

## Ecology Landscape

Deep environmental roots guide this business owner's approach.

BY JANET AIRD

**G**eorge Kerr's work as a landscape designer and contractor comes from his passion: the environment.

"My roots with the environment go back all my life," says Kerr, owner of Ecology Landscape in Simi Valley, CA.

He's worked in landscaping since he was 7 years old, when he began helping in his father's landscape business. Kerr, a commissioner with the Ventura County Fish and Game Commission for more than 12 years, started Ecology Landscape in 1970.

"I specialize in restoration ecology," Kerr says. "I'm very much concerned about the restoration of our wildlife."

Ecology Landscape has won several awards through contractors' associations, Kerr says, and has been voted "Business of the Year" by the Simi Valley Chamber of Commerce.

Kerr's favorite work is custom residential design and installation. This is where his



**Environmental focus.** George Kerr specializes in restoration ecology.

love of the environment and for sustainability meet.

"I want to have things organized and balanced, with a reason, flow and rhythm," he says. His designs take into consideration the climate of the area and the microclimate of the property, the architecture of the house and even the way the house sits on the lot. He also makes sure the design suits the lifestyle of the homeowners and their families. If a gardener is going to do all the maintenance, Kerr makes sure the landscape needs minimal attention.

Kerr encourages the homeowners to get at least one specimen tree. He designs the plantings in zones, and sets the irrigation system for each zone. He also takes care in preparing the soil. He uses intensive soil amendments and different kinds of fertilizers, both organic and chemical, depending on the time of year.

Even when an installation is finished, Kerr isn't. "I go by my projects all the time," he says.

He does 'tune-ups' for his customers, to maintain the landscaping at the same level as when it was installed. "I always worry about maintenance," Kerr says. "When a job is done right, it's pretty self-sufficient, but every job does

have to be maintained to a certain extent."

His crew takes the same care in their work. "I'm really

proud of them. They take great pride in presenting themselves well, doing a quality job and keeping the work area cleaned up," Kerr says.

Kerr gets all his work through referrals. One advantage of referrals is that he isn't locked into one given area, he says. Another is that he has a competitive edge when people have heard of him.

He's glad to see homeowners gravitating toward sustainable landscaping, although, he says, too many of them hire 'fly-by-night' landscapers who plant the wrong materials in the wrong spot, or invasive species, which sooner or later have to be taken out. "Landscape malpractice is truly out there," he says.

He sees part of his job as educating homeowners.

"I try to help them make the right decisions," he says. "I do my best for the environment and the homeowner." **LM**

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►► **Location:** Simi Valley, CA **Founded:** 1970

**Business mix:** 100% design/build **Full time employees:** 8-10, depending on the time of year