Waterscape designs look like nature's own

New designs, technology and construction methods have elevated the craft of waterscaping to new heights of form and beauty.

Some of the most artful strides in the craft are being made by MACAIRE, a Los Angeles-based waterscaping company, led by president Ken Macaire.

Macaire, a professional landscaper since 1969, has operated his own landscaping company and retail nursery business. He's now brought his talents and experience in landscaping to the fore, and has made waterscaping a specialty.

And it's a specialty that's more in demand by residential developers, hotels and golf course designers.

The difference between Macaire's designs and those of most other rockscapers is that Macaire individually designs dramatic and innovative rockwork and waterscapes that are geologically and regionally accurate for the surrounding environment.

"Quite often," says Macaire, "companies have gotten by with their name [recognition], and by pouring a whole lot of water over a rock.

"One architect I know says people aren't going to judge rockscapes like they used to. People aren't going to accept a whole lot of water and say 'Gee, that's a beautiful water feature.' Companies are going to have to make some tasty designs."

Macaire's designs for residential and commercial projects are seen in locations throughout Southern California, but the company is not restricted by state lines or even great distance. The King of Zaire was recently a client, and work in Japan appears to be on the horizon.

Attention to detail

Realistic waterscape designs by Macaire include:

● individually designed features, not just a redundant collection of castings;

● dramatic, innovative designs that are true to nature;

● leach lines, creating many levels of water flow;

● sculptured rockwork, integrated with natural stone.

● geologically and regionally accurate designs;

● plants designed directly into rockwork.

Wes Mason, project manager for Sumitomo Construction in Los Angeles, hired Macaire to install a boulder pond for the Los Angeles Christian Reform Church, and was impressed with the waterscape's natural look.

"It's as real-looking as anything I've seen,' says Mason, who thinks the Macaire waterscaping even rivals artificial stone work seen at tourist attractions such as Disneyland or Knotts Berry Farm. "They couldn't begin to touch Ken's work," states Mason. "If more people saw how realistic it was, they'd want to use it in lieu of other things. It doesn't look artificial, it looks real."

Macaire waterscaping projects usually require at least 2,000 square feet of rock work. This can include a diving rock, water slide and a retaining wall to recirculate water.

"There's no question about it; the look is beautiful; we're very happy with the way it looks," says Steve Dubow, who hired Macaire to install an outdoor spa waterscape at Dubow's new residence in Rancho Palos Verdes.

"It's very difficult to tell what is real and what is not," Dubow claims. "The Macaire people are very knowledgeable, and are very good crafts people."

Quality waterscape designs by Macaire aren't cheap, given that all designs are made by hand and require two months installation time. "Usually, rock for a boulder pool costs at least as much as the pool itself and possibly 20 percent to 30 percent more," Macaire explains. "Theoretically, "the man installing the pool is there for five days. We're there for two months."

Macaire estimates a typical project will cost from between $30,000 to $60,000.

The Macaire waterscaping process consists of six steps.

First, miniature clay models are made to provide a blueprint for construction. Steel rods are then shaped to form the basic rock outline. A cement coating is then applied, and the boulders are embossed with textured impressions. Wall panels are installed last, and the rockwork is painted to match the surroundings. **LM**

"The look of natural beauty" is what Ken Macaire achieves with custom-designed waterscaping. This project was installed at the Mulholland Estates in Beverly Hills.