



AFTER

BEFORE



ABOVE Fiberglass architectural columns and synthetic PVC trim material are long-lasting alternatives to wood trim, and the raised panel detail of the below-deck dry storage area repeats the home's architectural detail. Also note the curved decking border boards, which were constructed by milling a 2x10 board down to 1-inch thickness and then scribing the curve. This before shot shows the original staircases and drab patio area.

Project Principal

■ McHale Landscape Design,
Upper Marlboro, MD

ABOVE The new staircase features a steel framework clad with IPE treads, PVC synthetic risers, solid 6x6 cedar posts and a mahogany rail cap. The cap was built on site by scribing the metal rail shape onto a full 2x8 piece of IPE.

This project was a Grand Award winner in PLANET's Environmental Improvement Awards program. For more information on this program, or other services of the Professional Landcare Network, please call 800/395-2522 or visit www.landcarenetwork.org.

State Line project

Passion for customer satisfaction delivers a renovation featuring a year-round outside swimming pool

BY SUE BROKAW GUARD

Situated on the far eastern edge of Kansas, smack dab next to the Missouri border, lies the town of Olathe (pronounced O-lay-thuh). It's the Shawnee word for "beautiful." Included among the 100,000 residents is Jason Cupp, CEO of Highland Outdoor Landscape Designers, which caters to upscale residences and commercial properties.

Because of the city's locale, Cupp named one of his company's most recent ventures the State Line Project. It's a high-end ranch-style home of about 5,000 sq. ft. surrounded by about an acre of landscaping that required enhancements or renovations. A Kansas City, MO, firm, D. Andersen Consulting, provided the project's engineering and consulting.

Built on trust

Dan Andersen and Jason Cupp have worked together for three years on other projects, as well. Their thoughts and

philosophies dovetail so well that you would think that one can read the mind of the other. There is pride but no ego in their business relationship.

"We think alike and we both keep an open mind for change or suggestions," says Andersen. "We believe craftsmanship, creativity, trust and client importance is woven into every project. All of these qualities result in achieving our goals."

Cupp has been passionately devoted to landscape design/build since 1986. It's a commitment that fuels the efforts of Highland's employees, as well.

With the State Line project, Cupp and Andersen worked with a client who travels a great deal. He requested that his outdoor pool be designed so that he could use it year 'round. Heated to 89 F. for that purpose, the client enjoys the heated pool even when the winter temperatures fall below freezing, which happens, on average, about 100 days a year in Kansas City.

"It was a big project," Cupp says of the pool renovation. "We installed a



Winter dip in the pool? A Kansas City homeowner enjoys winter swims thanks to Highland Outdoor Landscape Designers.

cover that slides out of sight when the pool is not in use. If the client is not home, the cover is put in place and the pool temperature is turned down. When Andersen says the client is returning home, we uncover the pool and turn up the temperature, all by computer. All is ready when the client gets home."

No cold feet here

When Highland Outdoor says it delivers customer service, it's not just talking, it's doing.

"On one occasion it snowed 12 inches overnight. Any time the client is home, the

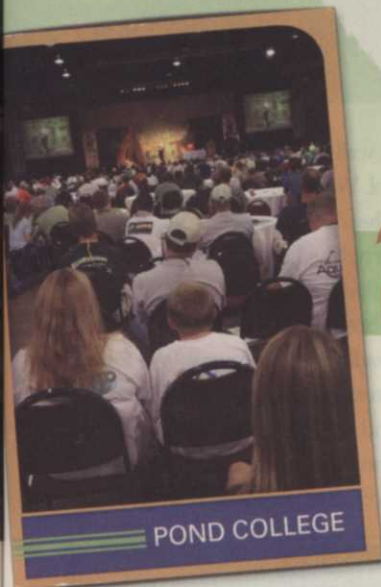
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crew arrives about 5 a.m. to remove the snow so that he can swim in the morning without walking through snow," says Cupp. "And the snow is removed by hand so there isn't a lot of noise that would wake up the client." When the client is out-of-town, a machine removes the snow.

Meeting customer expectations in spite of unforeseen challenges is the hallmark of a quality company, and the State Line project had challenges.

Andersen says: "We wanted to enhance the pool perimeter in an onyx color so we found and ordered about 18 tons of Mexican pebbles. Our concrete supplier stored the stone at his yard. Then it rained. A jelly-like substance oozed from the stone and we were astonished. Everyone — me, Jason Cupp, and the

Cupp's company enhanced some of the features already present, on the property, such as the limestone walls and the red brick pathway.

supplier. We sent a few of the stones to a lab for processing and it was discovered the goo was some type of algae. We had to replace the stone with another type of shiny black pebbles."

Cupp emphasized that the landscaping, brickwork and other requirements were not all new installations.

"We enhanced and reclaimed what was already there to keep the house as original as possible," Cupp says. "A rectangular

limestone wall with arched insets is next to the pool. We cleaned it up and added two lions heads that were elsewhere on the property. The lions heads became fountains that flowed into the pool."

Vines, both dried and healthy, covered a similar wall on the property. "We found the main root system was strong and healthy and we pruned the foliage back, keeping the vines along the top of the wall as decorative greenery. Regular main-



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tenance will keep the growth under control." Similarly, Highland Outdoor Landscape Designers and upgraded the landscape's irrigation system.

Because the client likes to entertain guests poolside, the company installed new lighting at the pool area and also in the landscape at the rear of the house, which also features a red, brick pathway and a patio.

"On the morning of the big celebration party, we were checking the lighting one more time and found one of the transformers had blown," recalls Andersen. "Jason had one of his crew go to his own home and get a transformer from his yard. The party went off without a hitch,"

Cupp's Highland Outdoor specializes in upscale residential design/build projects, maintenance of any landscaping and snow removal, as well as providing similar services on premier commercial properties. It also incorporates property management and concierge services into its residential/commercial packages.

More challenges ahead

However, Cupp's real passion is envisioning the finished project, such as the State Line project.

He and Andersen are working on another challenging residential property where the owner has requested an indoor swimming pool. It's not your "cookie cutter" indoor pool with a greenhouse-type of roof.

"It's going to be in the middle of the house, accessible from the living room,

the kitchen and the master bedroom," explains Cupp.

As with every other project the Andersen/Cupp collaboration has been involved with, this one sounds like it's going to pose some fascinating challenges.

"As long we don't lose sight of our vision and we don't let our passion start flagging — and we won't — we'll be fine," says Cupp confidently. **LMI**

— *The author lives in Cleveland. Contact her at neebrokaw@yahoo.com.*

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Collaborative effort

Tossing out the plans and designing a residential water feature as you go can spell disaster — or something incredible

BY DON DALE

When you put a creative contractor together with an equally adventurous client, unexpected things can happen. Sometimes you have to trust your ingenuity, tap into your client's enthusiasm and let 'er rip, says contractor Mike Bulone.

Maybe this is one of those "don't try

this at home," projects, but Bulone, owner of Bulone Brothers Landscaping, Aurora, OH, made it happen. He "teamed" with a client to create what an incredible backyard waterscape project. In other words, Bulone and the client agreed to pretty much scrap the original blueprints and the original contract — and "wing it" in the midst of a very complex job.

Not a good idea? Recipe for disaster?

From time to time, given the right circumstances, why not throw caution to the wind and test yourself, asks Bulone? He started his design/build company in 1992, and since he's experienced in creating water features and loves the ingenuity they require, he was confident his company and the client could pull it off

— he just didn't know how.

The customers found Bulone through a local pond and garden tour after admiring the water feature he saw at the contractor's house. That led to some work, such as renovating an existing pond in the client's front yard. But the big job was to be a water feature in the backyard.

Leaving the known behind

That job ultimately encompassed the entire backyard and took up about five months of Bulone's time over a period of almost a year. Taking the client's original ideas, Bulone came up with some of his own. This led to a collaborative effort that was so creative that it necessitated leaving the original design and working from day to day on elements that client and contractor collaborated on.

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◀ The bridge, concrete with a stone veneer, is based on a bridge in a Thomas Kincade print.



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"There was a lot of creativity there. It was above and beyond the normal," Bulone says. He loved the process, and the client got into the spirit of the project.

By the end of the job, the back yard

▼ **Grade changes challenged Bulone's crew in building the patio and water features.**



held a stream, a bridge, an extensive patio, a lot of new vegetation and a waterfall as well as several small water grade changes ending in a pondless reservoir. It was a water feature that grew, in phases, into an entire landscape.

The job began in the fall of 2005 with the grading of the odd, triangular backyard. The first part of the work was a walkway and multi-tiered patio. Next came a 6-ft.-long footbridge, which Bulone conceived as being stone. It ended up being built in three phases in concrete, and then his crew put a stone veneer on it. The bridge was based on the client's concept of a Thomas Kinkade painting that had a bridge in it.

"Then we started carving out our stream bed," Bulone says. It ran under the bridge, dropping three levels, and ended



in a huge hole filled with gravel. That was the pondless water holding tank, the size calculated after figuring grade requirements and the fact that the recirculating system would require 17,000 gallons of water per hour.

Using mostly Aquascapes circulation equipment, the water system began with a hidden biofalls box from which water overflowed into the head of the stream among some evergreen trees. At the bottom, water was recirculated through a pump and filtration in a vault hidden in the holding pond. Three pumps were used in all. There is a 4-ft.-tall waterfall by the bridge that streams into the holding tank and is viewable from the house.

Another prominent aspect was the stones and boulders. Bulone was almost fanatical in selecting colored "character stones". He and his crew fitted about 50 tons of stone into the landscape, including many moss stones and one 700-lb. boulder that he drilled through with a diamond bit so that stream water could run through it. Reworked drainage and a planting of Canadian hemlock trees for backyard privacy were also necessary.

Excellence recognized

The yard turned out to be beautiful, and it won the 2006 Water Features & Lighting Award (Category II, over \$25,000) from the Ohio Landscape Association. But a beautiful part of the story is how well this turned out with both client and builder tossing out ideas over the course



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◀ Bulone took care in selecting the boulders and "character stones" that would grace the flowing stream and 4-ft.-tall waterfall. Everything is viewable from the client's house

design, they also agreed to set aside the original estimate and contract. Because the project grew and grew, the company basically ended up working on a per-day rate that was acceptable to both parties.

"The homeowner's very happy," Bu-

lone adds. "That's what it all comes down to." **LM**

— The author is a freelance writer living in Altadena, CA, has been covering the Green Industry for more than a decade. Contact him at info@landscapemanagement.net.

of the project. Bulone is still amazed by the customers' active participation.

"We wanted to make sure we were on the same page," he points out, so good communication was important. Fortunately, the homeowner was around a lot, and Bulone was on the job most of the time himself. "A lot of it, we winged it," he recalls, and made corrections to the corrections as they went along.

For anyone who knows Bulone, that doesn't come as a surprise. He's a creative contractor who loves to tweak and redesign and reassemble as he progresses. When you're working in concrete and stone, that can be a hassle, but he's just the type of guy who will tear out work if the aesthetics aren't there for him. His crew of seven to 10 workers (it varies with the season) has learned to be patient with him. "First of all, they know I'm crazy," jokes Bulone.

As for this particular client, he calls him a "needle-in-a-haystack kind of customer." He says that their relationship was so successful that early in the game the two of them not only began changing the

▼ The 6-ft.-long concrete bridge was built in phases and is a focal point of the landscape.



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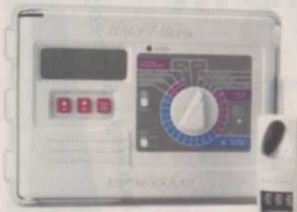
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