

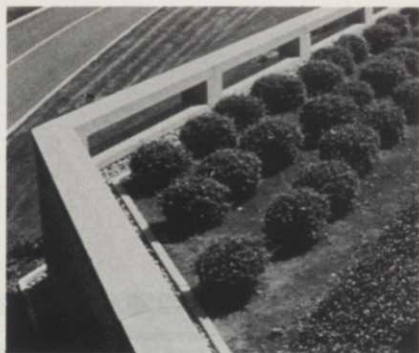


A view of the courtyards at AT&T's Basking Ridge site. There are 1,200 trees on the 126 acres of land.

DIVINE DIVISIONS

More and more major companies are moving their division head quarters to country settings. Here's a look at what AT&T and Mobile Oil have done.

by Heide Aungst, associate editor



Just a few of the 30,000 shrubs planted at AT&T.

Looking out the window at their corporate headquarters in New York City, executives at AT&T see concrete, pollution, and herds of people. But at AT&T Communication headquarters in Basking Ridge, N.J., executives see lush green turf, blue skies, and herds of wild deer.

Even when a company's headquarters is located in the heart of New York City, it doesn't mean the executives forget about landscaping at other divisions...even though they can't enjoy the greenery themselves.

AT&T and Mobil Oil are prime examples. Both have headquarters in the city, but major divisions in picturesque country settings.

In fact, both companies have won landscaping awards for their division headquarters: AT&T for its Basking Ridge facility and Mobil for its marketing and refining headquarters in Fairfax, Va.

AT&T Communications, opened in 1977, sits on 197 sprawling acres—60 acres of lawn (a special seed mix of ryegrass and tall fescue created by the original landscape architect), three miles of paved roads, an 11-acre pond, and 14 acres of terraces.

AT&T employs its own supervisor of landscape and grounds, Ralph Ayres. Ayres is licensed by the EPA in pesticides, turf, and ornamentals, but the actual maintenance work is contracted out. Controle Maintenance was awarded the three-year contract a year ago.

"We write the specifications and they (contractors) abide by it," Ayres says. "But we're always open to suggestions."

Ayres says the concept of the landscape is to make a modern building look like it's part of the environment.

They've done just that.

In 1982 and 1983, AT&T won the American Society of Landscape Architects award for environmental impact. Of course, Ayres stresses proudly, that's just two among "lots" of other awards.

The prize design prompts employees to arrive at work on weekends. Not to sit behind desks, but to bring friends and relatives for a tour of the grounds.

"We get a lot of tours. Local garden clubs walk through, even local landscape and architectural firms bring their new employees through," Ayres says.

30,000 shrubs

Ayres has the grounds down to a science. He can rattle off statistics as fast as an auctioneer can up the price of an antique desk: "...30,000 shrubs, six acres of ground cover, 1,200 trees including 30 around the pond, 40 acres of irrigated land including the 14 acres of terraces, and 2,500 pop-heads in the irrigation system..."

Within the rural setting is something you certainly wouldn't find in a back-to-nature documentary, a heliport.

The heliport implements a unique landscape architectural option: formal shrubbery defining restricted areas.

About four years ago, AT&T installed an "underground" roadway leading from the heliport to the pond.

The road is actually made of perforated cement blocks measuring 250 ft. by 20 ft. Because of the perforation, grass grows through the blocks, making the road invisible.

Designed primarily to allow fire trucks to reach the pond to pump water in case of an accident at the heliport, the road actually appears to be part of the lawn, although the concrete underneath can support the weight of a vehicle without excessive damage to the turf.

As a precautionary measure, Ayres puts styrofoam swans on Bariet Pond to keep flocks of Canadian geese away from the heliport so they don't interfere with a landing. The geese are tagged regularly for studies.

Basking Ridge is a wildlife area located near the Great Swamp. Besides the sometimes-pesky geese, wild deer inhabit the land. Their biggest crime is eating the tulip bulbs in the winter. "We tolerate that," Ayres jokes.

A storybook setting

The wildlife is a beautiful addition to the storybook setting. A security company tours the complex regularly to ward off any poachers.

The 30 trees around the pond are all flowering so that color is reflected in the water. The pond—six feet at its deepest point—is stocked with bluegill and bass, although fishing isn't allowed. Ice skating is also discouraged because of AT&T's liability.

The terrace area offers a unique combination of nature cushioning the harsh blows of industrialization.

The parking garage consists of two underground floors. Eight courtyard terraces rise above the garage. Trees, including one 45-foot honey locust, rise from the garage through the terraces.

The design allows light and ventilation into the garage. Courtyards are heavily landscaped with shrubs to combat car exhaust. Trees on the terraces include cherries, locust, maples, crabapples, and white and black pines.

Steve Lowry of Controle Maintenance says the architectural design of the building is "spectacular in itself. In very few buildings will you see terraces done that well."

No matter where you stand at AT&T Communication, you see greenery.

"It doesn't stop at the front door," Ayres says. Elaborate interiorscapes blend the outside with the offices inside. "We try to provide a healthy environment for the employees," Ayres says. "If they're happy, they'll perform better."



Mobil Oil's marketing and refining headquarters in Fairfax, Va., is located on 126 acres. Just 18 acres boast turf while the remaining acreage is natural woods.



AT&T's award-winning Basking Ridge, N.J., facility features eight terraces rising above underground parking garages. The courtyards feature many trees including cherry, locust, maple, crabapple, and white and black pine.



A worker sprays trees near the entrance of Mobil Oil's Fairfax, Va., facility.

Lowry is a veteran of landscaping for major corporations. His company has worked for Allied Corp., Exxon Research and Engineering Division, and Arco Chemical.

He says there's really no common link between the companies. "They all have their idiosyncrasies," he says. He ranks AT&T "near the top."

"It's kept nice, but they don't do much with flowers," Lowry says. "Otherwise people would want to know why their phone bills were so high when they're spending money on flowers."

Lowry says the impact of the breakup remains to be seen. But he thinks the company might install more flower beds as profits increase.

Controle does maintain a small park (¼ acre) on the site, planted with perennials used for cut-flower displays inside. The company doesn't do the interiorscape. It is responsible for design, installation, maintenance, and snow removal.

Lowry says snow removal is often the most important part. "If the grass isn't mowed, it's not going to stop people from getting to work," Lowry says.

His favorite current project is renovating an old apple orchard into a working orchard. The orchard includes 48 apple trees from a farm which originally stood on the property. The apples will be sold by the AT&T Pioneers, a group of retired employees, to raise funds for charity.

Lowry's crew, sometimes as large as eight, also maintains two softball fields at the headquarters. For those who don't play in the company league, a nature trail winds through the area for lunch time jogs or lei-

surely walks.

"The management is very concerned with its corporate image in town," Ayres says.

A wooded setting

Mobil Oil's marketing and refining headquarters won an Associated Landscape Contractors of America

'We try to provide a healthy environment for the employees. If they're happy, they'll perform better.'

—Ralph Ayres
landscape supervisor
AT&T, Basking Ridge, N.J.

grand award and merit award for commercial contracting in 1982. The site was built six years ago.

The headquarters is located on 126 acres. Of that, only 18 acres is turf. Most of the property is natural woods.

Mobil employs its own staff of one grounds foreman, one assistant foreman and four laborers. Operations manager Bill Phillips oversees the entire staff.

All formal planting is contracted out to Chapel Valley Landscape Co. of Woodbine, Md. Phillips credits them with turning the property into a blue-ribbon site.

Chapel Valley also takes care of pruning and insect and disease control. The Mobil staff maintains the turf

and woods, and polices the entire area.

Grounds foreman Bill Kempf says he uses Kentucky-31 tall fescue, but overseeds with perennial ryegrass and hard fescue.

"K-31 is a good grass, but it's coarse and doesn't do well in the shade," Kempf says. "I prefer hard fescues. They require more care, but are better looking. They have a better color and finer texture."

Kempf uses fescues because they're drought-tolerant. Just five acres of the land is irrigated and the turf browns easily in August.

Phillips says the architect designed it that way because of the limitation of the wells on the property. "Fairfax County has a history of water shortages," Kempf adds.

Kempf's crew uses only walk-behind mowers. "We're not here to do it fast, we're here to do it right," he says.

The woods is primarily a hardwood forest with white, red and black oaks, poplars, evergreens, and standard American holly. A 1¼-mile nature trail winds through the woods around the building. Employees use it for exercise and fresh air at lunch. "Some are so religious that the only time they don't use it is during snow or rain," Kempf says.

The trail is left wild, except for some pruning of the trees for growth and shape. Dead or diseased trees are removed.

Occasionally, the crew will move wildflowers closer to the trail. The first year, an attempt to make wildflower beds around the trail looked unnatural.

The site is designed for spring color only. More than 10,000 azaleas bloom each spring in 34 flower beds next to the building. Also in the beds are three varieties of more than 300 crabapple trees and a cherry tree.

Mobil is adjacent to a hospital, apartment project, and office building. Kempf says he's seen some "friendly competition" develop between the landscapers at the various places. "We've improved the entire neighborhood," he says proudly.

Not only that, but there may be some psychology behind good landscaping. "Management supports us 100 percent," Kempf says. "The employees utilize the place and they're very happy. I think it makes a difference in their work."

More corporate executives also are discovering that a pleasant atmosphere makes a difference in employees' work. And more corporate divisions are moving out of the stifling city and into the open country. **WT&T**