

# Backyard oasis business blooms

*Scott Hodges and his Naturescapes team in Tucson quench desert dwellers' thirst for—you guessed it—water features.*

By DON DALE

**S**cott Hodges is the president and founder of Naturescapes, Inc. of Tucson, AZ. The company produces artificial features for landscapes, and it's doing a booming business.

The nine employees of Naturescapes manufacture and install natural-looking features, and often have a five-week backlog of work. They produce components that can stand alone or can be combined into features such as ponds and waterfalls. They work mainly on residential sites.

"There's a definite desire

out there to create a natural oasis in a natural setting in a back yard," says Hodges, who focuses on Tucson but has produced features for landscapes in several southwestern states.

Naturescapes generally contracts for an entire residential landscaping job, subcontracting the plants and other aspects to other companies. Hodges and an employee do most of the designs.

"We're licensed to do landscaping, but we're too busy doing hardscaping," says Hodges, who was a masonry contractor before he got into manmade rocks. "What brought me into this was my love of creating spectacular features."

So how does he create his artificial features? It's done with special cements that are poured into hand-made molds.

The first step is to design a feature, often by copying a rock or

boulder found in nature. Then a field mold of the natural rock feature is made.

A final mold, more sturdy



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than the field mold, is made by duplicating the field mold. Then a cast is made of the feature using a special blend of cements. That blend is proprietary and essential to creating a strong, permanent, waterproof feature that can be handled and utilized around pools and patios.

"If it's a sizeable feature we would do that on-site," Hodges says. The walls of the features are an inch thick or less, though the base of a large feature may be thicker to support weight, and special fibers are used as reinforcement. "It's an incredible psi rating."

The components are colored using an acrylic stain and assembled with other components to create larger features. They are bonded together with the same cements they are made with.

Hodges casts Schedule 40 PVC fittings right into the cement so that plumbing can be

utilized in the features. He uses PVC flex line to plumb waterfalls and fountains.

Naturescapes currently has 14 standard features on display at his Tucson office, all attractively shown also in sample books. It has over 140 different component molds that are used to cast "rocks" that will be used in those features.

The company can also go out and copy a favorite rock in nature for a customer, though prices may be high for that kind of individualized project.

Prices on his standard features are reasonable enough to appeal to the ordinary homeowner, ranging from \$1,600 to \$14,000. Most jobs are in the middle range, though the company has done some commercial jobs.

*Writer Don Dale is based in Guadalupe, Calif.*



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