

# DRESSED UP

Landscaping is big business at the nation's big businesses. An attractive landscape conveys a positive image.

by Heide Aungst, associate editor

**S**mart corporate executives keep up their personal image by using dress-for-success techniques. Today, higher-echelon business people are realizing the importance of dressing up their corporate headquarters with landscaping, as well.

Most of the top 10 Fortune 500 companies take pride in their landscapes, whether their headquarters are located in a concrete-entombed city or on sprawling country acreage. Some employ their own staffs, others contract the work out. Either way, each crew has its own tricks to satisfy the company for which it works.

Perhaps the most difficult landscape jobs are New York City-based companies—No. 1 Exxon, No. 3 Mobil, and No. 8 American Telephone & Telegraph.

## Turf-less Exxon

Rockefeller Center's maintenance staff of seven takes care of Exxon's landscape, though bids are taken on some major projects.

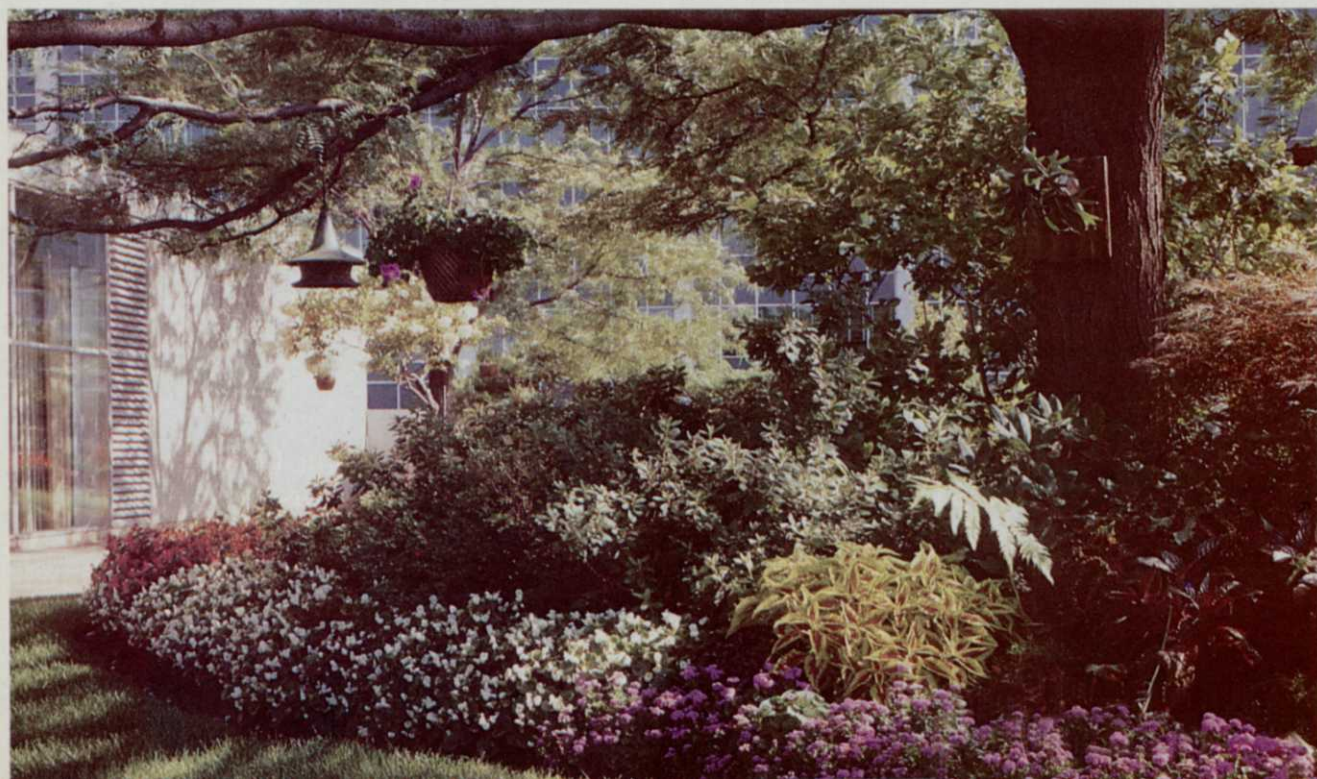
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*Editor's note: IBM (No. 6) refused to talk with WT&T about its landscaping. A company spokesman says IBM won't endorse one contractor. Settgas's company installed the landscaping at IBM's headquarters in Armonk, N.Y., and has nothing nice to say about how IBM treats its contractors. Similarly, Laflamme's dealings with IBM have been negative.*

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**Amoco, Chicago—no turf, but plenty of ground cover.**

**Ford Motor, Dearborn, Mich.—when the budget is cut, so is turf care.**





The entire Center complex consists of 19 buildings on 22 acres, including two roof gardens and the famous ice skating rink. The Exxon building, finished in 1971, is 54 stories, 750 feet tall.

Concerts and ethnic celebrations are held regularly in Exxon's park from April through September.

Turf doesn't grow in rocky Manhattan, so the park consists of paving and shrubs—mostly taxus, hollies, and rhododendrons—which don't live long either.

"We never plant a plant to grow," says Rockefeller Center's manager of gardens David Murbach.

Instead, Murbach's crew will change the flower beds every two weeks. That's a chore in itself. "I miss the long-term caring," Murbach says. "But it's a very exciting environment for horticulture."

Just replacing a shrub takes more teamwork than the Yankees executing a triple play. It often takes 45 minutes to get from one building to the next.

If the shrub on a roof garden is being replaced on a Saturday, security has to be notified first. Memos are sent out to notify everyone else. Furniture movers, elevator operators, and carpet cleaners are all in on the master plan.

Street trees, mostly honey locust, suffer injuries not mentioned in most tree manuals, like car door damage, and damage from hot dog vendors dumping steaming water. So Murbach's crew keeps the trees well fertilized.

Twenty trees are irrigated, but with four levels of plantings most of the Center is watered manually to avoid leakage.

Last summer, when the city banned watering, Murbach devised a scheme to water the trees. He added tanks to a special Cushman to recycle water condensation from the air conditioning system. The water was then held in a reservoir under the building and pumped to the surface for waterings.

### No landscaping?

Not much can be said about the landscaping at Manhattan-based Mobil and AT&T. There isn't any.

But both companies showcase the landscapes at division headquarters.

Mobil's Marketing and Refining headquarters (cover photo) in Fairfax, Va., and AT&T Communication headquarters in Basking Ridge, N.J., have both won awards.

E.I. Du Pont de Nemours (No. 7) in Wilmington, Del., also doesn't offer much in landscaping. Du Pont spokesman George Palmer describes the landscaping as "a patio between two buildings with a few bushes and trees...no grass."

### De-urbanizing Amoco

Standard Oil (No. 10), now referred to as Amoco, also has to fight the battle of beautifying an urban setting.

Langner & Associates handles the account. President Toby Langner says three- to four-man crews have worked the one-square-block job for six years.

The Chicago headquarters, like Exxon's, has no turf. Instead, *eunonymus colorata* (winter creeper) is used as ground cover.

Trees are primarily honey locust, shade master, and majestic varieties. Ornamentals include Washington Hawthorne; shrubs consist of cotoneaster, evergreen, and taxus.

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Langner's crew beautifies Amoco with seasonal displays of flowers and evergreen material. The crew takes care of pruning all plant material, some formally, others more naturally.

### Windy GM

General Motors (No. 2) of Detroit, also tries to make the most of its city setting. Vidosh Brothers Inc. has maintained the area since 1977.

The GM building, situated on one square block, features landscaped planters on the north, east, and west sides of the building. The largest landscaped areas are two pocket parks developed in 1977.

Vidosh's Pat Conroy, who oversees the site, says the largest park is about 120 by 200 feet, the smaller park about 60 by 60. With a 12-foot circular fountain highlighting the bigger park, summer concerts liven urban Detroit.

Conroy says one of the biggest problems of trees is windburn. Evergreens will "fry up," and pinoaks don't fare well either. Other plants are screened with burlap during the winter.

The most wind-tolerant trees are honey locust and ash. Sugar and Norway maples do well, but often suffer from heat scorch in June and July.

Conroy says they try to combat the problem with a regular watering and fertilizer program, but the combination of being near Lake St. Clair and tall buildings (which magnify the wind), makes it tough to avoid damage. "We're almost a zone within a zone," Conroy says.

Usually, a crew of three works on the GM site, but in mid-May Conroy brings in 7 to 10 people for a week of planting 12,000 to 15,000 annuals.

Geraniums are the main focal point. A combination of red begonias and yellow marigolds are used because they withstand the wind. Turf is a Kentucky bluegrass blend.

During the auto recession several years ago, Conroy saw his budget for new projects cut. Likewise, landscaping at the Ford Motor Co. (No. 4) was hurt by the recession.

### 'Up time' at Ford

Dave Wood, Ford's building services director, says the turf budget goes first in a recession. But Wood describes this as an "up time" when the company can implement projects set aside during the recession.

Ford is located on 100 acres, including roof gardens and an arboretum. The staff fluctuates from 12 to 20.

Ford has been using its own grounds staff for 30 years, and Wood has been with them from the beginning.

The only problem with that, Wood says, is training people in a union shop. "We had a problem keeping people," Wood says. Now, Ford sends the crew to school to get training in landscaping.

The crew takes care of spraying and mowing the Kentucky bluegrass blend. Wood believes in using dry fertilizer to maintain "grade A turf." Ford does contract out for spraying and pruning of shade trees.

The design of the site has changed over the years. "As years went on, we re-did the roof gardens," Wood says. "We changed things around after we found out what plants would survive. We learn as we go along."

Azaleas and rhododendrons are the mainstay of the roof gardens. Floral displays from tulips in the spring to mums in the fall brighten the gardens.

The major project now is updating and remodeling the arboretum, including the addition of a labeling system for the more than 95 varieties of native Michigan trees and shrubs. The project, complete with hard walking paths, will be completed in 1987 or 1988.

### GE's full care

General Electric (No. 9) is located on about 100 acres. The company awarded a three-year contract with a two-year option to Laflamme Services last November. The contract calls for full care of the facility including maintenance, snow removal, and installation.

President Edmond Laflamme says



the previous landscape company worked on the site from the time it opened 11 years ago. One reason why Laflamme Services won the bid is that all employees are college-educated, including an arborist and turf experts.

The site has about 25 acres of turf, primarily blends of fine fescue and ryegrass.

Because the fescue requires less water and fertilizer, Laflamme's crew is gradually killing off sections with Roundup and reseeding with fine fescue.

Trees include a variety of maples, oaks, and birch. Hawthornes are used as ornamentals. Shrubbery, primarily junipers, is formally cut. Flower usage is kept at a minimum, although begonias are used for color, mostly because they are low maintenance.

The entire property is irrigated, with a drip system used in the flower and shrub beds. Laflamme prefers to

use reel mowers rather than rotary.

"A rotary machine tears the grass," he says. "A reel slices for a finer look. It's healthier for the lawn to cut rather than tear. It gives a better look and the blade isn't damaged as much."

Texaco (No. 5) in Harrison, N.Y., is located on 117 acres. That consists of 39 acres of fine lawn (bluegrass mix), 19 acres of meadow, and almost five acres of beds. Only 10 acres of the property is irrigated.

NATRL Plants and Lands Management Co., Ltd. installed the site in 1976 and has maintained it ever since.

Three levels of interior courtyards must be hand-weeded because many executive offices face the courtyards.

The most difficult part to maintain is the four acres located over the two story parking garage. The area has only 12 inches of soil, which must be irrigated since it dries out quickly. A

planter holds a Japanese maple and junipers.

Shrubs include taxus hedge, azaleas and rhododendrons. Oak, maples, cherries, pears and dogwoods are among the trees used.

One popular area is the two miles of walking trails which wind through the meadow. Ribbons of shrubs separate the lawn from the meadow area.

Those who don't like hiking can work up a sweat on the company's tennis courts.

General superintendent Richard Settgest uses a crew of 10 to 15, depending on the project. To save on labor, he often combines fertilizers and weed controllers in the same application.

Although each crews' techniques vary depending on the company, most would agree that landscaping is crucial for a strong corporate image. **WT&T**

## Detroit bands together for New Center area

General Motors has taken its interest in landscaping a step beyond other Fortune 500 companies. Besides maintaining its own property, the company has donated millions of dollars toward renovation of the 50-block inner-city area of Detroit surrounding its headquarters.

GM isn't alone in its efforts. Other major Detroit corporations, most notably, Burroughs Corporation, Henry Ford Hospital and Trizec Properties, have all contributed toward the multi-million dollar project.

It's become known as the New Center Area.

The New Center Area is 500 acres (5.2 million sq. ft. is office space). It is home to 3,000 people, while more than 27,000 work there.

### Teamwork

It began selfishly, perhaps. In the early 1970s, each corporation was involved with beautifying its own property. Burroughs completed its new \$30 million complex. At the same time, Henry Ford Hospital began a 10-year \$150 million expansion and development program on the hospital's New Center campus. GM followed suit by renovating its headquarters with \$35 million in improvements.

In 1977, GM constructed its two pocket parks adjacent to the GM building as part of a \$1.25 million program. According to Pat Conroy, project manager for Vidosh Brothers, the materials located in the pocket parks originally came from the GM Technical Center in Warren, Mich.

GM project coordinator Barbara Spreitzer says that after the parks were added, the company began looking for new ways to "halt deterioration" of the area. GM created the Detroit Revitalization Committee to make recommendations for city improvements. The committee decided the best way to revitalize the area was to first renovate the surrounding neighborhoods.

In 1978, GM began working toward that goal. A subsidiary of GM, New Center Community Corporation, and 14-other area businesses funded a multi-million dollar neighborhood revitalization project. Federal

grants from the Health and Urban Development office, including a \$2.6 million Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) and a \$1 million Community Development Block Grant helped fund the project.

To date, 45 single-family homes and 34 condominium units have been renovated and sold. The housing area has been named the New Center Commons.

### Public/private

The New Center Area Council was organized to work with its 150 corporate members in coordinating the overall development plans. The Council's director of special projects Mary Hebert calls the New Center Area "a unique public/private partnership."

The Council, she says, serves as "the maintenance arm of the projects." One of NCAC's responsibility is to contract with Vidosh Brothers for landscaping work in



The New Center area in Detroit, Mich.

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the entire area, which helps maintain consistency.

Vidosh is also a member of the Council. "We became charter members because of doing the work there," Conroy says. "It's nice to support the area you work in."

Vidosh and the NCAC also have a working relationship on hiring teenagers, usually from the inner-city, to help maintain the grounds in the summer. The Council supervises the teens, while Vidosh pays them and provides benefits.

Vidosh Brothers started on the project by installing and maintaining the landscaping at GM, including the pocket parks. They also did the work for the Commons houses.

Conroy says the houses were renovated during the recession, so budgets for plant materials were tight.

Vidosh used material in keeping with the 1920s theme of the renovation, including lilacs and forsythia, two varieties of privet for the hedge, and kousa dogwood for height. Turf was a blend of Kentucky bluegrass, sodded in the front yards and seeded in the back.

Although Vidosh used the same materials at each house, design varied. Many home owners added their own landscape touches after buying the houses.

Following the housing renovation, a partnership of GM and Trizec Properties, Trizec New Center Development Associates, developed the New Center One Building in 1983. The building, an eight-story atrium office and retail complex, cost \$65 million.

Last year GM, along with Crowley's, Trizec Properties and Allied Film & Video, started a \$33 million revitalization program for the heart of the New Center business district.

The improvements continue. Construction is set to begin on a new streetscape project in July, which should be completed by the end of 1987. Funding for the project will come in part from a UDAG grant for \$5.8 million.

Four blocks along West Grand Boulevard and two along Second Avenue will receive landscape design improvements along the sidewalks and median strips.

Johnson, Johnson & Roy Inc. of Ann Arbor has worked on the landscape design development.

Vidosh has spoken informally with the architects to let them know which materials work best in the area. Windburn and sunscorch are the worst enemies of trees. Bids for installation will probably be taken in early summer.

Spreitzer says the business district improvements have become a necessity to balance the revitalized nearby neighborhoods. Also, GM management has gained confidence in its projects with the success of the neighborhoods and is more open to allocating funding.

"We all have a strong commitment," Spreitzer says. "Despite some economic down-turns, our management has maintained a commitment to the area." □

—Heide Aungst

## Bigger may be better for landscape contractors

Large companies may be well known for putting customers through a lot of red tape, but landscape contractors seem to agree that the bigger the company, the easier it is to work for and with.

"My experience is that it's easier to work with large firms than smaller companies or residences," says Toby Langner, whose company services Amoco's Chicago headquarters.

"They set the tone of business in an organized manner, have authority to delegate down the line and understand the value of making decisions promptly."

Large companies also tend to pay their bills on time, according to Langner.

"I think the bigger company knows what it wants," adds Edmond Laflamme, whose Laflamme Services does landscape maintenance at General Electric's corporate headquarters in Fairfield, Conn.

"A smaller company is generally not as concerned or organized.

They don't have one person to concentrate on the grounds. Any change is far slower to come about," he says.

G.E. has one staff member, Elmer Toth, who handles the grounds. Laflamme says Toth has an extensive background in horticulture and the two speak at least once a day.

Communication is the key to a good working relationship between the contractor and company. Langner says that at Amoco both management and employees are environmentally aware and immediately let Langner know if there's something they don't like. In return, if Langner has a suggestion on

future design, management listens to him.

Former Ford President R.J. Miller was so concerned about the environment that he initiated the arboretum on the property.

Like G.E., Texaco has a staff horticulturist who inspects all of NATRL's work. General superintendent Richard Settgast calls Texaco tough to work for because "they expect a top notch job."

"The biggest problem is visibility," Settgast says. "The site is constantly visible to a thousand people at a time."

NATRL also maintains the grounds around three houses on the Texaco property, where visiting executives from throughout the world stay.

High visibility is also a problem for Rockefeller Center, home to Exxon Corp. David Murbach, manager of gardens, says the Center always strives toward excellence. "We even have people who scrape gum off the sidewalks," he says.

To keep up that positive corporate image, most corporations are also willing to finance projects. Ford is one of those companies.

"The corporation is conscious of quality landscaping and willing to back it up with finances," Ford's Dave Wood says. "The grounds are a showcase for the company. We keep them in top condition at all times."

Laflamme says G.E. is more conservative with its budget, especially when it comes to new installations.

"I think most Fortune 500 companies are conservative," he says. "I can't blame them. Why rock the boat?" Still, he describes G.E. as "the best company I've ever worked for."

An outstanding landscape is something both the contractor and the company can be proud of. As Ford's Wood put it, "It's a window to the world." □

—Heide Aungst