

Thrill rides and landscaping

An amusement park's scenery is a key part of its appeal, as LM discovers at Ohio's Geauga Lake

By JAMIE PETERS

Now 110 years old, northeastern Ohio's Geauga Lake amusement park shows little signs of its age. Two acres of new landscaping enliven the park grounds with a lush, youthful vibrance.

Registered landscape architect Andrew Sparks of Garfield Heights, Ohio, and Tony Monaco, co-owner of Land Design by Monaco Landscaping, Aurora, Ohio, worked together to create an Old West atmosphere in the Coyote Creek area of the park. The centerpiece is the park's newest ride, the \$10 million suspended roller coaster, "Serial Thriller". To compliment the ride's seven loops and twists, the landscape was designed in subtle spirals, which are most visible from the 120-foot peak of the coaster.

Beneath the ride, a seven-foot waterfall spills into a creek, which twists through the terrain, mimicking the coaster's sinuous form. Wisconsin Holey Boulders line the creek, enhancing the area's western-prairie aura. A 6,500 lb. Holey Boulder, with the ride's logo embedded in the stone, is an imposing sight at the ride's entrance.

For Sparks and Monaco, the amusement park was an opportunity to deviate from conventional residential and commercial landscape designs.



Andrew Sparks, left, and Tony Monaco saw the Geauga Lake project as a chance to move beyond conventional landscape design.

"We tried to keep things looking unusual and different," says Monaco.

South Carolina pine needles which blanket the slopes of the area serve an atmospheric purpose and prevent erosion. Weeping elms, mulberry and crab trees lean out on the slopes.

"We tried to get a certain number of plants that were sort of blown over and leaning, like in some of the western parts," says Sparks. "And then the creek running through gave us an opportunity to try a few other things. There are some water lilies, that will eventually spread and get bigger."

Fifteen varieties of grasses — some of which will reach 10-12 feet high — sprout in a tumbling, rolling motion; and won't need mowing, says Sparks.

"When you have an area this big, and you have a maintenance staff like they

have here, I think you can get away with some things that you can't get away with in other types of venues," he says. "I think the value of the drama and the excitement that those kinds of plants add to this type of landscape make it worthwhile. I don't use mulberry ever, but we had an opportunity to let a couple of plants just get huge and hang all over the place. Who cares how they're taken care of? There's an odd catalpa right up at the front entrance, and there's another mulberry down at the creek that I would never use anywhere else, but they will be perfectly fine here."

Near the roller coaster is a butterfly garden where many of the 1,800 grasses, plants and trees were planted. Sparks hopes they will thrive and fill out the 4,000-5,000 square foot garden. Among the unique plant choices, Sparks points out

the weigela shrubs, whose distinctive purple and yellow foliage varieties are appropriate for the park's atmosphere.

"That's what they [amusement parks] cater to--the unique and the unusual," says Sparks. "If it doesn't startle or surprise people, what good is the ride? And with this landscape, I think we had the opportunity to do the same sort of thing."

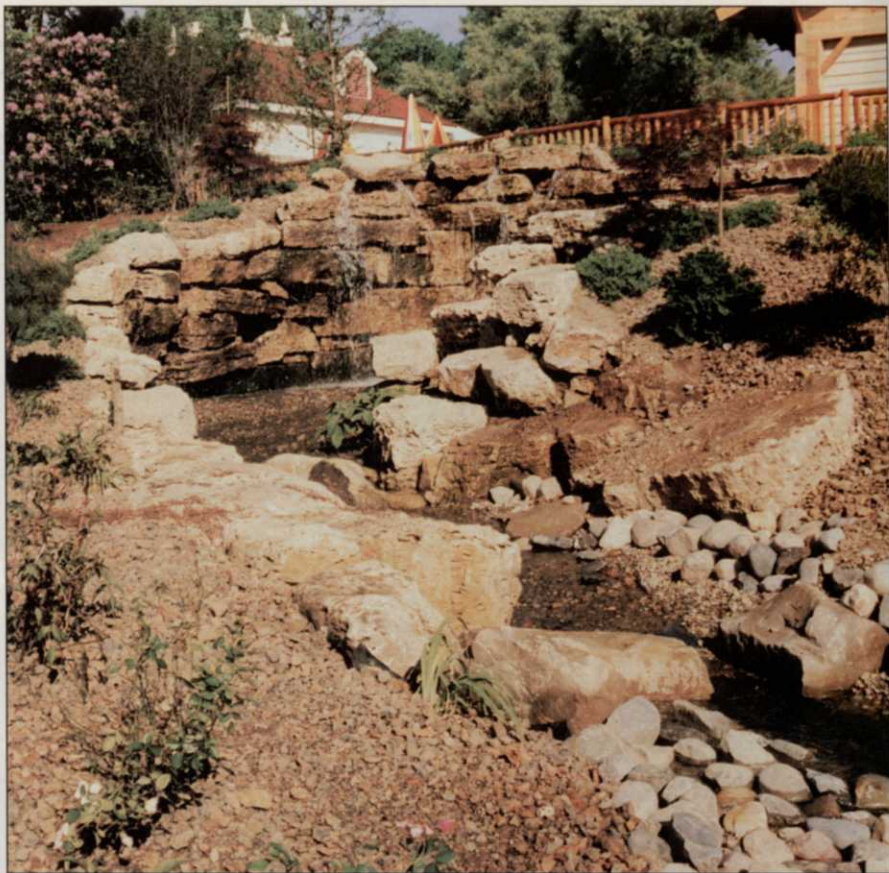
When choosing plants for the area, Sparks had to take the park's seasonal operation into account.

The parks cater to the unique and the unusual. It should startle or surprise the visitors.

"April and May, I don't care how dead it is, there's nobody here," he says. "Starting around the tenth of May, things will be starting to bloom, and then all the way into October and November there will be color here the entire time because their last

big hurrah is Halloween. So they have to go right through October 31 with color and things that are interesting."

Work on the project continued after the park opened in May, says Sparks. "That



'We tried to keep things looking unusual and different,' says Monaco. The creek running through this area was an opportunity to try water lillies and other plants.

was a little bit of a zoo because you're really distracted by the people, the behavior, the screaming and watching the people on

the ride," he says.

Monaco employs 10 full-time crew members, but at one point, he had 22 landscapers working three shifts around the clock to finish the job. It's a challenge that Monaco, who has worked on other areas of Geauga Lake, embraces.

"You have to be a certain type of person to work here because of the commotion," he says, emphatically waving his arms to convey the fast-paced atmosphere. "I'm the type of person that likes commotion, more or less. I thrive on the challenge."

Monaco lets his arms rest at his sides as he contentedly walks away from the Coyote Creek landscape.

"There are all sorts of people that come to parks," he says. "And a lot of them enjoy the landscaping and like to sit down, relax or even take pictures. The setting is always what people look at. It makes them want to come back." □



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