

Making a place for turf in the desert landscape

'Everybody thinks desert landscaping means rock and cactus. In our designs, you're going to see the wildflowers and natural plants that grow here.'



This home landscaping project by Arterra shows how turf complements the dry, dusty look. The expanse of green turf replaced a bland stretch of river rock.

■ Landscape designer Peter Curé has lived his life in Arizona. He loves to be outdoors in the warm Arizona sun. And like many a cowboy who rode the plains before Curé began his life's work, he spends all of his time outside, putting together the pieces of desert landscaping.

President of Arterra, located in Scottsdale, Ariz., Curé's been in the landscape architecture/installation business for 25 years.

Arterra is a full service shop that can handle the A-to-Z of design and installation, with a little help from pool and paving contractors.

"We're not really a design/build firm," explains Curé, "since the initial idea is to sell the design alone. We'll meet with them again with a cost estimate. They pay us for the total design fee and then we give them a proposal to do the whole project. We end up building probably 80 to 85 percent of the projects we design."

Arterra designs both residential and commercial landscapes, but it installs only the home projects.

The Arterra company is four years old. Curé had a larger company during the 80's boom, then downsized when the recession hit. Business has been booming over the past three years, thanks to residential remodeling jobs. Real estate sales have been slow, so owners decide to stay put and add a pool or new landscape.

People may not be buying homes, but they sure are building them. The area's current new home construction market has taken off. Homes there are selling for a quarter to half a million dollars.

Green is good —Curé admires desert landscapes, but not to the exclusion of turf; he thinks the "desert style" is stereotyped.

"Everybody thinks it means rock and cactus,"

says Curé. "That's not what our designs are at all. In our designs, you're going to see all the wildflowers and natural plants that grow here."

Curé has found that growing plant material is easy and worthwhile if you can give it the time and space required. The Arterra crew has become expert at nurturing container-grown plants until they reach the desired size for a specific project, from seedlings all the way up to the 24-gallon-size.

Always in focus — A degreed landscape architect who learned his craft at Arizona State, Curé (pronounced *Cure-ay*) worked his way through design school



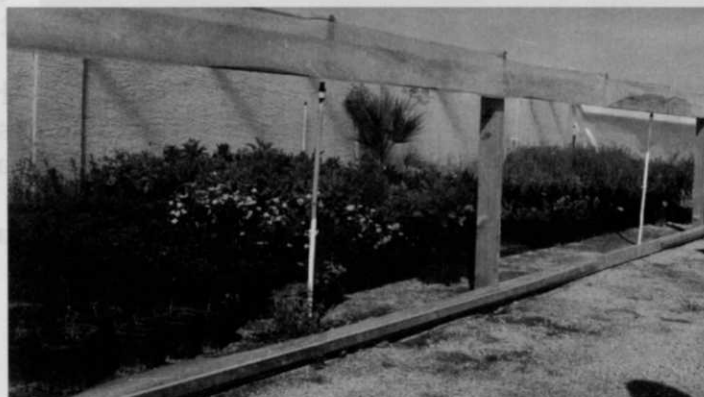
Peter Curé: When planting, stress the symbiotic relationship native plants have developed to survive. Some of them belong together.

by working at a local architectural firm. After graduation, he stayed with that company rather than apprentice himself elsewhere.

Curé most likely would have felt stifled starting off again as an apprentice, given the experience he had up to that time. Today, he has the look of a man who's always thinking, as if he's working on a blueprint in his head.

That focus has paid off. Business is based exclusively on referrals. Awards fill office tabletops, and Arterra projects are often featured in local and state association magazines and several home and garden journals.

—Terry McIver



A section of the Arterra nursery shows the volume of planting that's possible if given enough space.