

## PRIMAL *appeal*



Fire and water give outdoor living spaces an edge.

BY CASEY PAYTON

**A**t Cleveland's Great Big Home & Garden Expo, held in February, the model home's fire and water feature was a big hit. The combination of two elements that seem like they couldn't possibly go *together* is intriguing. And even if not incorporated as one feature, they are both elements that homeowners are requesting

for their own outdoor rooms. According to the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), outdoor living areas are still quite desirable, though homeowners are getting a bit more selective about what they plan to include. For many, fire and water features still top the list.

So what's behind the popularity of the fire and water feature as one design? Perhaps we can attribute it to human nature, says Jim Lapides of ASLA. "I really think the appeal is a primal one," he says.



Fire dances on pool water and along its edge at Cleveland's Great Big Home & Garden Expo.

"While we don't rely on water features for drinking or fire pits for warmth and protection, I think there is a deep comfort they provide that's an essential part of human nature.

Combining fire and water acts as a perfect example of 'two plus two equals five.' You have the juxtaposition of fire and water in one place, plus the prehistoric appeal of those two elements."

Barry Morton, president and CEO of Ohio-based Morton's Landscape Development Co., the company responsible for the landscaping around the

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and water elements aren't incorporated as one big feature, individually they're both quite popular for outdoor living areas. In fact, the ASLA's 2011 "Residential Trends Survey" found that fire pits and fireplaces were at the top of the trend list. Around 94% of respondents rated fire pits and fireplaces as "somewhat" or "very popular" for 2011. Decorative water elements such as ornamental pools, splash pools, waterfalls, grottos, water runnels or bubblers got about 85%.

"It's soothing to sit on your deck or patio and hear the sound of water," says Morton. "That's just a relaxing and soothing

sound people like to hear. At this year's home show we did some booth space and took a simple 6-ft. round tub with a 3-ft. granite boulder and drilled a hole through it. We ran a pipe through and let some water bubble up. It just had that nice sound, and people 'oohed and ahhed' and made quite a big deal over it, even though it was very simplistic. You can definitely do a simple water feature that's cost-effective and still get a great response."

Fire also seems to always draw a crowd. Everyone gravitates toward a fire pit or fireplace. So incorporating both will really enhance the outdoor space. "Personally I think the more innovative and creative designs visually combine fire and water, even if those specific features are physically separated," says Lapides. "It creates a powerful effect without necessarily calling too much attention to this very juxtaposed idea of fire and water."

Given their appeal to human nature, fire and water are likely to stay put on homeowners' radar. **LM**

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Great Big Home Show's model home, says they did a fire and water element at last year's home show and recognized then that it was a crowd pleaser. "The fire and water together visually wows people," says Morton. "It may seem complex, but it doesn't have to be. It's just a gas line that bubbles out of the water and can be lit with fire."

Morton says it's certainly something other landscapers might consider offering and it's easier to install than they may realize. "The biggest challenge is making sure you run the gas lines properly, and I definitely recommend using a certified plumber," he advises. "You also want to make sure you have the proper shut-offs. It's definitely something that clients respond to and a popular feature."

And Lapides believes the trend will only continue to grow. "I think we'll see these designs being offered more frequently — especially among high-end clients," he says. "The interest is certainly growing. The question is how many will actually incorporate these designs in the current economic climate?"

The economy has definitely played a role in homeowners' scaling down their

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outdoor living areas. But it seems many are still doing them — just not as elaborately. Instead of having all the bells and whistles, homeowners are picking and choosing what they want. Fortunately, the "wow factor" of combining fire and water can be achieved even with a simplistic design, says Morton. "It doesn't have to be a large feature," he continues. "It can be very simple and small and still get the impressive effect."

### Enhancing the outdoors

With more products on the market that combine fire and water into one feature, such as fire sitting in a fountain, it's definitely becoming easier for landscape designers to offer. But even if the fire