: What we’re publishing shows *their* visible, marked improvements in creativity, style, technical sophistication, overall concept, sensitivity to site, sense of color, materials selections and more – rather than our ingenuity in bringing these projects to print.

Now, don’t get me wrong: I’m all for letting our magazine get credit where it’s due, and I know we’ve played a part in all of this by having our eyes and ears open in lots of the right places at the right times. We have, in other words, shown some skill in creating a forum. But in reality, we’ve stayed relatively constant through the years, and the differences so many of you are perceiving have to do with progress so many of you have made toward playing the game at a higher level.

As I see it, it’s a great combination: The magazine is more valued and appreciated by its readers because the work’s getting better and better as time goes by and is drawing the magazine along with it.

Let’s take this issue as a case in point, because it covers three projects that are worthy examples of what I see as being watershaping’s march to excellence. We start with a contribution from Anthony Archer Wills – “Historic Perspectives” beginning on page 26. It’s a bit hard to believe it after all these years, but this is his first-ever project profile for *WaterShapes*, and in it he begins coverage of a gargantuan residential project in southern Wisconsin where he’s using a complex system of ponds and streams to add new dimension to a historic property. I’ve always considered him to be the poet laureate of watergardening, and the reasons why are much in evidence in this article.

Next comes a project from landscape designer Colleen Holmes, who shares some of her best work to date in “Graceful Transformation” (page 36). Here, she tells us how she used myriad watershaping and landscape details to create exterior spaces of almost mesmerizing tranquility and, between the lines, reveals the fact that she’s yet another restless spirit who’s pushing creativity to the limit in just about every project she tackles.

Finally, Joan Roca covers one of his most recent projects in “Straight and Narrow” (page 44), a detailed look at a spectacular pool he built for a resort complex near his home in Costa Rica. Joan is a tremendous artist, and in this instance he’s taken manifestly simple forms and vested them with profound functional beauty.

If presenting such material makes it seem as though the magazine is improving, that’s a wonderful side benefit. As I see it, the main point is that we’re sharing the state of the art with you and are more than satisfied to see that the state of the art keeps right on advancing.

WATER SHAPES

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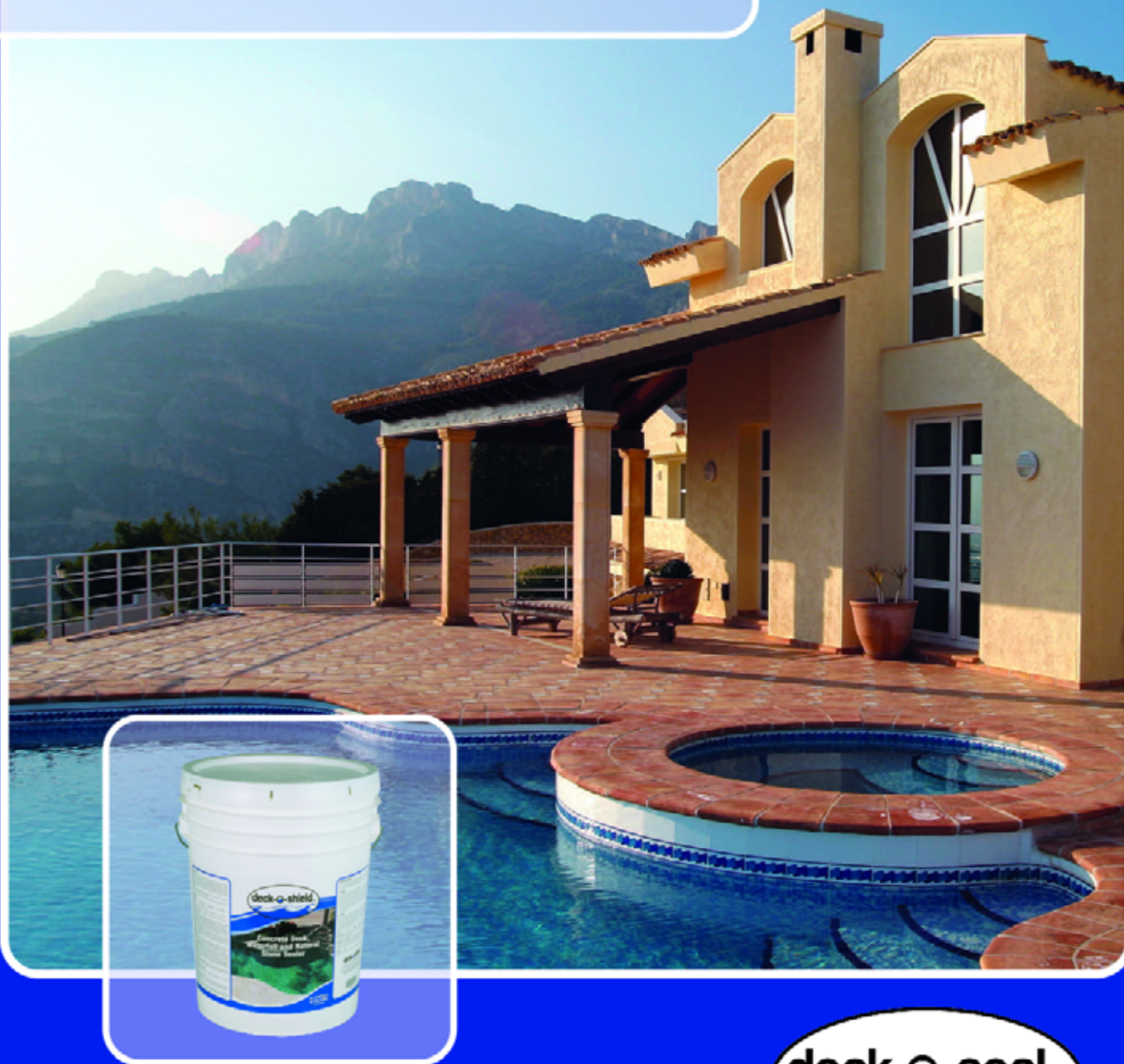
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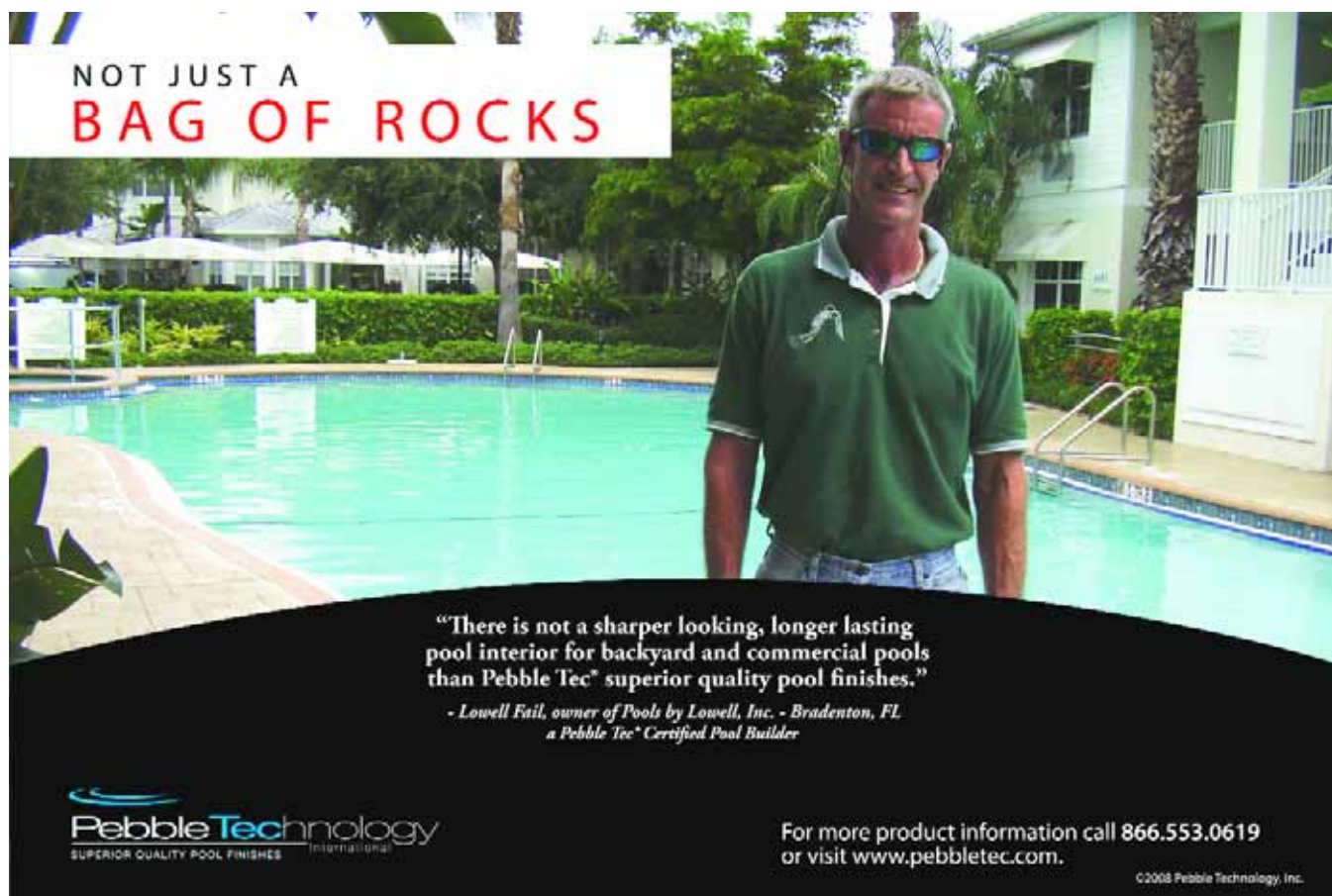
In This Issue

March's Writers

Anthony Archer Wills is a landscape artist, master water-gardener and author based in Copake Falls, N.Y. Growing up close to a lake on his parents' farm in southern England, he was raised with a deep appreciation for water and nature – a respect he developed further at Summerfield's School, a campus abundant in springs, streams and ponds. He began his own aquatic nursery and pond-construction business in the early 1960s, work that resulted in the development of new approaches to the construction of ponds and streams using concrete and flexible liners. The Agricultural Training Board and British Association of Landscape Industries subsequently invited him to train landscape companies in techniques that are now included in textbooks and used throughout the

world. Archer Wills tackles projects worldwide and has taught regularly at Chelsea Physic Garden, Inchbald School of Design, Plumpton College and Kew Gardens. He has also lectured at the New York Botanical Garden and at the universities of Miami, Cambridge, York and Durham as well as for the Association of Professional Landscape Designers and the Philosophical Society. He is a 2008 recipient of The Joseph McCloskey Prize for Outstanding Achievement in the Art & Craft of Watershaping.

Colleen Holmes is president of New Leaf Landscape, a full-service landscape design/construction firm based in Agoura Hills, Calif. A landscape designer with more than 30



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years' experience, she began her career as a child at the side of her father, Charles Prowse, who instilled in her a love of the art of landscape design. She studied landscape architecture at the College of the Desert in Palm Desert, Calif., where she was profoundly influenced by sculptor/landscape artist Michael Watling, and later attended UCLA's school of landscape architecture. Her early work focused on designs for country clubs and gated communities in the Coachella Valley. Since then, Holmes has run her own pool and landscape maintenance firms and founded her first landscape design/construction company in 1980. She established her current firm in 1987 and now focuses exclusively on high-end residential projects including a number of celebrities' homes.

Joan Roca is a watershape designer and installer based in Guanacaste, Costa Rica, and founder and principal of Aquart, the country's only custom watershaping firm. Born in Barcelona, Spain, he holds a degree in industrial engineering and began his career in swimming pool construction in 1975 in San Jose, Costa Rica's capital. Roca's search for watershape-design education led him a few years back to the Genesis 3 Design Group, which he credits with transforming his approach to design and construction and led him to reconstitute his company with its current name in 2003 with a new focus on high-end custom work. He can be reached at www.aquart.com



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Aqua Culture



More and more people are staying home and taking their vacations at home, and on a much more extensive and pervasive scale than any of us would have dared to believe ten or 15 years ago.

Digging for Insight

By Brian Van Bower

For the best part of 20 years now, trend watchers have tracked Baby Boomers and have kept telling us that, as we aged, we'd definitely become homebodies – so much so that the words “nesting,” “co-cooning” and “staycation” have all taken significant places in our social vocabulary.

It's a concept I've touched upon in these pages – numerous times, in fact – while observing that watershapes and other aquatic amenities go hand in glove with the homebody trend. Always, my basic point has been: It's time to think in terms of providing our Boomer clients with complete outdoor environments that will make their home experience as pleasurable as they could ever want it to be.

So far, I haven't read any studies of just how thoroughly the homebody phenomenon has truly manifested itself and whether or not it is as real as some would have us believe. That's too bad, but it hasn't gotten in my way: I've

seen for myself what's happening and, although it's the product of my own observations and anecdotes I've heard from others, I think my perspective is valid.

As I see it, not only has the prediction that more and more people will want to stay home and take their vacations at home actually come to pass, but it has done so on a much more extensive and pervasive scale than any of us would have dared to believe ten or 15 years ago.

all in one

I've reached this conclusion because of what the preponderance of my Boomer-vintage clients have consistently been telling me – and, more important, how what they are saying is reflected in their purchasing decisions.

In one way or another, many of them have indicated that they want all of the luxuries of a resort property in their own backyards. Even though they definitely can afford to travel, they tell me that they increasingly prefer the safe, familiar, convenient trappings of home, especially if the environment provides a fun place for kids to play as they grow and, eventually, as they start having children of their own.

I suspect this demographic trend has a lot to do with why many of the custom watershapers I know have continued to thrive in this dreary economy. When you add in the weakness of the dollar and the fact that overseas vacations are more expensive than they once were, people seem to prefer investing their recreational dollars in something unique that provides greater and longer-lasting value.

I believe that cable television has played a role here in the form of HGTV and other home-improvement-oriented channels. So have magazine racks, through the proliferation of publications targeting consumers interested in home improvement, regional styles and upscale living. It's clear to me that prospective clients are spurred as well by memories of places they've been: When you couple that with inspiring images of lavish spaces seen in the media, the upshot is that they're keenly interested in bringing similar slices of the good life to their own backyards.

It also hasn't hurt that creativity in the watershaping and land-

A large, clear blue swimming pool at a resort. In the background, there are several tall palm trees and lounge chairs with umbrellas under a clear sky. The pool is surrounded by a light-colored deck.

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scaping markets has advanced by leaps and bounds in recent years, at least on the custom side of the business. Not to go overboard with self-congratulation, but the fact that many of us have expanded our thinking in terms of design possibilities has helped bring greater ranges of choice to clients in ways that have no doubt driven far more expansive and inclusive designs.

Finally, I've found that consumers, particularly those investing in custom watershapes, are much more sophisticated than they once were when it comes to knowing what they want – which brings me to a point where I'll resume the discussion about client contact I began in the last issue and the methods I use to elicit information that will help me succeed for them in the design process.

Last time, if you'll recall, I covered approaches to interviewing clients and described my own interview technique as something that is constantly growing and evolving in response to what I learn from other watershapers as well as my clients. I also outlined some broad ideas of what I was after, which will lead me this time to narrow the focus and suggest some ways of digging even deeper into clients' wants and needs.

future memories

As mentioned last time, I start by asking clients why we're meeting and maneuver the conversation around to asking them how they visualize using a watershape. Armed with that basic information, I start to hone in on their more specific likes and dislikes and a range of other considerations as I prompt them to visualize, imagine and desire.

Here are some of the questions I use to ferret out the information I need:

► *Have you ever had a pool before? If yes, what did you like about it – and what didn't you like?* The answers here can be tremendously revealing. You might, for example, discover that the clients enjoyed nothing so much as swimming laps, lounging in the shade near the water's edge or diving into the deep end at the end of a long day at work. On the flip side, you might learn that they were disgusted by the smell of chlorine, didn't

like the way pool plaster felt on their feet or hated having to pay attention to water chemistry.

I've found that this single question reveals a great deal about their water-related experiences and dials in on specific issues in the context of a lifetime's spectrum of memories, some good and some not so good. In fact, even if their initial answer is "No, never had a pool," almost everyone can conjure feelings about watershapes from the well of memory and give me ideas and images I can use in getting them to visualize the project at hand.

I've found that consumers, particularly those investing in custom watershapes, are much more sophisticated than they once were when it comes to knowing what they want.

► *How important to you is the visual aspect of the design?* Of all the visualization-prompting questions I ask, this one really seems to do the trick with many of my clients. I've always been surprised by how many of them will say that they really don't care about how their watershape will look; instead, they're all about how it will function and say that so long as it's not an eyesore, they'll be all right with it.

Of course, many of them just start out that way because they've never visualized anything beyond swimming in a pool or sitting in a spa or watching a waterfall: When they begin to visualize things in the context of their own backyards, many of them come around to the aesthetic side of the process and start caring about how things will look. Not all of them make this transition, of course, but most will.

Then there are those who are *entirely* about aesthetics, don't care much about function and are mostly interested in making a statement. That's when I ask, "How big a statement?" In some cases, I learn that their primary desire is to im-

press other people with the lavishness of the details or the fineness of the materials, while in others they let me know that they want the watershape to reflect their tastes in art and architecture in all sorts of subtle ways.

► *Do you swim? How important to you is aquatic exercise?* In my last column, I wrote about asking clients to visualize how they'll use their watershape, so in many cases I already know the quick answer to these questions. But if anything they've said makes me doubt the clarity with which they're considering how they'll use a swimming pool or spa, I hit them with these questions to find out whether or not they intend on swimming, exercising or engaging in a specific activity such as diving, volleyball or water polo.

In other words, while they may have mentioned swimming at the outset, with this question I get them to focus on the physical aspects of owning a watershape – and often the answers are much more detailed and nuanced now, especially when it comes to the subject of *exercise*.

Along with the cocooning trend among Baby Boomers, it's clear that consumers near or beyond retirement age have turned to exercise routines and pursuit of physical fitness in a big way to fight aging and improve the quality of their lives. There's also growing evidence (reported in detail in past issues of *WaterShapes*) about the profound health benefits of aquatic exercise, and I'm prepared to offer that information to reinforce my clients' thoughts about its value.

Along those lines, I've also become versed in the use of devices including underwater treadmills, swim jets and other fitness-related features. If clients get interested, we start talking about zones and organizing areas for different activities, from diving to water sports and hydrotherapy. Some people get deeply, emotionally involved with their watershapes here, and it all makes sense: They've started visualizing a healthy lifestyle in relation to an aquatic environment, and it *all* feels good.

► *Do you entertain?* Again, this may have been answered back when I asked about intended use, but as with the exercise questions, I've found that deeper

inquiry here a bit later in the conversation can be quite beneficial to the process.

As a social animal myself, I'm often surprised in speaking with people who say they don't entertain at all. For the most part, however, I find that people increasingly have highly developed ideas about the entertaining they have in mind. To be sure, developing designs for outdoor entertaining is a huge topic that could be (and probably will be) the subject of future columns. It covers a vast range of subjects focused on space allocation and amenities ranging from outdoor kitchens and pizza ovens to seating areas and outdoor sound and video systems – so suffice it to say here that when clients express interest in entertaining, you can delve deeply into what they want and need through this question.

► *Do you sunbathe?* This may seem an odd question at a time when people are increasingly paranoid about exposing themselves to the sun, but there are still people out there who like to bask and work on their tans. If the clients prove to be tanning enthusiasts, accommodating them is a simple matter of designating part of the design as a sunbathing area.

Perhaps more important, if the answer you get here is negative in its attitude about sun exposure, it leads you directly to an important follow-up question:

► *What are your thoughts on shade?* Even sun worshipers, of course, need refuge from the sun from time to time. In fact, addressing the need for shade should be a universal component in our projects, but that's not what I've observed in the field.

Shade structures these days are truly marvelous, and in many cases I'd even categorize them as sculptural works of art. They can be relatively small, covering a limited part of a patio, or they can be expansive to the point where whole rigging systems are used to shade entire bodies of water with retractable awnings or screens.

Umbrellas are another wonderful option that comes into play, and clients seem to like them because they can easily be moved from place to place. These days, in fact, we're often asked to design pool areas with multiple umbrella sleeves to maximize flexibility in shade manage-

ment around and sometimes within the watershape.

This discussion also leads to another question:

► *Have you thought about a shallow lounging area in the water? How about a raised seating area next to the water?* By this point, you should already have a good sense of how or if your clients plan to socialize in or around the water, but experience once again has shown me that relatively few of them are aware of what can be done these days with shallow lounging areas, beach entries, raised-edge seating areas, step treatments and raised planter edges.

I've noticed as well that there are large numbers of people who love being near the water or in partial contact with it while staying completely or mostly dry. Grandparents, for example, often enjoy having a convenient place to lounge while watching the grandkids play nearby. And there are those people who don't swim but like being in contact with the water without complete immersion.

On that level, this question adds depth and new meaning to discussions you've already had about entertaining. In my experience, if I explain and illustrate these features and get my clients to visualize them, it's yet another way to get them to buy into the process on a whole new range of emotional and physical levels.

anything and everything

If you read between the lines of what I've written in these two columns, my meaning is clear: When you prompt your clients to look forward and see how they'll interact with the environment you're discussing, the better you'll be able to engage them in the process, meet their needs and make dreams come true – even dreams they might not have known they could have.

What I try to do through the entire interview process is to make my questions or lines of follow-up questions open-ended, because there's no telling where your clients will lead you if you give them the latitude to do so.

In opening things up, you might run into someone who's obsessed with water temperature, for example, and spend a

good bit of time discussing various options for maintaining it at just the right level. You might find environmentalists who want their systems to be as green and sustainable as possible. You might find people who are so good at the visualization process and so adept at working through options that the design process will fly by.

Again, it's all about getting them to open up, and I've found through the years that a deliberate interview process is the best way to get it done so long as I listen well and establish a decent rapport.

As I see it, this approach to interviewing is enjoyably hard work, often comes with surprises and involves conversational techniques that can be applied across the board in discussions of pools, spas, fountains, lighting systems, deck systems, outdoor amenities, outbuildings and much, much more.

This is where being at the cutting edge of the exterior design business gets to be a great deal of fun. Opening clients' eyes to the wonders of laminar jets, waterfalls and streams; to the joys of quiet water in the form of reflecting pools or ponds; to materials of all types and descriptions; to control technology, water-in-transit systems and fire elements: It makes me happy just to think about what can be accomplished with the right clients in the right circumstances.

I always remind myself that we're in the business of providing venues for human experience – an incredibly important responsibility for us and a very personal commitment from the homeowners with whom we work. To get things right, we owe it to them to help them visualize a better future: All it takes is a clear mind, open ears and a little list of questions. **WS**

Brian Van Bower runs Aquatic Consultants, a design firm based in Miami, Fla., and is a co-founder of the Genesis 3 Design Group; dedicated to top-of-the-line performance in aquatic design and construction, this organization conducts schools for like-minded pool designers and builders. He can be reached at bvanbower@aol.com.

On the Level



Medical Arts

By Bruce Zaretsky

Not long ago, I did a pair of columns on healing gardens and their benefits. If you'll recall, I preached the importance of persuading hospitals in particular to include these spaces in their overall site plans as a means of providing garden environments for patients, patients' families and hospital staff: These spaces reduce stress, help patients heal more quickly and give everyone who visits them a soothing sense of tranquility.

I've attempted to the greatest extent possible to practice what I preached, and through the years I've installed numerous health-specific gardens at local assisted-living centers, Alzheimer's care facilities and even at a center for emotionally challenged children. But truth be told, I haven't met with much success with our local hospitals, despite the fact that healing gardens have caught on with countless such facilities coast to coast.

I don't know quite why this is, but we just haven't had much luck getting larger institutions to buy into the concept. In fact, just getting an appointment with decision-makers is an exercise in pulling teeth. But in one instance a couple years ago, a serendipitous

We aimed to create a space that could be occupied by more than one user at a time, with spaces available for solitude and private contemplation as well as discussions among small groups.

encounter gave us the break we needed, and it's a story well worth telling here.

wear and tear

Many of you can probably relate to the fact that watershaping or landscape contracting can be hard on a body. I know I've spent many years abusing mine: Nobody can set stone better than I can, of course, so I set them all. Nobody works with bricks as well as I do either, naturally, so I've installed square miles of them.

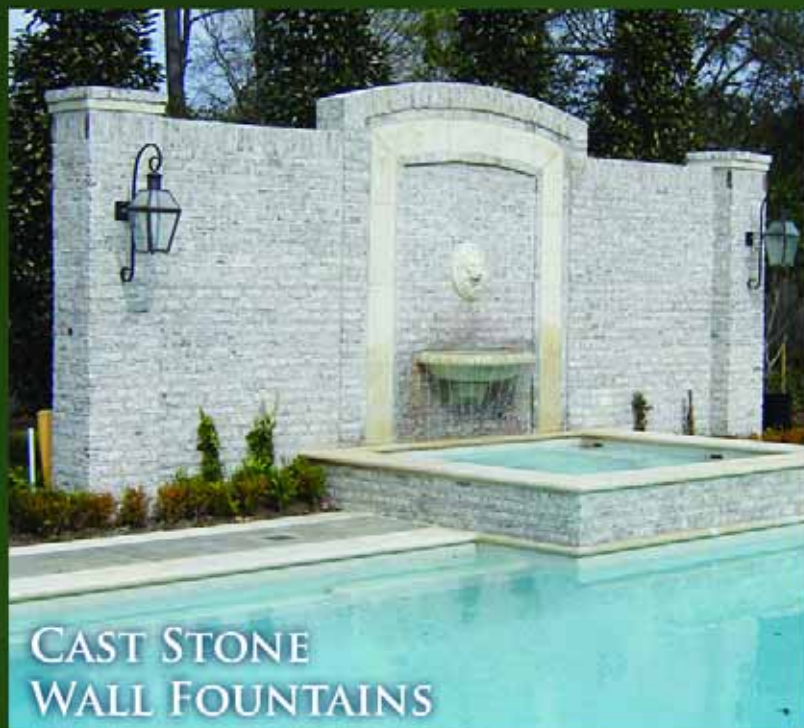
And so it came to pass in 2004 that my body rebelled: Pain forced me to seek out a neck specialist to assess why I couldn't look up, sideways or down without discomfort. The neurosurgeon asked me what I did for a living that could be so hellish as to result in the MRI results he was reviewing, and once I told him, he proceeded to tell us a moving story.

It took us a few minutes to figure out the relevance of his tale, but the payoff was wonderful.

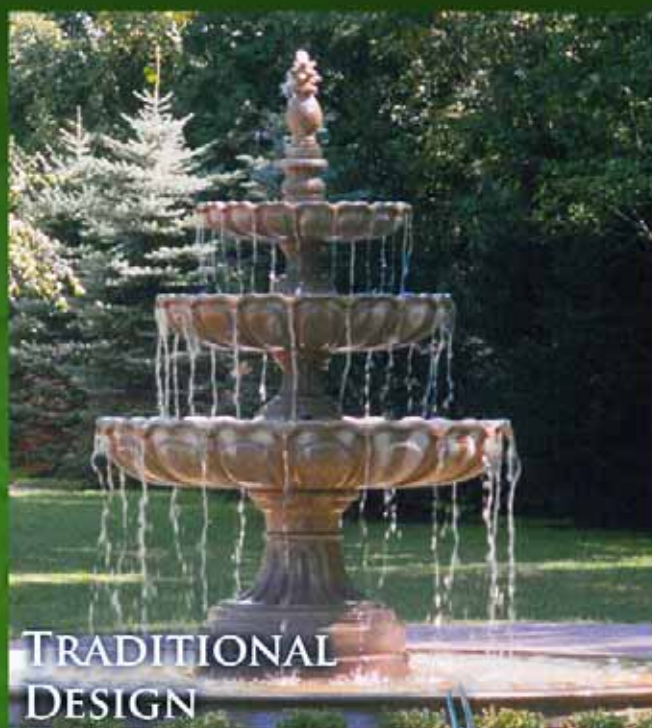
One day, he said, his daughter suddenly experienced a paralysis that affected most of her body. A virus had attacked her nervous system (it turned out to be Guillain-Barré Syndrome) and was so nasty that she couldn't move any part of her body below her neck and was in grave danger. The doctor, a nationally renowned expert in his field, could do nothing for her but wait and hope. He stayed at his daughter's side day and night for the week or so in which she fought for her life. Gradually, she won the battle and began regaining her mobility almost as suddenly as she'd lost it.

One day as she recovered, the doctor who was so accustomed to solving his other patients' problems but had been helpless to do anything for his own child, asked her if there was anything he could do now that she was safe. "I want to go outside," she said.

The doctor immediately unhooked everything attached to her and wheeled her bed out of the room, down the hallway and through the door into the rain. His daughter told him later that she had never felt so much joy as when the raindrops fell on her face. He immediately wondered why there wasn't a space set aside



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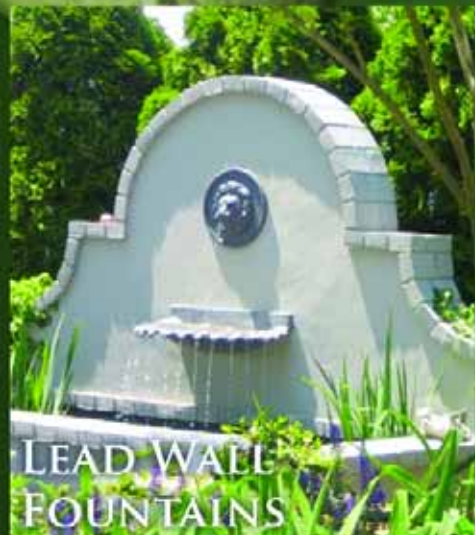


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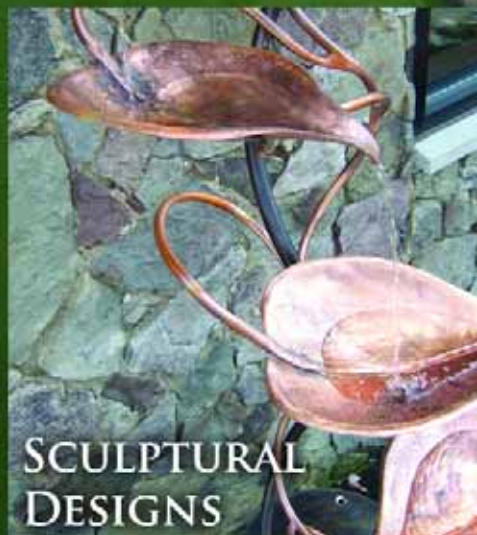
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On the Level

for all patients to have such experiences.

As soon as he finished his story with that question, my partner Sharon Coates and I immediately told him, “We can help you there.” On the spot, he hired us to design a garden in a space on the hospital site that wasn’t being used. We came up with a conceptual plan, prepared a rough budget and presented the package to him.

He was fully committed to the project and had the wherewithal to pull it off because of his role as one of the hospital’s principal fundraisers. But there was a catch: Unbeknownst to him, the space for which we’d designed the garden had previously been set aside to accommodate a new wing for the hospital. It wasn’t anywhere close to being built, we learned, but the space we were after had been spoken for.

Our plan immediately moved to a back burner – at least for the time being.

moving along

In the time since, Rochester General Hospital has undergone a great deal of expansion. As we watched it happen, we kept after the administration and buttonholed anyone who would listen to us and our arguments for committing resources to a healing garden. Finally, persistence paid off – but not in quite the way we were hoping – when we were asked in 2007 to redesign the entire front portion of the hospital grounds, including the main entry off of a busy road.

Wherever we could, we stuck to the principles and spirit of healing gardens, largely by designing with plants that are traditionally used in these settings and by establishing a connection between the hospital’s main waiting room and a new exterior waiting room surrounded by plantings and a nautilus-shaped stone wall.

The main road entering the hospital grounds was flanked by a pair of these nautilus-inspired walls, each weighing 100 tons. Since it was completed, the special areas we designed into the overall space have generated a tremendous volume of positive comments from patients and staff – and even from local businesses.

This project *finally* led to a meeting with



It's not a large area, but we were able to work with low, radial walls and movable furniture to create areas that seem private and self-contained while leaving an open space in the center that's suitable for larger groups.

the hospital administrators to discuss adding a healing garden specifically for use by patients, their families and hospital staff. Because of the scope of the project (and the fact that foundation money was being used to fund it), the hospital was required to hold a design competition. My firm and three others submitted plans.

One of our stipulations for participating in the process was that all of us had to present plans not only to the engineering

department, which was charged with handling the project, but also to a committee made up of a staff member, a patient liaison and the maintenance department.

This approach worked: With our experience, we were the only company that addressed the particular needs of everyone who would be using the garden and as a result our proposal was accepted without much debate – although the hospital *did* require that we work with one of the other companies (an episode that

has no bearing here).

The process of designing and finally getting to a point at which our plan was finalized bears some discussion. First of all, we were never given a budget for the proposed garden. I like this sort of process, because that nagging “Am I designing too much?” bug that lurks in the back of our heads when budgets are around never infected us. So we were free to create a space that would be dramatic, elegant, useful and safe.

We established raised planters for easy access by wheelchair- or gurney-bound patients; private seating areas for intimate conversations; a larger space for gatherings and official functions (such as fundraising events!); and simple but dramatic waterfeatures built into a wall to allow people to get their fingers wet. The plan also included lighting to extend the use of the space: After all, illness doesn’t knock off when the sun sets.

down to business

We went back and forth for months with details of this program, including budget development, plant choices and more – the upshot of one session being the elimination of any real water from the garden. This was (and still is) a sore point for me, because most other healing gardens around the country include water. (In this case, we ran into an insurmountable brick wall in the form of the hospital’s infectious-diseases staff.)

Undaunted and at this point getting ready to schedule the construction process, we changed directions and devised faux waterfeatures made of copper and glass. My partner Sharon and our colleague Al Broccolo – of Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care of Rochester, N.Y., with whom we worked on the garden – designed and fabricated these distinctly one-of-a-kind sculptures.

With the give and take complete, we were told to get going with the construction phase in August 2008. And by the way, they asked, do you think you can have it all done by the end of October? We told them that this was unrealistic and let them know instead that we would schedule theirs as our very first project of 2009.

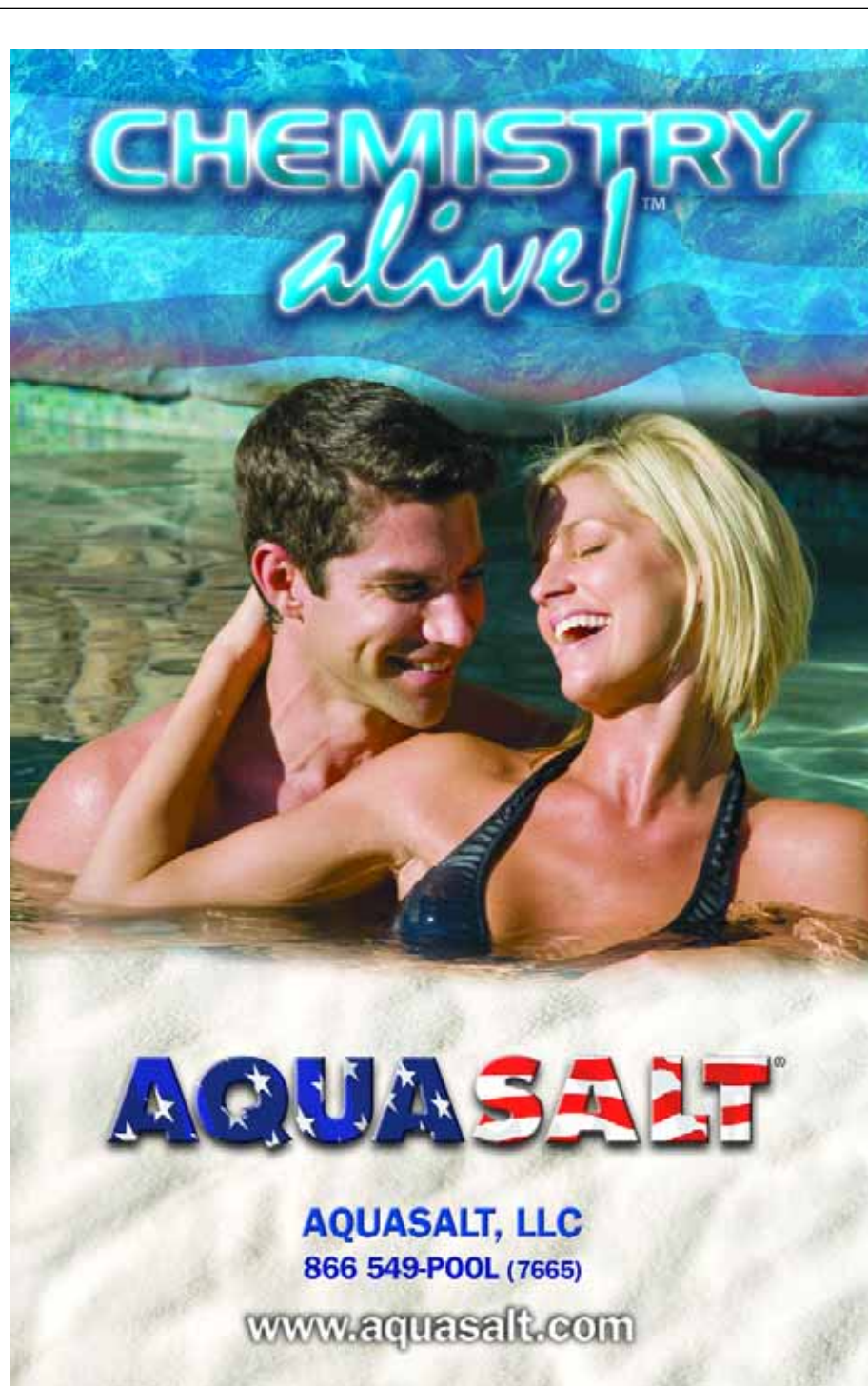
The intervening months passed quickly, and when March came around, we met

with the hospital to finalize the design and define responsibilities.

Soon thereafter, the hospital took care of removing the existing concrete surfaces and light poles and securing the underground utilities in preparation for our coming on site to do everything from the concrete paving, walls and wooden shel-

ters to the lighting and, with our colleagues at Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care, the plantings and any other contractual details.

We informed the hospital that we would not do *anything* without a signed contract and a deposit in hand. They countered by asking us to agree to have the project done by Memorial Day 2009.



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To read the interview with Jack Beane, go to www.watershapes.com and click on Interviews.

WATER SHAPES
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As it turned out, we weren't able to bring the sound of moving water to the space to add richness to the experience. But we recognized that *suggesting* its presence was important and developed a one-of-a-kind sculptural approach in copper and glass to make the impression.

Operating under the assumption that, weather permitting, we could be on site by April 1, we told them yes.

Our goal in all of this was simple: We aimed to create a space for Rochester General Hospital that could be occupied by more than one user at a time, with spaces available for solitude and private contemplation as well as discussions among small groups. As suggested above, the area also had to work for fundraising events and use by larger families.

As was noted in my previous columns about healing gardens, there's a lot of common sense involved in the design process. In this case, features included smooth, glare-free paving surfaces for ease of movement (especially for those toting I.V. stands) – but not so smooth as to be slippery; small private areas with movable furniture; some background noise to mask conversations and provide auditory privacy; raised planters to allow access to plants for those sitting in wheelchairs or reclining on gurneys; areas for

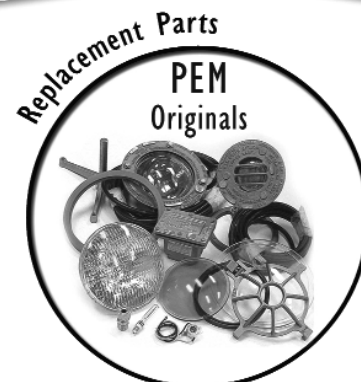
sun and shade; and fragrant plants.

In all, the new garden covers a relatively small space – just 62 by 90 feet – but includes six private terraces, a central gathering space, two wooden shelters with colored steel roofs, three raised planters, a curved seat wall of varying heights (with two “wheel-chair parking” slots), hundreds of plants and a detailed lighting scheme. Maximum use of the space is critical given the large scale of the hospital and the potential the space has to host large numbers of users.

When it was finished, we knew the space was *exactly* what the doctor ordered. **WS**

Bruce Zaretsky is president of Zaretsky and Associates, a landscape design/construction/consultation company in Rochester, N.Y. Nationally recognized for creative and inspiring residential landscapes, he also works with healthcare facilities, nursing homes and local municipalities in conceiving and installing healing and meditation gardens. You can reach him at bruce@zaretskyassociates.com.

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Outdoor rooms are a fantastic way to expand living areas and create useful spaces while also adding entirely new types of experiences to the lives of homeowners.

Stepping Outside

By Mike Gambino

For more than 10 years now, outdoor rooms have been growing steadily in both popularity and complexity. That's great, because it enables designers – architects, landscape architects, landscape designers and pool builders alike – to bring interiors outside and provide living spaces where activities previously associated strictly with indoor spaces can move comfortably into the great outdoors.

It's a fantastic way to expand living areas and create useful spaces while also adding entirely new types of experiences to the lives of homeowners.

Among this trend's many implications is that it has challenged landscape lighting designers to think in all-new ways about how we light exterior spaces. For starters, we need to be aware that many homeowners will enjoy these spaces exclusively after dark – and also be conscious of the fact that these environments require much more complicated lighting schemes than classic suburban patios ever did.

The differences are so profound that I believe lighting designers need to talk to clients in new ways that take into account not only their aesthetic desires but also create an understanding of how the lit spaces will be used – for food preparation, for example, or for dining, lounging, playing games, dancing or even holding wedding ceremonies.

Accommodating these various activities while still adhering to the basics of aesthetic design, safety and comfort adds layers of complexity to our projects that have rippling effects of design, system layout and installation. It's challenging, but it can be great fun as well.

design time

The vast majority of these spaces are covered by some type of shade structure, arbor, awning, trellis or pergola, to name a few possibilities. While this gives the lighting designer a wonderful array of options with respect to fixture placement, those possibilities must all be balanced by consideration of the fact that, unlike traditional landscape lighting, the fixtures in overhead structures are meant to shine down on people below them.

In addition to decorative lighting, we're more or less getting ourselves involved in task lighting. What this means, first and foremost, is that glare is a huge issue – not so much where people are standing (because they don't tend to look up), but much more so when they're seated: You never want to have light shining down in their eyes as though they're under a spotlight.

This leads to the first and primary principle of decorative-lighting design for patios – that is, it's almost always preferable to use indirect lighting. This means you want to light the pillars or posts holding up the shade structure; plant materials bordering the patio; or the walls of the house or other structures, such as stone fireplaces, sculptures or retaining walls.

This indirect approach enables you to direct light to the sides of the gathering spots and thereby avoid most problems with glare. Furthermore, it draws attention to the structures and features that define the boundaries of the patio itself and can make the space seem larger. In many respects, this is not unlike landscape lighting in the way features are lit and remain relatively static: Effectively, they're either *on* or *off*.

Of course, this lighting simply casts a controlled glow over a

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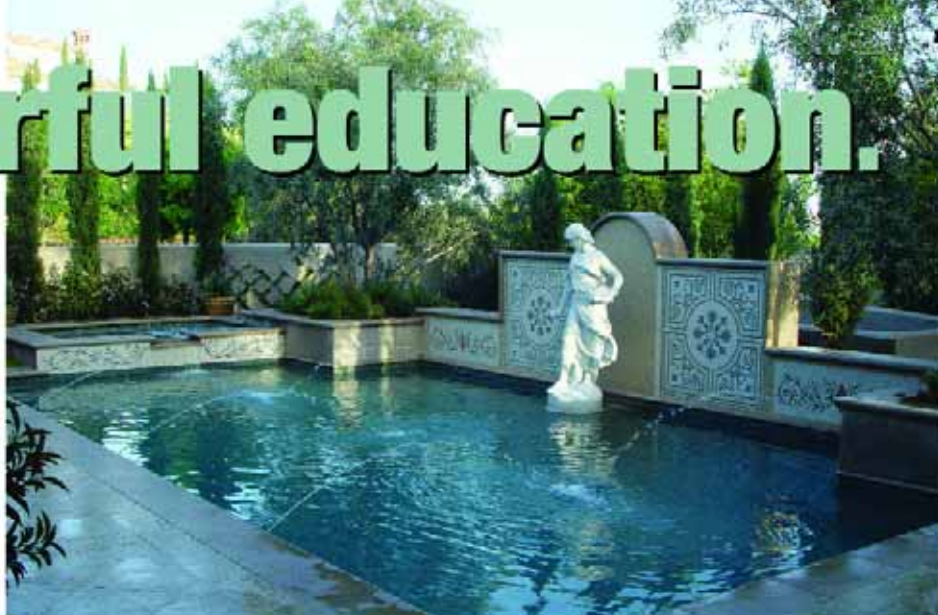
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defined space. While it may even represent the majority of the lighting, you still need to provide lighting within the outdoor room to make it suitable for various activities. By definition, this requires the installation of banks of lights controlled by switches, sub-switches and dimmers – whatever it takes to illuminate all the uses homeowners envision for their outdoor space.

Communication is key: You need to know the full extent of the homeowners' plans for the space and accommodate their thinking to the fullest possible extent. You might, for example, have a need to set up a bank of lights over an outdoor cooking area as well as bright lights dedicated to a countertop, sink or stove location – all of which can be turned on when the features are in use but also turned off individually while the rest of the space stays lit.

Barbecues are a special challenge because (unless they're built in, of course) they can be moved to various locations. In such cases, you may even need to plan out multiple cooking areas with separately controlled, relatively bright lights and focused beams that will put light right where it's needed.

In the dining area, your approach needs to be different and should involve the use of dimmers to allow the homeowners either to read or work in the space while also enabling them to set the mood for intimate dinners. The same is true of areas adjacent to outdoor fireplaces (where people might lounge, relax and enjoy conversation in dim light or need bright light to read by the fire) as well as spaces devoted to outdoor games or watching television.

personal control

The design goal throughout these spaces is to give homeowners as much control as possible over how the space and various areas within it are lit. This is not generally the case with general landscape lighting, where the control for the entire array is basically *on* or *off* and brightness is an issue determined once and for all: With outdoor rooms, your clients should be able to control not only which lights are on, but also how bright



In lighting patio spaces, we will often use an indirect approach and light the trees, plants and structures that surround the space to fill the area with a warm glow. This tends to make these spaces seem larger (which is almost never a bad idea) and also helps avoid problems with glare.

some of them may be.

Brightness is a complicating factor, because people vary dramatically in what they want and what constitutes their personal comfort zones. Some don't mind tremendously bright light that brings an area to near-daytime illumination levels and won't object to a bit of glare that comes along with it. There are also those who prefer very dim lighting to create a distinct ambiance – and if they encounter even a *hint* of glare, they claim to be blinded by the light.

That's why the use of dimmers is so important in outdoor rooms: This allows the clients to set the lights at levels that suit their purposes, depending on comfort and the needs of the specific activity. If, for example, they're playing cards in a dining area, they may want the lights all the way up to enhance visibility – but for a quiet dinner the next night over a great bottle of wine, they may opt for lower, more romantic lighting levels.

Dimmers make all of these possibilities available with ease and come in a few different forms that lend even further flexibility to lighting designs. Primarily, they're

made for service with either low-voltage (12-volt) or line-voltage (120-volt) systems, with the latter being far more common because the switches are used extensively for indoor applications.

By and large, I prefer working with 120-volt dimmers for outdoor rooms because they adjust the power input to a transformer and therefore can easily be used to control multiple fixtures. Low-voltage dimmers, which, when you can find them (and it's not always easy), are good for controlling *single* low-voltage fixtures, are less useful and flexible than their 120-volt cousins.

Also, many of my clients ask these days for lighting controllers to run the dimmers and turn various zones or individual lights on or off. So in addition to switch- and wall-mounted dimmers, we have the option to offer clients complete lighting-control systems that allow clients to determine how the space will be lit by using a handheld remote.

As you work out the details of these programs, you must also consider safety in the same way you would in the landscape. Thus, for example, primary steps within

and around the outdoor room must receive the same sort of treatment as do pathways or entryways – that is, they must always be clearly lit with no shadows!

Finally, it bears mentioning that when you light cooking and dining areas in particular, you need to pay attention to the color of the light itself. If the lamps you select produce light that tends towards the “cool” color-temperature end of the spectrum, for example, food will tend to look blue or green and distinctly unappetizing. As a rule, you want the lighting over those areas to be “warm” to give things within the space an inviting look. (And although it’s not necessarily recommended, for outdoor lighting, pink or rose colored lighting is known to enhance skin tone in a positive way.)

more to installations

For the most part, the fixtures in the lighting schemes for outdoor rooms tend not to be decorative and instead are meant to blend in with the overhead structure.

In other words, in these settings you don’t want to draw attention to the lights themselves because this will cause the homeowners and their guests to look up and be exposed to sources of glare. And excepting situations in which you’re dealing with a solid cover of the sort you’d find inside the home, you won’t be able to use recessed or countersunk lights and the fixtures will be exposed.

With all that in mind, we tend to use dark or black fixtures and have fixtures chemically stained or powder coated a dark brown to “hide” them within the overhanging structure. If that structure happens to be white, we’ll order powder-coated fixtures with white finishes – and the same goes for exposed conduits or junction boxes.

Indeed, we do our best to hide both the fixtures *and* their wiring runs. We install conduit, for example, on top of the shade structure whenever possible and run it down the back sides of columns and posts where they’ll be least visible. We’ll also run properly shielded wiring in rain gutters and downspouts (a fantastic concealment method) while making certain, of course, that we don’t interfere with the

water’s flow. Sometimes hiding power cable this way is not possible, in which case we must be creative in our use of routers or strategically placed moldings to conceal things.

With these tight aesthetic boundaries, mounting lights over patios requires a good bit of creativity – and it’s almost al-

ways far more work than is installing standard landscape lighting. In fact, you have to become part carpenter as well as part electrician in these situations: up on ladders, cutting channels or holes in wood structures, mounting fixtures any way you can to a variety of materials.

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However an outdoor room is illuminated, we do what we can to minimize the fixtures' presence by day without compromising nighttime performance. This often means finding fixtures that match the surrounding structure's colors, or powder-coating them to make them blend in. Alternatively, it means hiding fixtures within the structure to make them as visually unobtrusive as possible.

what the site gives us. Nearby trees might come in handy, for example, and we often place fixtures beneath roof overhangs and eaves. Every site is different, but one thing we know for sure: With overhead lighting for outdoor rooms, we're almost invariably forced to get creative!

That need for improvisation grows even larger when the outdoor spaces you're lighting have no overhanging cover. Here, it all boils down to exploiting whatever opportunities the site has to offer: nearby trees, adjacent fences and walls, distant structures. On occasions, we've even had to use streetlamp-style lighting—a last resort in my book because they can look tacky, draw too much attention and are an immediate and unavoidable source of glare.

(I also have a problem with lights mounted in the room's floor. Sometimes they're the only possible design solution, but unless you can make them completely flush, they become a trip hazard in addition to getting hot.)

Finally, there are instances where homeowners will insist on using decorative fixtures, which often happens when an interior designer is in the loop and wants to make a statement by bringing an indoor-style feature to the great outdoors. For all my resistance, I have to agree that the right chandelier can be a beautiful addition to an outdoor dining area, but in such cases I insist on the fixture being safe and fully intended for outdoor use.

open dialogue

As mentioned at the outset, the lighting of outdoor rooms offers the landscape lighting designer wonderful opportunities to get creative. At the same time, it also brings a lot of responsibility, basically because the element of human interaction comes into play on so many levels.

Bottom line: You need to learn to communicate with clients in slightly different (and certainly more accommo-



dating) ways. When lighting trees and structures in the landscape, clients will have their preferences, but to a large extent, you make the calls. On a patio or in an outdoor room, by contrast, the client tends to be more involved in the decision-making process and you need to do a lot more to accommodate their preferences, likes and dislikes.

To be sure, there have been instances where I've suggested and then done things about which clients were initially hesitant but came subsequently to appreciate and enjoy. I've also had clients react negatively and insist on adjustment – at my expense, naturally. This is why I do everything I can to make certain we're always on the same page and that I know how they plan to use the space. It's also why I use lots of dimmers and build as much flexibility into

I'm not a huge fan of using fixtures to make bold statements, but in some cases a pendant or chandelier can be the right choice so long as it's truly suited to outdoor use and is set up on a dimmer so the light can be adjusted to suit the need as well as the mood.



these systems as possible!

As I see it, these projects are about as fun as it gets in lighting design: They let me take what clients tell me they want and need and use my knowledge of the effects I can achieve to exceed their wildest expectations – the best of all possible situations. **WS**

Mike Gambino owns and operates Gambino Landscape Lighting of Simi Valley, Calif. A licensed lighting contractor since 1990, he has specialized since 1995 on high-performance low-voltage systems. He may be reached via his Web site: www.gambinolighting.com.



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HISTORIC PERSPECTIVES

BY ANTHONY ARCHER WILLS

WHEN WATERSHAPER AND LANDSCAPE ARTIST ANTHONY ARCHER WILLS WAS ASKED TO DEVELOP A POND/STREAM SYSTEM FOR THIS HISTORIC MIDWEST ESTATE, HE SAW AN OPPORTUNITY TO REDEFINE THE SCENE TO BEFIT THE GRAND AND GLORIOUS SETTING. HERE, IN THE FIRST OF THREE FEATURES ON THIS PROJECT, HE DESCRIBES THE EARLY STAGES OF HIS WORK AND A DESIGN MEANT TO BRING BEAUTIFUL VIEWS AND WONDERFUL SOUNDS TO SPACES DEDICATED BOTH TO CHILDREN AT PLAY AND ADULT DELIGHT.



There's something truly wonderful about working on properties that are in one way or another historic: In a very real sense, they give you a rare opportunity to participate in the past while at the same time you are conceiving and forming a place for the future.

This project is a case in point: My endeavors here gave me the chance to enhance a truly splendid 1905 private home in the upper Midwest and complement its amazing Palladian/Greek Revival-style bone structure with a

contemporary composition in rock, plant material and water.

The owner, who has a passion for architecture and historic preservation, had already completed a total restoration of the buildings. The grounds, however, still left much to be desired. The property manager had worked with me on a previous project, and he suggested that I should be brought in to revitalize the space – the centerpiece of which would turn out to be a grand system of ponds, streams and waterfalls.

SETTING THE SCENE

The mansion faces a lakefront to the south and is backed by approximately 35 acres of mostly forested land. To the front of the home is a lawn that covers an expanse running from 300 to 400 feet down to the lakeshore and a private dock. The site rises gently from the water's edge, eventually reaching mature oaks, maples and other assorted species that have been there for 100 years or more.

It is truly a noble setting, and fortu-



This is the property as it appeared before construction began, complete with an existing pond that couldn't be detected from the house other than as a fountain spray rising awkwardly from the lawn. As can be seen here, the slope rises very slightly and gradually through much of the deep available space, with a distinct grade change occurring mainly in the upper third of the space.

nately, the new owner had the architectural knowledge and enthusiasm to restore the entire estate to all of its original grandeur.

I was called in initially to address the property's rather scruffy little pond – a thing that did not do justice to its surroundings. It was extremely small and sat at the bottom of steep banks, so the water was invisible from the house and only discernible when you were almost on top of it. One was made aware of its presence only by an ornate fountain spray that rose above the banks and the beds of waterside plants. Aesthetically, none of this worked well, and the pond always seemed half empty.

I have always disliked the look of half-empty ponds: They remind me vividly of the bomb craters that used to dot the countryside where I grew up in southern England in the 1950s. Out in the fields, I'd encounter these random holes, which

often were partially filled with water, and disliked them because they looked so unnatural and alien to the landscape. (This is probably why, to this day, I'm such an advocate of brimming water.)

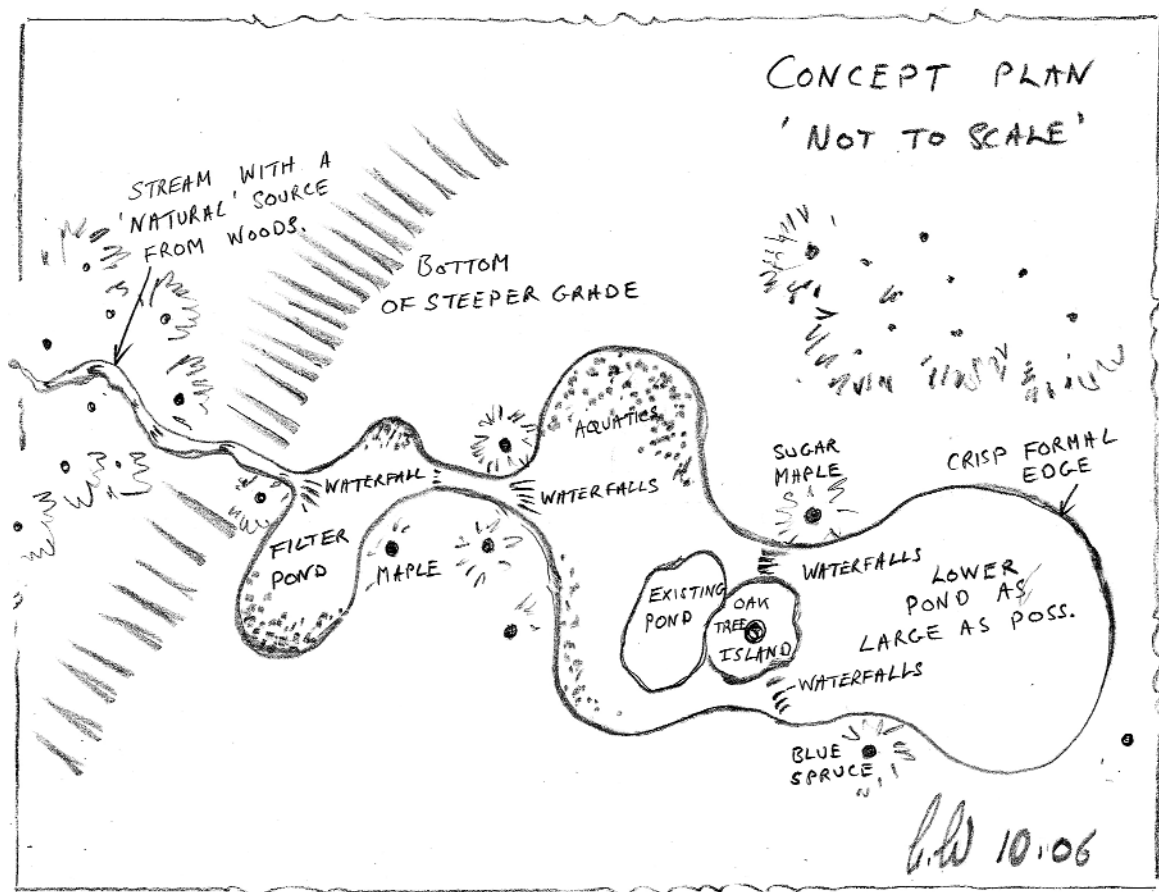
Eventually, of course, those countryside craters were filled in and erased from the landscape, and that's exactly the fate I intended for this pond. Indeed, in my very first discussion with the client and the property manager, I suggested that the existing watershape was thoroughly inadequate and that it would be best simply to wipe the slate clean and start again.

They agreed, and over the course of many subsequent conversations marked by their willingness to allow me a great degree of creative freedom, we went right to work in designing the overall scheme.

Through the years, I've spent a considerable amount of time refining my approach to such tasks. I lack a formal de-

sign education, but I've spent a lifetime speaking with and very carefully listening to people I admire, aligning what I learn from them with my own informal studies of great artists and various design traditions and, more particularly, with what I've observed in the grand and wonderful laboratories of nature.

In essence, what I've determined is that in approaching any design task – whether it's an expansive one such as this or one on a far more modest scale – I must consider the entirety of the setting. I won't, in other words, just drop in a pond or stream without considering the whole property and its larger context: how it works, how one moves through the space, where the views are (both within and beyond the property lines) and where sunlight and shade make their presences felt. Moreover, I do all I can to understand the clients and how they live and will use the spaces I'm developing for them.



As the design process moves along, I generate all sorts of drawings as a means of conducting my own dialogue with the site but also to draw clients and other members of the design team into the conversation as well. Here, for example, is a general concept drawing that gives everyone an overview: It's far from literal and even farther from being set in stone, but it introduces them to my trains of thought.

TAME AND WILD

As I see it, I simply cannot leave any of these influential elements out of the process or I will invariably miss opportunities to forge the visual and emotional connections that will make these spaces work at their best for my clients and their guests.

In this case, as an example, when the homes in the area were first built, none were accessed by road; instead, residents and guests arrived at the local town by rail and were met by a steam yacht that carried them to the estates' private docks. The result of this arrangement is that all homes on the waterfront were oriented to relate to the lake rather than to any sort of street.

By extension, this meant that these properties became wilder as one traveled uphill away from the shore and into the woods. This history directly informed the design: The planned water-

shapes were to emerge from the woodland in a naturalistic, discreet fashion and increase in splendor before terminating in a large pond adjacent to the home. Here, near this structure, the edge treatment was to be controlled and disciplined. Farther away, it would transition to a much more natural appearance and be marked by a series of waterfalls and wild plantings

Things would get increasingly wild as the system marched up the hill into the woods—the overall impression from the house being that you're standing next to a long-tamed portion of an entirely natural water system that works its way down from the forest above to civilized spaces around the home and near the lake.

But I'm getting a bit ahead of myself here in offering an overview of the design solution that emerged: Before I go any further, let's double back and take a look at the fantastic canvas this

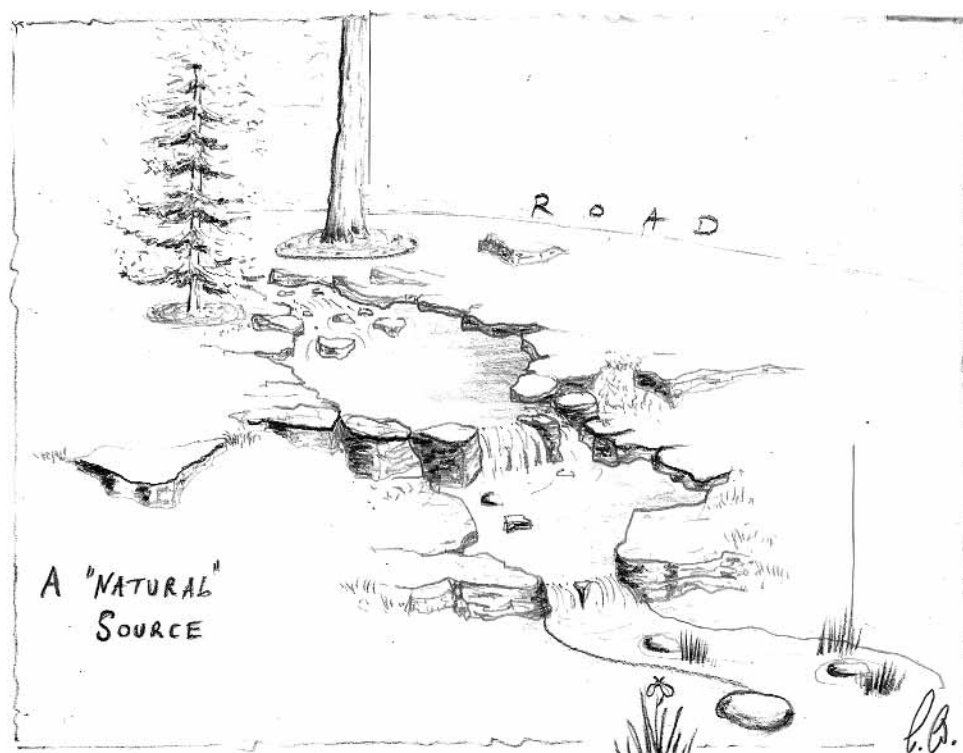
project offered me.

The overall space is quite large: approximately 600 feet wide and about 3,000 feet deep. Within that swath of land, I took my first steps by laying out in my mind what would ultimately become three major ponds connected by complex systems of waterfalls and streams.

As is almost always the case, there were some obstacles in the way—including the fact that, despite the lot's size and location, the space is relatively flat. From top to bottom, although we were working with some 40 feet in vertical transition, almost all of it took place in the upper third of the space.

That might seem like a big drop—and indeed would be in another setting—but when cast over a space so large and with so much of the rise concentrated in one area, it's really not so grand as all that. In fact, for the majority of the space the slope rose no more than about four feet,

When it comes to key details, a design will go through many iterations and variations as we move along. Here, for example, are two basic concepts for the water system's headwaters, one in which the flow emerges from the slope as a natural spring, the other in which it rises (in formal and more rustic versions) from a font set in a grotto structure beneath the road.



so I had to be unusually creative and very deliberate in planning transitions to make the most of what we had at hand.

This slope issue was exacerbated by a second challenge presented by the site's mature trees. In one spot along the lower portion of the proposed system, for example, stands an oak that is probably more than 200 years old. It rises within reach of the stream course, with the crown of its root ball determining the top of the grade.

MAKING DO

What this meant, of course, is that we had to work very carefully around these obstacles to make certain we wouldn't cause any damage—and, in fact, would succeed in creating the illusion that the tree had grown up alongside the water's edge.

The same issue we had confronted with that one beautiful oak came up time and again as we laid out our systems and were steadily challenged by the need to give priority to preserving the old trees. The only ones we could actually remove were either sick or damaged or compromised in some way, but those removals were few and far between. As a

result, we were left to snake our way among many healthy, well-presented specimens to establish our watercourses. In so doing, I worked scrupulously beyond the trees' drip lines to avoid any incidental damage in the here and now that might result in major harm later on.

On the plus side, this work gave us many chances to place the beautiful trees on promontories and at bends of the streams, giving these particular specimens the appearance of having taken root opportunistically in available land adjacent to the water.

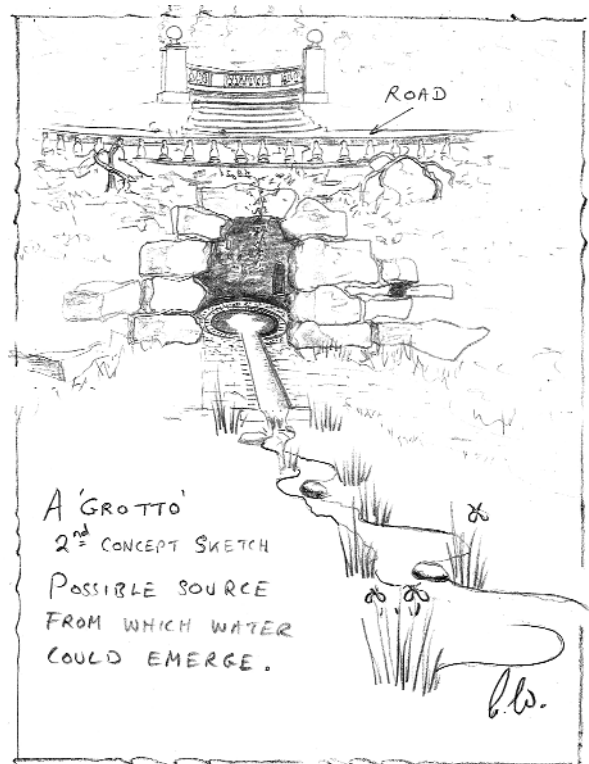
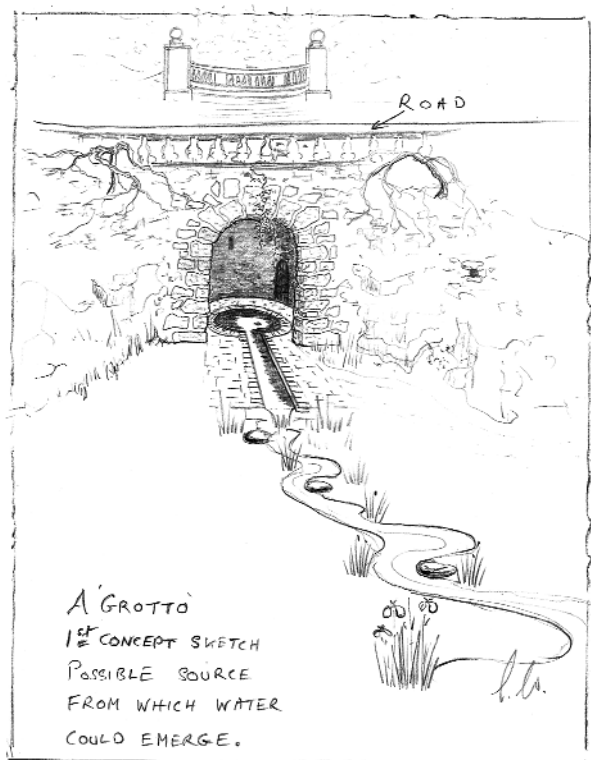
Another challenge we faced had to do with the fact that the existing landscape was utterly devoid of natural geological formations and offered no visible rock outcroppings of any kind to work with. This meant that, for one thing, we'd have to bring in all the rock material to cover the entire job. It also meant that we'd have to extend those formations well into the landscape beyond the water to generate the impression that the water had been responsible for exposing the formations.

These were, of course, specific installation details I wouldn't be dealing with directly until we were well under way on

site—and I won't be discussing them to any further extent until we publish the next article in this series. Just the same, I know that I must consider such details from the start and anticipate what they'll involve so I can accommodate their needs. Indeed, all elements must be considered at the planning stages to avoid problems and extra costs in the future: It's about much more than figuring out the extent of the rockwork!

Early in the design phase, we also established that we would be dealing with large ponds and streams to suit the scale of the property, and that everything would appear to be flowing down the slope toward the lake (an appearance discussed in additional detail in the sidebar on page 31).

The house itself sits at the very bottom of the water system, in front of the largest of the three big ponds. To create intimate bonds among the formal gardens surrounding the home, the bottom pond ends in a crisp, formal, near-circular edge and acts as a mirror for the mansion's beautiful architecture. As suggested previously, the idea was to make it look as though the water predated the home and



that only *portions* of the system had been tamed for human occupation.

Another detail supporting this narrative is the beautiful limestone culvert placed near the top of the system where a road crosses the stream's path. The idea here is that, when roads were eventually inserted around the lake to accommodate automobiles, this arched span had to be built to pass over an existing watercourse.

Now, as you enter the property by car, you first encounter the water as a very small stream up near the top of the drive and then see it at various points along the route. The impression given is that the system grows naturally in volume as it moves down the watershed.

FUN AND GAMES

As an overlay for this narrative, the owners made it clear from the start that they also wanted the project to include major elements of whimsy and play: The family includes young children, and the owners saw the pond and stream area as a place to encourage exploration and provide instructive entertainment.

This led us to decide that, as part of the waterfall structure at the lower part

of the system (quite close to the house), we would include a cave for the kids, with apertures through which they could peek out while hiding.

I'll stay away from construction details at this point; for now, suffice it to say that, in designing with children in mind, provision of hiding places and secure observation points is the key to

making these areas as much fun as they can be. Here, we devised a structure that could be accessed through a waterfall on the wet side and also by way of a small path running through an escarpment on the dry side.

This attention to the recreational needs of growing children was also a design focus beyond the cave system. Indeed, a

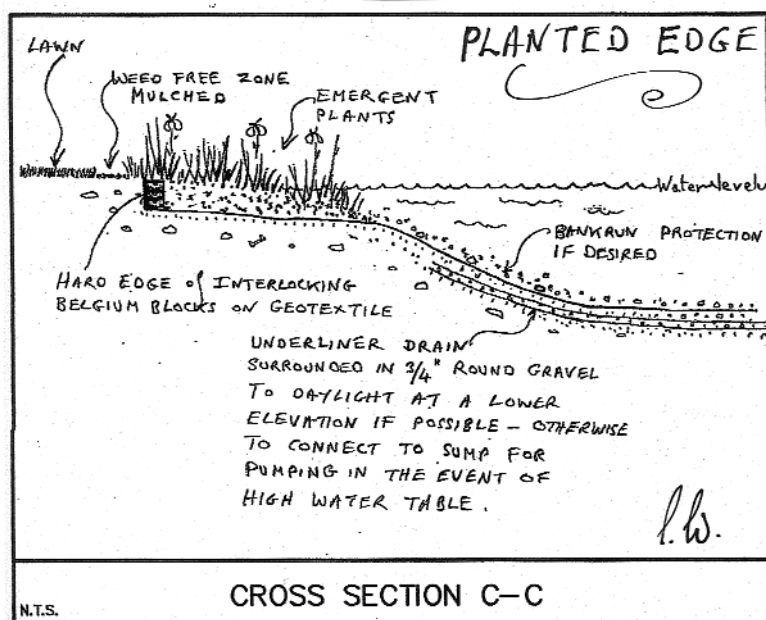
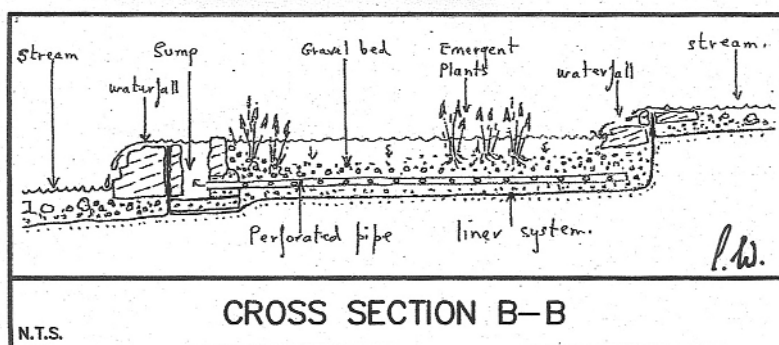
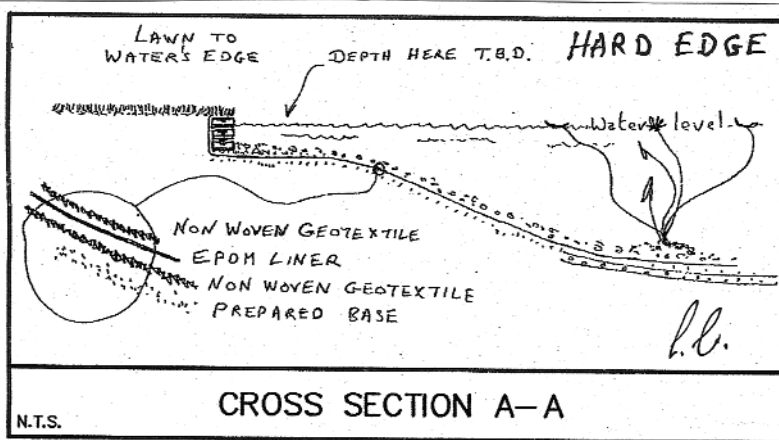
NATURAL CONNECTION

As mentioned in the accompanying text, one of the fundamental design concepts in this project involves creating illusory connections between our pond/stream system and the natural lake that fronts the property.

We didn't want to disturb the beautiful expanse of lawn between the house and the shore, so we agreed that the impression would simply be that the water in the ponds and streams flows to the lake via some hidden subsurface means – not an uncommon scenario in natural systems in the surrounding area.

That concept, however, assumes a great deal: We knew we'd be asking observers to make the connection on their own – and although that's not an unreasonable stretch of the imagination, I offered the thought that, at some point, we might further enhance the landscape (and the illusion of a connection between our water system and the lake) by inserting some sort of culvert structure near the lake.

–A.A.W.



In addition to sketches that are purely part of the creative process, I also generate drawings that serve as a guide for installation, helping the construction side of the team understand how everything will eventually come together on site.

good deal of attention was paid throughout the composition to establishing areas where children would be encouraged to interact with the environment.

This is why the design includes all sorts of pathways and turns and visual surprises and places to interact with the water. There's also a raised, wooden walkway that crosses a portion of the stream near a waterfall and a number of places where the water may be crossed via stepping-stones: These vantage points allow the family and their guests to interact intimately with the aquatic flora and fauna.

We didn't entirely surrender the space to children, of course, but we applied the same spirit in mirroring the children's cave upstream in the form of a cave behind the system's highest waterfall made for adult use: We included hollows and hidden places behind the rocks, knowing that these details would appeal to the inner child in everyone who moved through the garden.

After many visits to the site and lots of conversations with the owners and the property manager – and with all of these concepts very much in mind – my next step involved walking the site and establishing boundaries for the water and various other features with ribbons and stakes. This took a while as I located and relocated the outlines of the ponds and streams.

The property manager and homeowners were extremely helpful in what turned out to be several rounds of revising and editing – which brings up an important point: I believe that the best designers constantly revisit ideas to be sure they're the best they possibly can be. Yes, sometimes an original kernel will persist from start to finish, but often the best solution for a given space can only be found by testing and retesting various ideas.

I might, for example, revisit a portion of a stream course and decide that part of the contour is gratuitous and needs to be toned down, or, by contrast, I might see that I need to play up a certain contour to create a sense of a natural battle between the water and the land's edge. It is in striking these balances and defining these relationships that I invest a great deal of my time as a designer.

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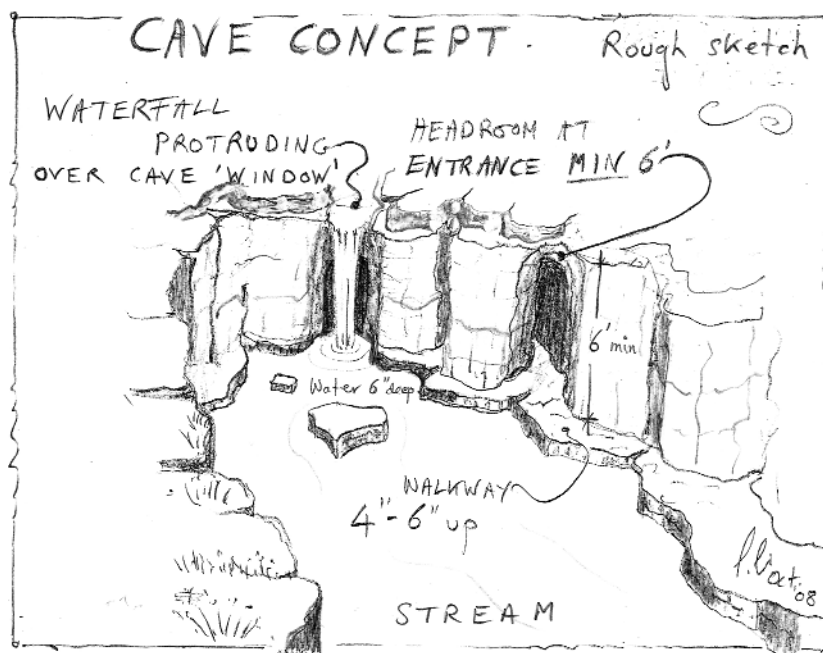
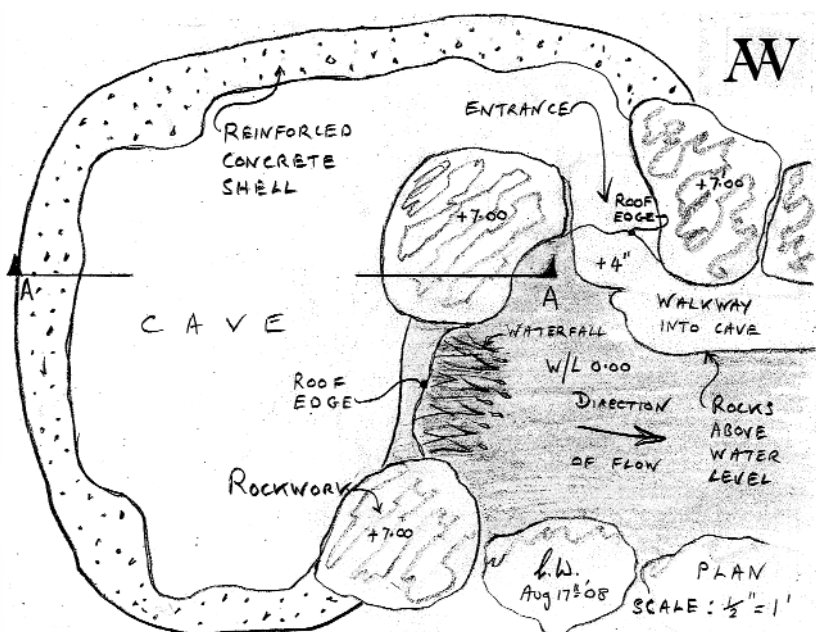
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WATER SHAPES

ONLINE



As concepts coalesce into plans, the drawings get more specific but not necessarily more detailed. Although we will indeed use these images as something of a guide once construction begins, there's a great deal of improvisation on site – and participation by the entire crew in achieving the atmosphere suggested by the artwork.

DOWN TO PRACTICALITIES

With the basic layout in place, it was time to plan the site's basic structural elements (especially the waterfall/transition areas, all of which would have to be supported by structural concrete) as well as the hydraulic systems required to drive a truly massive watercourse. In the latter case, not only did we need to consider performance and aesthetics, but also had to factor in efficiency in operating costs and take an aggressive approach to keeping a lid on energy consumption.

On both fronts, I drew tremendous support from my frequent collaborator, David Duensing (David B. Duensing & Associates, Ponte Vedre Beach, Fla.), who always does an amazing job with issues such as plumbing and pump sizing and other technical aspects of the work.

His team was to handle the complexities of installing and jointing all of the pond-lining material as well as connecting the pipes and pumps. He would also work closely with the property manager, who had at one time specialized in large electrical and hydraulic systems. The result of their collaboration is a system that moves lots of water while using many low-horsepower pumps and little electricity.

Indeed, the success of any project on this scale depends on the team – and in this case we had a winning combination: a forward-thinking, enthusiastic owner; a property manager who could make things happen and knew how to unclog logjams; efficient and professional earth-moving and general contractors; the aforementioned Mr. Duensing; and a delightful and supportive general staff.

I used the team to the fullest, establishing a portion of the design that they would either approve or offer suggestions of how things might be improved. Through it all, I generated countless hand drawings to help everyone involved visualize the details – edge treatments, water flows, plants – and keep all of us on the same general page.

The process here was delightful. The only difficulty, in fact, had to do with the local preservation and historical society, which maintains strict standards and felt the need to review every detail to see that

we were observing the rules to the letter – all understandable when a project involves changing a significant historic property. Happily, the vast majority of what we wanted to do was eventually accepted, the only real burden being the time added to the process while we obtained necessary approvals.

All told, in fact, these meetings and deliberations added a good six months to the process. The fallout of the delays was that, by the time we were ready to go, our window of opportunity had narrowed quite a bit, basically because of the weather. Our first phase – in which we were to build the bottom and middle ponds and their associated waterfalls – was compressed into little more than two months following the end of the winter and leading up to an important garden party.

Following that event, we returned for

Phase Two and added the third pond along with the system's biofiltration system. Above that level, we built the tall waterfall and its cave. Here, too, we faced a deadline in the form of another approaching winter.

In Phase Three, begun after winter's retreat, we finished the cave and surmounted it with a pair of streams, one of which emerges gently out of stone outcrops we placed in the woods, the other of which issues from a limestone culvert – both convincing ways of giving the impression that water is entering the property from a watercourse hidden above. Having completed that, we addressed the landscape areas adjacent to the ponds and streams.

More on all of this construction activity will need to wait for the second article in this series.

All of this creative energy was a prelude to a lot of hard work on site in which we would ultimately insert huge volumes of water where there had been none; work around existing trees while making them key components in the composition; create vertical transitions in what is basically a flat terrain; and introduce geology to a space devoid of it. All, as they say, in a day's work.



Graceful Transformations

Many watershape and landscape designers will attest to the fact that their best projects are those where no one element stands out among the rest; instead, the entire exterior composition is a balanced integration of beautiful materials and well-chosen features. Take the property shown here as a case in point, suggests Colleen Holmes, who transformed the grounds of a stately home in a historic Los Angeles neighborhood into a space of remarkably subtle beauty.

By Colleen Holmes

Everything about this project was classic and beautiful. For one thing, the home has the soft look of a French country chateau. For another, it's located in Hancock Park, one of the oldest of Los Angeles' upscale downtown neighborhoods. And when you add in the fact that it sits on a half-acre-plus lot on a quiet street, we had the pleasing sense that we'd landed on a refreshing oasis at the heart of a bustling metropolis.

We also enjoyed the privilege of working here with Andres Cardenes, a wonderful architect who had collaborated with these clients on and off for several years. In their latest endeavor, he had come in to refurbish the home along historic and formal lines – something that often happens in this neighborhood, which boasts numerous restored and beautifully maintained homes across a range of architectural styles.

Our firm, New Leaf Landscape of Agoura Hills, Calif., had worked with Cardenes on previous projects. When he called, he talked a bit about the situation and let us know that he thought we'd be a great fit because of the way we draw inspiration from both the clients and the site. When we met with the clients, they liked us and what we had to say and we were soon hired to move forward with the landscape.

FITTING THE CANVAS

Initially, we'd been asked to handle only the backyard, but as often happens when things go well, before long we became involved out front as well. In fact, before we ever put shovels to soil, things had advanced to the point where the clients gave us *carte blanche*, back and front.

There were, however, two major exceptions to what we could do: First, we had to work with an existing driveway that ran along the north end of the property past the side of the house before cutting across the backyard north to south – right through the middle of the space. Second, we couldn't touch a magnificent Magnolia that had ruled the backyard for at least 100 years.

Inside the home, Cardenes was doing truly lovely work – restoring the original charm of the kitchen, adding a wine cellar and, most prominently, placing a new conservatory at the back of the house. It was this last item that prompted the architect and his clients to think seriously about the backyard because of the way the glass structure commanded significant exterior views.

Initially, the clients and the architect had envisioned either a large swimming pool or some other type of upsized watershape for the backyard. I worked with that idea for a time, generating several design concepts and plunging into a lengthy process of sorting through various ideas that ultimately would become their backyard.

As we worked, it became mostly a process of taking big concepts and editing and whittling them down to more suitable forms. Cardenes, for example, started out as an advocate for a broad, truly dramatic swimming pool. As I saw it, this conflicted with the clients' basic conviction that they wanted the property to look pretty much the way it might have looked 100 years ago.

After more back and forth, I countered with a suggestion that we should think in terms of a simpler garden oasis. This would



be a space marked by layered views, textures and colors – all enhanced by the sound of water flowing in smaller scale watershapes. And of course everything out back would be visible from the conservatory, which was to be surrounded by and effectively become part of the exterior space.

With that spirit of historic revision in mind, my thinking about the property opened up and I began seeing everything in a new light. The backyard, for example, was hemmed in by a huge expanse of privacy hedging on the north side – definitely useful, but it was at that point a mishmash of unsightly, messy plants. Without my saying a word, the clients said that they wanted all that material removed to create an open, brighter feeling that would be more in step with the home's country-chateau design.

I agreed wholeheartedly, so one of the first things we did on site was rip out all that material and replace the worn, ugly perimeter walls with beautifully crafted, stone-capped walls that have been expertly finished in stucco to look as though they'd been there for decades.

TAKING A DRIVE

The next major detail we dealt with – the driveway – was not so easily resolved.

With old homes such as this, it's not unusual to see driveways passing into the backyard through some sort of *porte-cochère*. It is, however, unusual to have the driveway then turn and cut a prominent path all the way across the entire back portion of the property as it approached the garage. That structure was there to stay, so we had to find a way to contend with the driveway on an aesthetic if not a practical basis.

My solution included removing the original driveway, starting over and devising a "garden drive" stretching some 800 feet from the *porte-cochère*, through the yard and over to the garage. Starting at the street, we placed diamond-shaped, washed-aggregate pads spaced several inches apart, adding grass and other plants to superimpose the garden's aesthetic presence on the driveway's main, functional appearance.

Beneath the *porte-cochère* – a spectacular structure on its own – we added



The owners had done a great deal to increase the architectural charm of their French country chateau, especially with the key addition of the conservatory that now overlooks the backyard. But when I came on site, the exterior spaces left a lot to be desired, including the intrusively monolithic driveway and perimeter plantings that needed to be completely revised.

stones to make for a more solid surface and to signal that this was the place to unload passengers or groceries. Past this point, we picked up the diamond pattern again, carrying it though the backyard until the driveway reached a final turn at the very back of the property and entered the garage. (This driveway had critical viewpoints that happened to fall on the main axial line from the conservatory.)

As a backdrop to that axial view from the conservatory, we placed a small, artful waterfeature (to be described below) with a deck made of pavers cast from the stones of a French castle in front of it. We also used this material to pave the section of the driveway adjoining the

deck, but this time we used an ashlar pattern that blends in with the adjacent spa/fireplace patio. We then reverted to the diamond pattern as the driveway continued toward the garage, allowing the area around the waterfeature to become a visual extension of the driveway while also making the driveway part of the garden.

When we finished, everyone breathed a collective sigh of relief. This new treatment took what was probably the most awkward component of the landscape and turned it into a beautiful complement to the home and its surroundings.

That same integrative sensibility was crucial to the rest of the process that now

unfolded before us: It was our mission to make all of the various elements of the backyard work together visually and harmonize thematically with the home's architecture, doing all we could to align our thinking with the clients' wish list.

Happily, there was nothing unexpected on their list: They wanted places to relax in the midst of a beguiling, welcoming garden; they wanted spaces where they could entertain up to 30 guests; and they wanted a comfortable spa as well as a fire feature – all easily accommodated within the available space.

ROMANCING THE STONE

One of the quirkiest challenges we encountered in the project had to do with the stone that had been used in the home's original construction. Large sections had been faced with a beautiful yellowish-gray stone we wanted to use elsewhere in the space, but we soon discovered that nothing similar was being quarried anywhere in the country and didn't seem to be available by any means from any source.

So immediately, we had to come up with something different that would still be similar enough that the untrained eye wouldn't notice. We searched diligently among the many stone yards in the region before finally procuring a material we thought would work – and happily, it did. That was a good thing indeed, because the plans called for using it on the perimeter walls of the property as well as the outdoor fireplace, the raised spa and series of low planters that were to flank portions of the driveway.

The tale of the stone brings up an important point about the guiding principles of a design such as this: We were so intent on finding a close match for the stone used on the house because we wanted to use it throughout the site as a recurring, unifying, integrating visual el-

We did a lot of work with stone, plants and a bit of water in the front yard, doing what it took to lend a sense of antiquity to the approach to the door. The keys here are the weathered stones we used for the revised walkway as well as the addition of an antique livestock trough and trickling waterspout to a space adjacent to the porch.





ement. We did so firm in the belief that the best designs offer connections and balances among hardscape, plantings and other design features.

With the hardscape issues settled at last, we were able to focus our attention on plant selection, bringing in a wide variety of plants that might be found in a classic European garden. The key was setting up layered views with changes in textures and colors – all organized so the spaces were visually fused and no single element came to dominate the view.

We had an advantage here in that plants are our point of greatest expertise and my crews are well-seasoned professionals who work expertly with my staff and I during garden installations. We know all about plant spacing and growth patterns and position each individual plant in a way that those in the foreground won't block awareness of what

lay beyond – a sort of deliberate layering that gives garden spaces an inviting sense of depth and complexity. This, we believe, is the sort of impression that pulls people into the space where they can discover its full extent and explore its mysteries.

Another edge we have is that we handle both design *and* installation. This gives us the opportunity to work physically within the space rather than simply creating a plan view and moving on: We've always believed that understanding the installation process ultimately improves the work we start by developing a design.

In this case, the entire aim of that design was to provide a sense that the landscape had been there for years and had matured gracefully along with the home. In my opinion, this particular house is one of the prettiest on a street filled by

lovely homes and therefore deserved to present itself with a well-dressed, even regal sense of sophistication – beginning, of course, with the front yard.

MANAGING TRANSITIONS

As was mentioned above, the clients' appreciation of what we were doing in the back yard is what led them to ask us to work on the front yard as well. In so doing, we respected what was there when it came to placements, but as we'd done with the driveway, we replaced details such as the walkway with weathered stones that lent a sense of antiquity to the main approach to the front door.

We supported that temporal transformation by installing a waterfeature on the front porch made with a trough that had been used to water livestock in the French Pyrenees hundreds of years ago.

Using the neighborhood's existing,



Our principle challenge with the project was to minimize the visual intrusiveness of the old, monolithic driveway. We did this by replacing the original slab with a diamond pattern we carried all the way through the property and back to the garage with two key interruptions – one for the surface of the *porte-cochère*, the other for an extension of the patio space.



purple-flowered Jacarandas as a point of departure, we planted brightly colored camellias, hydrangeas and gardenias in the front yard. We also installed a secondary decomposed-granite path along the side of the house, bringing passers-by into close contact with the fragrant plants and encouraging them to appreciate some of the home's finer architectural details. In addition, we planted antique climbing roses to crawl up the stone face of the house and the small retaining walls we'd built from reclaimed material.

As you walk through the shade of the *porte-cochère* and enter the backyard, you pass through a small space darkened by ivy before the backyard unfolds. Alternatively, the yard is approached via a door off to the side of the solarium – another space we shaded with hanging vines and other plants to create a sense of entering a new and special space beyond.

To the right of this door is a stone-clad outdoor fireplace with an associated deck/gathering place. To the left is a raised circular spa that provides views of the gardens beyond.

As mentioned above, while you're in the solarium, you look through all of the spaces we've established to the very back of the property, where we positioned an intriguing, weeping stone wall that features a mask of Ariadne (companion of Bacchus the wine god and herself the goddess of ancient Crete) with a spout pouring into an antique bathtub.

This back area has a lawn and includes a cupola the owners had in storage. The perimeter (where the privacy hedges had been) was planted with sporadically spaced Italian Cypress punctuated by butter-yellow roses we set in the gaps. The walls themselves are finished with a distressed, soft-yellow plaster and have been capped with pieces of the stone we used throughout the landscape.

SMALL WATERS

As was mentioned above, initial thinking about the backyard included a swimming pool, but when all was said and done we followed a more restrained path and went with three small watershapes:

the all-tile circular spa, the antique trough near the front door and the weeping wall featuring Ariadne.

As we collectively came to see it, these relatively modest watershapes do more for the space than a large, static pool would have, introducing the sounds of moving water, providing distinct, remote destinations within the landscape and giving us a means of bringing sculptural elements into the space.

The spa is truly elegant: a raised, circular vessel clad inside with a beautiful porcelain-tile mosaic marked by prominent olive greens and buttery yellows. Its stone-clad wall rises beneath a trellis with hanging grapevines – an area that feels very private but is also well-suited for socializing. The fact that it's raised not only gives bathers and non-bathers a place to sit, but also offers advantageous views of the garden.

We located the spa's equipment about 75 feet away on the far side of the driveway in an area enclosed by an intriguing wood-and-metal gate. This way, instead of looking to all the world like a utility area, we've created another destination.

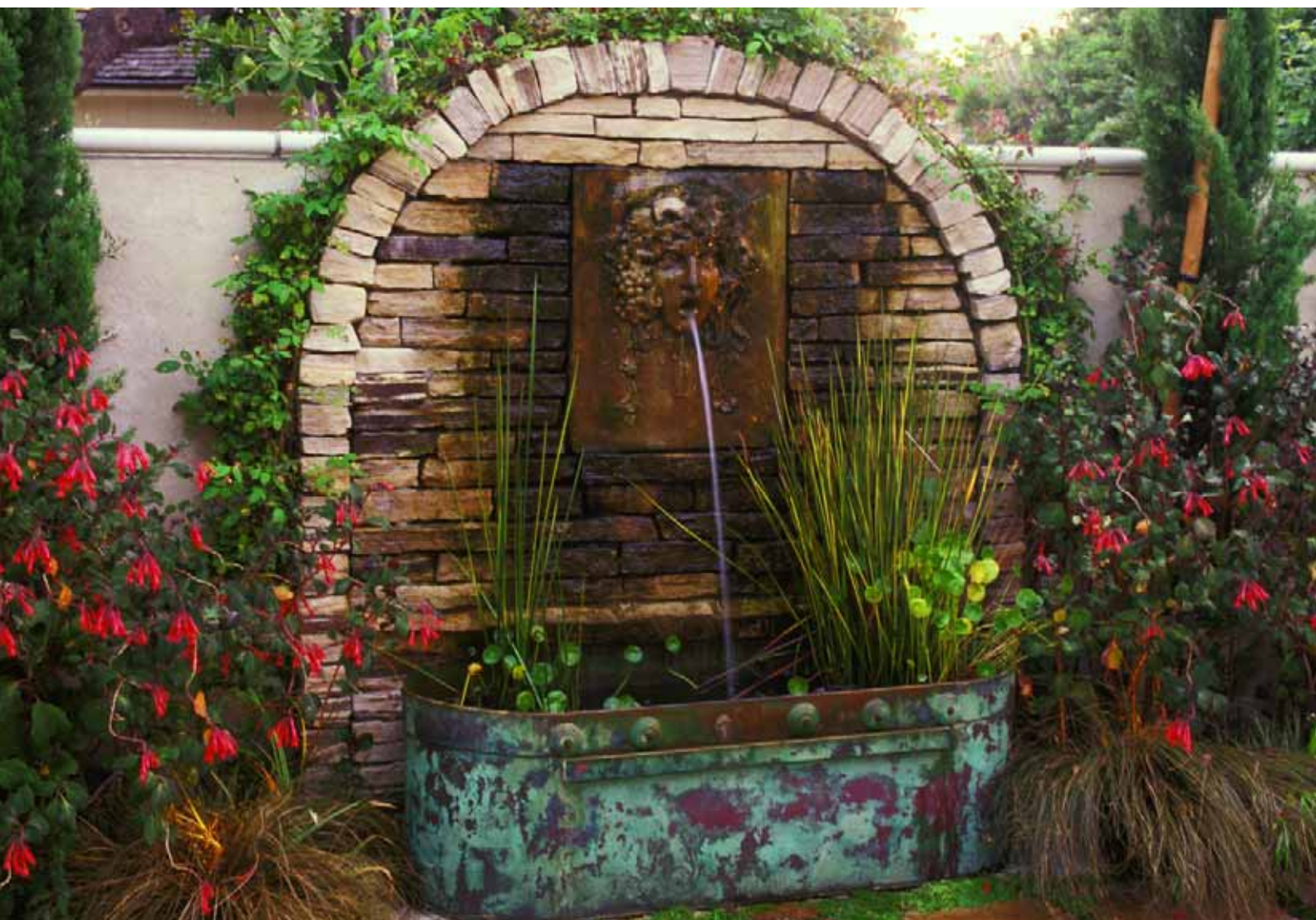
Of the three watershapes, the most unusual is the weeping-wall/tub combination at the back of the property. As mentioned previously, it features a mask of Ariadne mounted on an ancient-looking stone surface. Water issues from the mouth of the goddess; it also weeps through the rough-hewn stones, which we've left to collect moss that contributes to the aged appearance.

The story of the acquisition of this waterfeature's copper tub bears mention: I found it way in the back of an antiques store on Melrose, a street in Los Angeles known for such establishments, and the owner was an old codger who really didn't want to sell it to me. (He declared that it had originally been owned by Esther Williams: I have no way of knowing if that was true or not, but in any case, he would not budge.)

It was perfect for what we wanted, however, so I made my case and ended up begging him to reconsider. I finally left him my card and walked away, but I kept after him with repeated phone calls until he finally relented and named a price. I visited his shop with the clients, who fell in love



The glass-wrapped conservatory was the key architectural addition to the home and became the key focal point we used in organizing the backyard space. Directly opposite, we placed an outdoor room that includes a large fireplace. Just behind it, we set a raised spa that now offers superb views of the gardens beyond.



with the tub and acquired it on the spot.

The piece was so beautiful that it warranted a great setting, and the weeping wall was the result. When I subsequently found the Ariadne mask and suggested adding it to the composition, I knew we had it made.

STRIKE UP THE BAND

The story of this project ends on a wonderful and truly unusual note.

From the start, we knew we had to complete our work in time for the celebration of his parents' 50th wedding anniversary. We were all for meeting that goal, and as we came to know the clients and came to appreciate the fact that they were fun, kind-hearted people with fantastic creative spirits, we were even more intent on doing all we could to let them

start enjoying their refurbished property well before the deadline passed.

We'd wrapped up our work in the front yard and applied finishing touches out back with days to spare, leaving plenty of time for party preparations. On the big day and as a surprise for her father, they had obtained the permits required to close off the block to traffic and somehow managed to hire the University of Southern California's famous marching band to come down the street and stop in front of the house, where they performed to everyone's delight and amazement.

To all of us who were involved in this wonderful project, this seemed like the perfect exclamation point to close off what turned out to be one of the most enjoyable jobs we've ever done.

Toward the back of the property, we established a key focal point in the form of a weeping-wall composition that features a mask of the Greek goddess Ariadne that shoots water into an old copper tub – a great way to summarize the sense of antiquity we wanted to bring to the outdoor spaces.

STRAIGHT AND NARROW

BY JOAN ROCA

The Pacific coast of northern Costa Rica is lined with white sand beaches and dense vegetation — beautiful surroundings that watershaper Joan Roca has long used to inspire his work. Here, he takes us to visit one of his most recent projects, this one for a commercial property with requirements that called on Roca to find ways of expressing himself and draw on the character of the surroundings while using only the simplest possible forms.







We use masonry blocks to build pool walls in Costa Rica, basically because there's not enough local work of this sort to support a shotcrete-application company. While it's a different approach, it involves familiar processes as we excavate, prepare the steel cage, pour the floor, build the walls and pour the slot for the edge detail. With the shell complete, you can clearly see the sloping beach entry, the steps and benches, the central swimming area and the shallow lounging area as well as the two bridges that cut across the pool.

With watershapes, sometimes the most straightforward forms work out best. That was definitely the case with this project, a swimming pool I designed and built for a beach club near my home in Guanacaste, Costa Rica.

The club is part of an overall resort property known as Reserva Conchal, an utterly spectacular spread covering 2,500 acres on scenic Playa Conchal on our country's north Pacific coast.

I first became involved with the resort's owners about ten years ago, when they were completing their first phase and I helped them solve some problems with a pool that had been built by another firm. Since then, as the owners' master plan has gradually unfolded, I've worked with them on a number of pools in various spots around the huge property, including watershapes for various condominiums and other facilities.

My involvement with their newly constructed club has been, by far, the most stimulating collaboration I've enjoyed with these clients to date.

A Complete Scene

The beach club was intended to provide a range of luxurious amenities for

the property's condominium residents, including a bar/restaurant, a fitness center, meeting rooms, locker rooms, indoor spa and sauna facilities and, of course, a beautiful outdoor pool that was to rise above a pristine stretch of beach.

The resort's project director called me in for a meeting with the architect, who at the time was still in the initial stages of developing the club's overall design. Right away, the architect told me that he wanted the pool to be very linear – nothing even remotely naturalistic or curvilinear. No visual adornments at all, in fact: just a clean, straight, rectangular pool.

Although the rigidity of that direction seemed limiting and unimaginative to me at the time, as I familiarized myself with what he was after, it made perfect sense: The architecture of the beach club was going to reflect exactly that sort of linear value – very contemporary in style with compelling sets of straight lines.

I knew from my years of experience and especially from my study of design principles and traditions through Genesis 3 that simple rectangles have resulted in some of the most beautiful swimming pools ever created – if, of course, they're

used in the right setting and in the right way. You don't need to think much past the Taj Mahal, the reflecting pool on the Capitol Mall in Washington, D.C., or many of the pools designed and built by Frank Lloyd Wright to find examples of this point.

Still, this was to be a *resort* pool, so I knew that I had to “think inside the box” (literally) and create various zones for different activities and provide the large space with different points of interest. With that in mind, I set out to see what I could do with a rectangle to make it as interesting as possible.

The pool runs parallel to the beach at the center of a long, narrow deck area positioned between the beach club's main building and the sand. It's almost 220 feet long and about 22 feet wide, essentially a long and very skinny channel abutted by shade structures, cabanas and scores of lounge chairs.

I decided to use the extreme length to my advantage by dividing the pool into three sections: a beach entrance and shallow play area (about 72 feet long and dropping to a depth of four feet); an 82-foot-long lap-swimming area (with a depth from five to five-and-a-half feet);



and a 43-foot long reflecting pool (about five inches deep) – all situated within the pool's long footprint. (The remainder of the pool's length is taken up by stepping pads and other amenities.)

This arrangement establishes the beach entry/shallow space for families and children to congregate. For its part, the middle is dedicated to guests interested in exercise, while the shallow area opposite the beach entry offers a place for lounging or just getting your feet wet and seeks to attract an adult crowd. (This last area, by the way, also happens to be situated right next to the bar/restaurant and the outdoor spa.)

Lay of the Land

When you enter the club's main building from the parking lot, you enter a grand hallway that offers a straight-ahead view across the pool to the ocean. Centered on this line, we placed a set of stepping pads that cross the pool between the beach-entry area and the lap-swimming space. In this way, you're asked to cross the water to get to the beach, which seems about as inviting a way as possible to enjoy the spa.

The limestone stepping pads are in sections divided by runnels that give the pads a floating appearance. These pads are mirrored further down the pool (between the lap-swimming area and the shallow lounging area) by another set of pads – but these are slightly submerged, giving guests a sense of walking on the water.

(To heighten interest in the reflecting pool/lounging area, we also plumbed the shelf for installation of an array of laminar and vertical jets that could be used to create a programmed water display. The resort's owners are still deciding how to proceed, but the plumbing is all there when and if they make the call. Ultimately, they may not be needed to bring excitement to the space:

In building the spa, we followed much the same process as we did in pool construction – but the spa was a much more intricately layered structure that reflected the degree of freedom I was given to do something special for this part of the project.





The completed spa is larger in surface area than are most swimming pools these days, and that was intentional: We wanted this to become a gathering space where large groups of club members could socialize, relax and share the joys of communal bathing in a warm, beautiful watershape.





I recently celebrated my birthday at the club in an area adjoining the reflecting pool, and I was startled to see lots of people dancing in the shallow water!

We finished the three sections of the pool in three different colors of an exposed-aggregate material from the Crystal Stones line manufactured by C.L. Industries (Orlando, Fla.). The beach-entry area is in Mojave Red (a terra cotta tint); the lap-swimming area is in Midnight Blue (to match the color of the ocean); and the reflecting-pool area is in Black Pearl, which is very dark and heightens the water's reflectivity.

The surfaces were expertly installed by Tempool (Jacksonville, Fla.). I mention them specifically because I use them for all of my projects wherever I may be. I think my friend John Temple runs the best plastering company there is, especially for projects such as this one where extreme precision is required.

We lit that gorgeous array of finishes with low-voltage, low-wattage LED lights

placed on both sides of the pool, a total of 30 1.5-watt lamps from Coloundra, Australia's Megabay Lighting Enterprises on either side in all. The lights facing the club building are all blue to reduce any issues with glare, while those facing the beach are white. The mixture of blue and white light inside the pool creates a nice, soft glow.

A Glass Carpet

The pool features a complete deck-level overflow system on all sides that spans a staggering 497 feet in all. The idea was to create a beautiful carpet of water with a vast reflective surface bound by limestone decking.

The edge detail uses special limestone grates imported from Greece by Harris Brothers Natural Stone Importers of Monterey, Calif. (If the slotted material seems familiar, that's because it's the same system of perimeter grates that David Tisherman used in completing the pool he discussed in *Watershapes*'

November 2009 issue.)

The grating defines the edge of the pool, with water flowing over the limestone material and down through its slots into a six-by-six inch trough. Four-inch drop lines were placed about every ten feet along the trough, which was set at a one-degree pitch to keep the water moving through separate six-inch-diameter runs we placed on each side of the pool.

The decking around the grates is made of the same material as both the limestone grates and the stepping pads. We pitched the decks slightly back toward the pool to direct splash-out back into the system.

All of these perimeter drain lines lead to a surge tank positioned beneath an equipment room situated near the reflecting/lounging pool end of the water-shape. We supersized the surge capacity so that there will never be a problem with bather load, even when the pool is at its busiest on hot summer days.



Given the narrowness of the pool, we set up the pool's steps to run most of the length of the pool and to frame both sides of the lap-swimming area. This configuration is similar in approach to the one used by Tisherman in a number of his pools, where the steps graduate to lower levels laterally along the wall instead of extending out into the pool and taking up excessive amounts of space. In my view, it's a great way to provide access all along the length of the swimming pool.

To make everything in this outsized watershape work, we installed four separate circulation systems – one located within each of the pool's three sections and a fourth to run the edge/overflow effect. The edge operates at 240 gallons per minute and the beach entrance at 70 gpm, while the lap area and reflecting pool operate at 144 gpm each. All the equipment was provided by Jandy (Vista, Calif.), including the pumps, cartridge filters and various control systems. In

addition, to keep the water safe for bathers, all areas of the pool are sanitized using an array of Jandy's AquaPure salt-water-chlorine generators.

We built the shell using concrete masonry units (CMUs). We simply don't build enough pools in Costa Rica to keep a gunite company going, so we use blocks and have developed a variety of techniques to make them work with pools of any shape. In this instance, of course, the block approach was ideal for delivering the very precise rectilinear forms we needed.

As a final precaution, we included a dewatering system – and did so despite the fact that the pool is located several feet above sea level and we had no problems with seawater intrusion during the excavation phase. We inserted a gravel bed below the base of the pool and installed an under-drain system: Any excess water can be pumped to a remote well point if the pool needs to be drained for any reason.

The club's fitness center is accessed along a corridor that features a long reflecting pool that picks up the colors and textures of the surrounding foliage as well as the patterns cast by the light coming through the overhead covering. Once inside, club members have access to smaller spas that share the spirit of elegance that marks the entire facility.

Elevated Comfort

The last of the pool area's key features is the spa – a portion of the project for which I was given far greater latitude than I had with the pool. Given that relative degree of freedom, I wanted to do something both different and special.

First of all, the spa is, at roughly 40-by-20 feet, larger than most swimming pools these days – but of course that's not unusual for major resorts or semi-public facilities such as this one. What is unusual is that I took themes from Islamic architecture and incorporated them into the design.



I headed in this direction because I've always been struck by how our bathing customs today are not entirely dissimilar (at least in public spaces) from what they were in the Middle East 1,000 or more years ago. Then and now, vessels like this are places where affluent people gather in an exclusive environment to indulge in warm-water relaxation – all in the midst of beautiful environments.

The analogy isn't perfect, of course, because feelings about nudity and mixed-gender use of common baths have changed, but for the most part, the governing principles are the same: People don't seem to have any objections at all to gathering and sharing the joys of bathing in beautiful watershapes in beautiful places.

With that as background, I wanted to celebrate our cultural and design traditions by providing the resort with a spa that paid homage to classic forms. The fact that Islamic styles tend to play off rectilinear forms had something to do with my choices as well: We were quickly able to agree on a basic spa design and details that fit comfortably in a modern setting while evoking the lavishness of bygone eras.

The vessel rises two feet above grade and is surrounded at its base by an eight-inch channel of water. Atop the elevated platform is a vessel that contains the spa, which is set back from the edge by about 24 inches. There's a second narrow channel at this elevation, this one emitting cold water that spills over the edge and into the channel below.

The visual impression this creates is that the raised spa is a monolith of water that rises and spills over the edge as an uninterrupted, full-perimeter flow.

The platform itself is accessible by steps placed on the beach side of the spa, so from the club and most of the deck it indeed has a full edge-overflow appearance.

The spa itself makes up only about two-thirds of the platform's area. We had to use two hydraulic systems to maintain constant, precise levels for both the hot and cold water, the goal being to keep them both right at the level of the platform's edge at all times. This gives the further impression that the hot and cold flows have a single source where in reality they are completely separate systems.

The outside wall of the spa is finished with a cream-colored, 12-by-12 inch Turkish marble tile – very elegant and a great visual partner for the limestone decking. The inside is finished with a four-by-four inch stone tile from Indonesia – a flesh-colored, semi-translucent material with interesting veins and patterns of color variation. It has the appearance of being a mix of glass and marble, and I've never seen anything like it.

This structure is lit with white and blue LEDs as well – blue in the lower channel, white in the upper channel.

Echoing Theme

Moving beyond the pool and decking, we carried elements of the long-and-narrow theme from the watershapes over to the entryway for the club's fitness center and locker rooms by placing a five-inch-deep, 50-by-3-foot reflecting pool to mark the center of the walkway into the building.

Originally, the owners had wanted small waterfall features on either side of the walkway, but I felt strongly that such

an approach would be too busy and noisy for such a confined space and pressed hard for the reflecting-pool approach.

My plan ultimately carried the day with an important compromise: Within the pool, we set three vertical jets from Crystal Fountains (Toronto) to give the owners the option of having a flat reflecting surface or a subtly active waterfeature. We finished the pool off with four-by-four, turquoise-colored Sukabumi stone tile from Indonesia, inserting a white LED light on either end.

Finally, inside the locker rooms we installed two spas – one each in the men's and women's locker rooms. These slightly raised, rectangular vessels are finished on the outside with the same cream marble tile we used on the exterior spa and on the inside with the turquoise tile we used in the entryway's reflecting pool – again, all very simple and elegant.

I know, of course, that this project could probably never have been built in the United States, basically because so many of its nicest details run afoul of local health department standards. Our rules here in Costa Rica are much less stringent, which freed us up to explore a greater array of creative possibilities.

No matter how you size it up, I'm intensely proud of this project: I entered it feeling constrained by the rectilinear program the architect demanded, but as I dug deeper and deeper into the process, I found all sorts of creative, constructive ways to play with the constraints and develop a system that offers a variety of aquatic experiences to club members and guests. It's also, I learned, a great place to hold a birthday party!



The completed pool complex is sheltered from the ocean breezes by trees and structures that are richly reflected on the water's surface. We used the interior finishes to give its three areas their distinctive looks (an effect seen especially well in the gently sloping beach entry and on the steps that flow down from the bridge). Day and night, the pool complex gives club members and their guests a wonderful place to enjoy the good life in superbly elegant surroundings. It is, as I learned, a great place for parties – and for more intimate gatherings!



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In the Spotlight

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Deck-Drain System



DECK-O-SEAL (Hampshire, IL) offers Deck-O-Drain, an easy-to-install drainage system for concrete pool decks and patios. Intended to collect and carry water away quickly, the wear-resisting, non-corrosive units are made of tough, long-lasting PVC and have a unique, non-directional design that eliminates the need for right or left fittings. In addition, a flat contour profile allows for tight fits against any walls.

Koi-Pond Aerator



AIRMAX ECOSYSTEMS (Marine City, MI) offers Koi Air-2 aeration kits for Koi ponds holding up to 16,000 gallons. Designed to increase oxygen levels to ensure healthy pond life, the units also help to ensure pond balance by promoting growth of beneficial bacteria, reduce concentrations of toxic gases and minimize chances of winter fish kills by maintaining an open hole on the water's surface.

Pressure-Side Pool Cleaner

POLARIS/ZODIAC POOL SYSTEMS (Vista, CA) has introduced the 3900 Sport, an automatic, pressure-side pool cleaner for all inground pools. It features an all-wheel drive system designed to deliver greater torque and is made using durable plastics and stainless steel hardware for years of dependable service. It also has a large-capacity bag and a sweep hose that cleans even tight, hard-to-reach areas.



Salt-Chlorination Systems

AQUACAL/AUTOPILOT (St. Petersburg, FL) offers Pool Pilot Model 75003, a digital salt chlorination system for pool or spa purification. Available in standard mode as a basic purifier, the system can also be upgraded with either a feed pump and tank to include pH control or, in the Total Control mode, with the Model 75001 chemistry-control module for automatic daily adjustments of purifier and pH levels.



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Wire-Mesh Features



McNICHOLS CO. (Tampa, FL) offers Eco-Mesh façade and trellis systems—modular, three-dimensional wire-mesh structures designed to create green walls and other green exterior amenities. Lightweight and strong, the units come in 12 different powder-coated colors and can be attached to buildings, columns or poles or set up as freestanding surrounds to hide utilities or create privacy screens.

Centrifugal Pump



PENTAIR WATER COMMERCIAL POOL & AQUATICS (Sanford, NC) offers the Berkeley B-Series centrifugal pump. Designed for commercial aquatic facilities and high-end residential projects, the unit works in applications requiring high-performance and easy maintenance at moderate initial cost. The unit also has a unique pullout design that allows access to the impeller without disrupting pipes.

Tile/Stone/Glass Installation Manual

LATICRETE (Bethany, CT) has published a comprehensive technical manual to provide guidelines and recommendations for the design, specification and installation of tile, stone, or glass mosaics in swimming pools, fountains, waterfeatures and spas. Broken into 13 in-depth sections, the manual is aimed at all designers, engineers and builders who work with surfacing materials in submerged applications.



Hydrotherapy Alarm

TERRAPIN COMMUNICATIONS (Ottawa, Ontario, Canada) has introduced a lightweight Safety Turtle visor. Designed to be worn by physiotherapy patients in either home or institutional settings, the device triggers an alarm if head immersion occurs or the patient splashes frantically to notify an attendant that assistance is urgently required. There's also a wireless alert button for manual operation.



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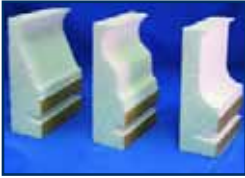
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Decking Forms



QUAKER PLASTICS (Schuylkill Haven, PA) has introduced an improved line of Styrofoam forms to complement its kits for concrete and vinyl-liner pools. The lightweight units come in three graceful profiles and feature both push-lock and

twist-lock attachment methods for fast, easy installation with a variety of pools. They also come complete with all needed nails, washers, wire ties and strips.

Acrylic Aquarium Walls



REYNOLDS POLYMER TECHNOLOGY (Grand Junction, CO) offers aquariums made using the company's R-Cast high-performance acrylic. The technology allows for creation of the largest, thickest monolithic aquarium walls available anywhere, and they won't lose strength, delaminate or yellow. They also have excellent UV resistance and are available in almost any size, shape or color.

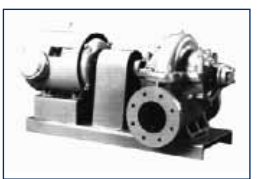
Precast Retaining Walls

NATURAL CASTINGS (St. Louis, MO) has published a brochure on its CreteTex retaining-wall systems. The walls are intended for the full range of residential, commercial and municipal projects and come in multiple styles and textures for maximum design flexibility. Installed with geogrid, the pre-cast, fiber-reinforced-concrete components stack easily and securely with a unique locking system.



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PACO PUMPS (Brookshire, TX) offers a range of pumps for use in pool, waterpark, amusement park and other waterscape applications. Available with discharges ranging from 1 to 10 inches, horsepower levels from 1/3 to 350 and flows of up to 7,400 gallons per minute, units come in end-suction models (horizontal, vertical and frame-mounted) as well as vertical in-line and split-case configurations.



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Concrete Possibilities

By Mike Farley

Concrete is an utterly amazing material, but it's so widely used – so *pervasive* in our world – that it's easy for the average person to take it for granted and barely give it a second thought.

As watershapers, of course, we don't have the luxury of underestimating concrete: With the sole exception of water, it's far and away the most essential of all the materials so many of us use across a huge range of applications. We simply could not do what we do without it.

But how often do we deploy concrete in purely aesthetic ways? Some of us use artificial rock or specialized decking treatments, but isn't it mostly true that we build our structures from concrete and then systematically cover it up with plaster, stone, tile or some other surfacing material?

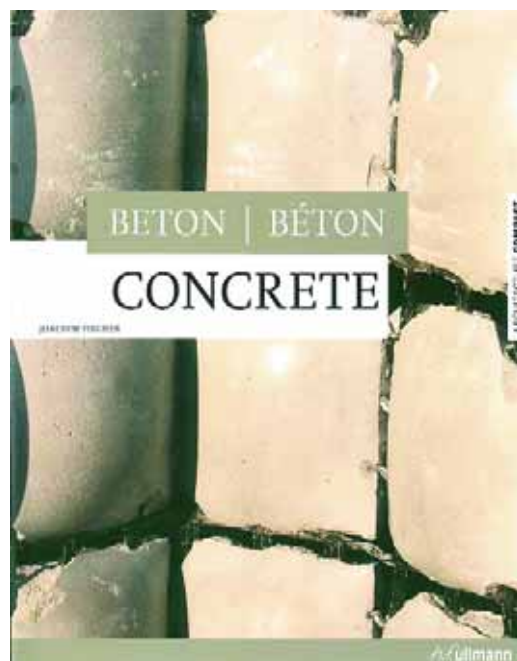
It didn't take long for me to start thinking about those questions in different ways once I picked up my copy of *Beton/Béton/Concrete*, a trilingual text prepared in German by Joachim Fischer with on-the-spot translations to French by Marie Piontek and English by Margaret Buchanan (H.F. Ullmann, 2008).

This unique 290-page volume consists primarily of photographs with short descriptive texts in those three languages, and despite its unusual nature, it's one of the most thought-provoking collections of words and images I've ever seen. Its value, I think, flows from the nonstop way it suggests creative ways to work with an exceptional material.

As I leafed through the book the first time, I began to see decorative concrete as a new frontier for watershape designers and builders. As I dug in deeper, the book continuously reinforced the impression I'd formed in reviewing the works of Frank Lloyd Wright, John Lautner and Antoni Gaudí that there's *much* more to this material than one would ever gather from the usual "idea books" on pools, spas and fountains.

Honestly, this book blew my mind: In a conventional vein, I saw walls, decks and other familiar structures made using concrete that had been paired with interesting furniture, countertops and a wide array of decorative features. In many cases, the concrete has its natural gray color but is finished with a variety of textures; there are also instances where dyes have been used to create wild arrays of color.

But many of the depicted projects go well beyond the conventional, especially where we're shown instances where ma-



terials have been added to concrete to generate exotic effects; where forming systems of various types have been used to leave indelible imprints; and where combinations of colors, textures and sheens have been used to conjure a universe filled with aesthetic possibilities.

In one project, there's a freestanding concrete wall in which the builder used a robotic drilling machine to bore countless small holes all the way through the material, letting the light shine through in a variety of eye-catching patterns. In another, the concrete mix included five percent optical fiber, resulting in a slab that transmits light directly through the material. In yet another instance, lightweight two-inch "beads" of concrete were strung together with wire to create a uniquely sculpted screen.

There was also a project that simply left me gasping: In this case, the walls of the church were built by stacking wood logs over which concrete was poured. Once the concrete set, the logs were burnt away, leaving their imprint in the most surrealistic surface I've ever seen.

Not all of the treatments are so outlandish, but I found almost all of them to be mind-opening and expressive of the fact that we can use concrete to create a huge variety of striking visual effects. I'll never look at concrete in quite the same way, and I can't wait to put some of these ideas to use in my own designs! **WS**

Mike Farley is a landscape architect with more than 20 years of experience and is currently a designer/project manager for Claffey Pools in Southlake, Texas. A graduate of Genesis 3's Level I Design School, he holds a degree in landscape architecture from Texas Tech University and has worked as a watershaper in both California and Texas.



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