

# Landscapers are building more walls

**New stone and concrete products and a growing body of how-to info broaden client interest in retaining walls.**

■ A growing number of landscape companies are building retaining walls.

These include everything from simple treated-wood or railroad-tie planting beds to decorative concrete block walls.

A well-designed, well-constructed retaining wall serves a functional purpose but can, depending upon the skill of the builder and his choice of materials, enhance a landscape too. For instance, a residential client may choose a decorative, stone or block retaining wall instead of having a section of their property regraded to solve a particular site problem. Or to shore up an embankment.

"The design and installation of retaining walls has blossomed dramatically in the last three years," says Greg Ernst. He and his brother, Clint, operate Custom Retaining Walls & Landscaping, Rochester, Minn.

Often, what separates the work of landscape professionals like the Ernsts from general contractors in this kind of



**Stone-faced block wall helps set off a stunning residential landscape.**

work is the installation of appropriate plant material in and around the wall. This combination of attractive wood, block or stone wall *and* greenery can be particularly eye-catching.

Professionals like Ernst feel that one of the best times to suggest a retaining wall is at the initial landscape installation. "The design of a house will almost dictate that you need retaining walls," he says.

It's at these new-construction sites that a landscaper with good stone-laying experience can really show his stuff, says Freely Downing, Jr., Downing Landscape, Springfield, Ohio.

Not only does Downing Landscape design and build customized walls, but it also lays paving stone, installs walks, constructs tree wells, etc. The company uses a variety of building materials, including hand-picked flagstone and busted up sidewalks (rough side showing) to build some of its most distinctive retaining walls.

"Every once in a while we wonder how far away from the actual landscaping we want to get," says Downing. "But stone work is definitely becoming a bigger part of landscaping."

Retaining walls can be simple or elaborate, but increasingly they're also attractive.

That's because a growing number of stone and concrete block companies are coming out with newer, more attractive and easier-to-work-with products.

Typically, these suppliers will also provide suggestions and how-to's (some of it surprisingly detailed) on how to use their building materials.

"The learning curve's already been done by other people," says Ernst.

—Ron Hall



**Block suppliers like Versa-Lok provide solid how-to information.**

## More about retaining walls:

● Building Stone Institute, P.O. Box 5047, White Plains, NY 10602-5047. 914-232-5725.

● Keystone Retaining Wall Systems, 7600 France Ave. S. Ste 110, Edina, Minn. 55435. 612-897-1040. 800-747-8971.

● Rockwood (and EZ Wall) Retaining Walls, Inc., 7200 N. Highway 63, Rochester, Minn. 55906. 800-535-2375.

● StoneWall Landscape Systems, Inc., 3934 N. Ridgely Cr., Milwaukee, Wis. 53211. 414-962-4065.

● Tech-Stone, The Ideal Builders Supply & Fuel Co., 4720 Brookpark Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44134. 216-741-1600.

● Versa-Lok Retaining Wall Systems, P.O. Box 9116, North St. Paul, Minn. 55109. 612-770-3166.