

temperature, thus cutting energy costs. That's important to non-profits like Potter.

Water management

The Humane Society in Silicon Valley, CA, is opening its new, green facility this spring. Landscaping features include bioswales to capture and cleanse rainwater, according to Laura Fulda, the group's vice president for marketing and communications.

"Bioswales will reduce the energy needed to clean water supplies," says Fulda. Landscapers added native plants such as vine maple, meadow onion and yerba mansa that grow well in California's low rain climate.

Jaci Nichols, development director for Ann Arbor, MI's Humane Society of Huron Valley, says landscaping plays a major role in their green shelter currently under construction. The shelter will collaborate with the University of Michigan's Matthaei Botanical Garden adjacent to the site to protect and restore native landscape and habitat.

"Currently, the site has no storm water management system," says Nichols. That's a concern, she adds, because Michigan gets ample rainfall and snow. "The new site meets all regulatory require-

WHAT IS LEED?

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) is a rating from the US Green Building Council. It uses a point-based system that rewards buildings for water efficiency, energy, atmosphere and other green innovations. LEED Version 3 is being rolled out by the USGBC on April 27. Visit www.usgbc.org for more information.

ments, and will implement best management practices to lessen potential damage to the creek, wetland and ponds nearby."

Nichols says the shelter is working with the Washtenaw County Drain Commissioner to apply infiltration standards in the design of the retention basins. Other eco-friendly landscaping designs include vegetated bioswales, rain gardens and use of native plants to manage soil erosion and storm water runoff.

Going green

Although no national sources compile data on green animal shelters, zoos or animal sanctuaries, architects like Lucinda Schlaffer of ARQ in San

Francisco say they often receive calls from shelter managers asking about green design. Going green, Schlaffer says, requires a commitment not only of time and money, but dedication to eco-friendly principles.

Switchboards are busy at architecture firms like ARQ and others that design animal shelters. Experts agree going green is the best way to reverse climate change, stop overflowing landfills and combat pollution. These days, shelters will almost always include eco-friendly landscaping in their plans from the start, Schlaffer says.

Heller agrees: "Constructing a building with a social conscience fits into our mission of making a difference and enriching lives for both people and animals." *L.M.*

WHITE is a Phoenix-based freelance writer who specializes in animal shelter topics. Contact her at whitedebraj@yahoo.com.

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INFOTECH

TYLER WHITAKER

The author is a freelance technologist. Contact him at 801/592-2810 or visit www.tylerwhitaker.com.

Be productive with online services

Recessions, depressions and the economy are clearly the big issues being discussed around the water cooler. With all the talk about bailouts and stimulus plans, I figure the only workable solution for the small business is to increase productivity and more fully respond to ever-changing customer needs. This month, I've collected a couple of online services to help lighten your workload.

Microsoft Mesh | www.mesh.com

Good business ideas come in the strangest places, and having the time to work on them all is always a challenge. When I got my first laptop, I thought I had this problem solved. Then I realized the critical files I needed were on my desktop computer at work. Does this sound familiar?

You need Microsoft Mesh. It's a simple utility that syncs your critical business files among your home, desktop and laptop computers. It even stores them in a secure location on the Internet for easy access when you are away from the computers you normally use. With Mesh, you don't need to worry about the physical location of your files. It allows you to work wherever you are.

As an added bonus, Mesh lets you take remote

control of your machines. Need to run a special program that is only available on your work machine? No problem, just connect remotely and work as easily as if you were in the office. And best of all, it's free for the first 5GB.

UserVoice | www.uservoice.com

Even the newest MBA graduate will tell you that the secret to a successful business lies in your understanding of the needs of your customers. Gaining that valuable insight has never been easier: UserVoice delivers a new online experience for your customers to provide instant feedback, suggest improvements to your business, and vote on new business ideas that would help them the most.

There are several benefits from this service that I find compelling:

- ▶ **The price tag just can't be beat.** They have a free offering to get started.
- ▶ **There is no software to install.** To get started, all you need to do is provide a feedback link on your Web site. They do the rest.
- ▶ **It's easy to use.** Your customers will love having the ability to be heard, and will become more invested in your success, having made suggestions.
- ▶ **Knowing what your customers need allows you to focus on exactly what they value.** That's a huge productivity booster.

There's one caveat to this panacea of customer input: You need to be engaged in the process. Your customers will expect a two-way dialogue. For best results, be an active participant. Respond with genuine concern and authenticity, instead of the traditional corporate voice. Customers want to be heard. Be there to listen.

Both of these services put forward real, tangible benefits that can be implemented in less than an hour. And with free plans available, the return on investment is immediate. In these uncertain economic times, getting closer to your customers and being able to implement their ideas faster are the keys to success.

The only **workable solution for the small business** is to increase productivity and more fully respond to ever-changing **customer needs**.



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ENGLISH SENSIBILITIES

BY DANIEL G. JACOBS, MANAGING EDITOR

With miniature donkeys watching their every move, the crew of Hoffman Landscapes gave cohesion to a colorful property.

IT WAS AN odd jumble of styles. The property included a sprawling old farmhouse, a tobacco barn, an old rodeo arena — complete with bleachers and lights — and several outbuildings dotting five acres. Remodeling had given the place a Greek revival influence, but the current owner wanted the landscaping to match her native English sensibility.

The task of pulling that together fell to Brian Cossari, ASLA, a landscape architect with Hoffman Landscapes, Wilton, CT.

The setting

“They had the idea of creating this elegant atmosphere in a farm environment,” Cossari says. “It was to match the rustic character of the property, but still bring some of the English influence to it — without using (English) boxwood. Imagine that, an English garden without boxwood. She hated the smell of it.”

The company did use arborvitae and inkberry shrubs, along with more than 20 other species of plants

and trees (see list, page 96). Cossari had crews install a number of statues and urns, which workers change out seasonally. The arborvitae were used to provide a privacy screen between the pool and one of the nearby buildings. Colorful perennials and ornamental grasses were used to hide a boulder retaining wall and reflect the client’s love for English gardens.

The live materials were pretty standard, Cossari says. With such a unique setting, there was no need to go for an exotic look.

“The evening light there is just amazing as it reflects off those barns,” he says. “The (tobacco) barn was a focal point, for sure. The idea is that it would be an entertaining area for large parties, which these people would often do. Weekenders would stay at

the house, and they'd party for days on end, literally. That was the center point of the swimming pool. You could step down into this barn for a casual, yet elegant party."

The barn posed a challenge for the designer. Down an often icy, steep slope

from the home during Connecticut winters, Cossari had to figure out how to create access from the home without completely leveling the ground. Adding to the challenge: At the time the design was done, the family was caring for a number of miniature donkeys.

"Every day, a couple times a day, the homeowner had to access the barn to tend to the miniature donkeys that were in there," Cossari says. "The way the site was graded — all winter long, it was a sheet of ice. The solution needed to grant the client access without necessarily paving a road between the two buildings."

Cossari designed a serpentine path for the client to take, integrating it into the symmetry of the design. He then addressed drainage with some surface drains and proper pitch.

A swimming solution

The focal point of the project was a pool that Hoffman Landscapes decided to place beside the barn.

"We wanted it to feel like it was pretty well anchored," Cossari says. "We picked a median point of the hillside to put the swimming pool, and then worked around that."

Changing the grade, though, created a new challenge.

"We needed to come up with a way to level the area to accommodate the swimming pool, but still keep access to the barn," Cossari says. "There was a hay door up on the second story of the barn, and they still needed to get the tractor to it."

Hoffman crews had to install retaining walls both on the uphill and downhill sides.

"One was more rustic and camouflaged with plant material," Cossari

Opposite. A pergola over the dining table at one end of the pool will eventually become a cool shady spot as Japanese wisteria vines create a green roof.

Top. The large tobacco barn provided the perfect backdrop for a new pool. Eventually, the family plans to install slide doors in the barn, in which it will host parties.

Bottom. Dry stacked and battered stone walls fit naturally with the farm in the background.





AWARD WINNER



Clockwise from top left. Between the pool and the guest cottage, the tall arborvitae hedge provides a privacy screen while the colorful perennials and ornamental grasses gently hide the boulder retaining wall and reflect the client's love for English gardens.

Garden nooks bursting with color and texture provide cut flowers for the lady of the house.

Stone walls and granite slab steps were set in place prior to the excavation for the pool.

THE PLANTINGS

Quantity	Common Name	Size
8	American Boxwood	30 in. - 36 in. ht.
30	American Boxwood	18 in. - 24 in. ht.
10	Tickseed	1 gal.
9	Purple Cone Flower	1 gal.
4	Limelight Hydrangea	18 in. - 24 in. ht.
6	Inkberry	24 in - 30 in.
12	Big Blue Liriope	1 gal.
14	Catmint	1 gal.
6	Dwarf Fountain Grass	2 gal.
6	Russian Sage	2 gal.
6	Moss Phlox	1 gal.
6	Japanese Andromeda	30 in. - 36 in. ht.
6	Fairy Rose	2 gal.
12	Rudbeckia Var.	1 gal.
6	Stonecrop Var.	1 gal.
11	Emerald Arborvitae	7 ft. - 8 ft. ht.
25	Creeping Thyme	3.5 qt.
6	Koreanspice Viburnum	36 in. - 42 in. ht.
2	Japanese Wisteria	2 in diameter
2	Butterfly Bush	5 gal.
3	Flowering Crabapple	3 in diameter
6	Rudbeckia Var.	1 gal.
1	Humus soil	1 cu. yd.

says. "The other one was used to stand out, keeping in mind future phases of the property."

The crews also installed several 12-ft.-wide granite slabs leading down to the pool. The granite and fieldstone used for the retaining walls are native to the region.

Cossari says he was challenged by some of the existing sites on the property. There was an old rodeo arena the family didn't necessarily want to get rid of, but they didn't want to stare at it, either.

"We put in the pergola structure, then we enclosed the dining terrace underneath it with a hedge," Cossari says. "Initially, it was intended to be a clipped beech hedge, but at the time of the project, we couldn't find the right beech trees to make it happen. We went with privet."

In all, the project cost about \$200,000, Cossari says. The work earned the company a Grand designation from PLANET's 2008 Environmental Improvement Awards. LM

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PROJECT PORTFOLIO

A SCRAPBOOK OF DESIGN/BUILD OVERHAULS

Upcycled elegance

THE MISSION

A quarter-acre property transforms into an English garden oasis — all while “upcycling,” or incorporating existing elements in new ways and spaces.

Barry Block, owner and principal designer of East Moriches, NY-based Barry Block Landscape Design & Contracting, was brought in to enhance and expand upon the builder’s “landscape package” at a newly constructed post-modern home in nearby Amagansett. In fact, construction was still being completed as he began his work.

The classic Hamptons-style home was a weekend retreat for the New York City-based clients. With a budget less than \$50,000, Block was ready to design around their must-haves.

“Our clients wanted to screen out unwanted views from all four sides of the property, create an outside room that would reflect back into the living spaces within the home, and provide year-round interest, with the main focus on summer seasonal color — which is when the house would be used the most,” he explains. “In addition, our clients desired ornamental grasses, hydrangeas and boxwoods, as well as an English garden style theme.”

To soften the home’s exterior and tie in all the fixed features on the site — driveway, pool house and retaining walls — Block used a plant palette dominated by lavender, pink, blue and white. Railroad tie retaining walls were constructed along the entire back and sides of the property to maintain the grade.

While the original landscape package had to be completely redone and/or transplanted, Block notes that all the material was salvaged and put to good use.

“In the end,” he concludes, “the final results far exceeded everyone’s expectations.”





THE WORK

1 | ROOMS WITH A VIEW. A simple, yet refined style was crucial for the overall design because both the dining room and living room have a picturesque view of the patio, pool and landscape beyond. Four pairs of large French doors expand the entire length of the back, creating a “wall” of windows that open directly onto the back porch and extend the living space outdoors.

2 | THE FRONT LINES. To create a sense of entry, Block placed 2x2-ft. thermal bluestone pavers set with lawn joints in a linear grid, helping to soften the front walk and make the lawn feel more expansive.

3 | IN THE BEGINNING. “Working with the clients, the builder and their budgets early on helped to create the groundwork for its completion,” notes Block.

4 | HYDRANGEA ALLEY. “Tardiva Standards” and “Annabelle” line the south side of the property, situated under neighboring shady white pine trees.

5 | THE BACK LINES, TOO. The pavers are repeated in the rear yard to enhance the sense of openness. “Plus, the grid pattern offers better circulation as one flows through the space, while keeping it from feeling overly designed,” Block adds.

6 | ATTENTION TO DETAIL. Mimicking the house’s architecture, the pool house hides the pool equipment and acts as both a storage shed and a changing room. To highlight its craftsmanship and details, Block installed climbing clematis vines, low perennial plantings and ornamental grasses around the foundation.

With degrees in landscape architecture and ornamental horticulture from Syracuse University, Barry Block has more than 20 years of experience and expertise. This particular property garnered him a 2008 Gold Award in the Long Island Landscape and Nursery Association’s Environmental Enhancement Award program. For more information, visit www.barryblock.com.

THE JOY(STICK) OF SKID LOADERS

Joystick controls are just one of the many new available technologies in today's skid steer loaders.

BY CURT HARLER

IF THERE IS one machine that everyone likes to operate, it is the skid steer loader. It's just fun to zip around, carrying loads, doing the work of four people at a time. Some technology improvements are making skid steers even more fun — and practical — for landscapers.

Oh, joy

Joystick controls are increasingly popular on all kinds of loaders. The new control system on the Vermeer line of mini skid steers, for example, includes two ergonomically designed joysticks that control transport and boom bucket motion. The ground drive is controlled by a single joystick, giving the operator a smooth range of motion while minimizing back pressure from the hydrostatic system. The units have no need for a steering wheel or dual levers to control movement.

John Deere, Bobcat and Caterpillar all are moving to electrohydraulic joystick controls.

"Electrohydraulics, as opposed to pilot or mechanical joysticks, allow us to expand the use of the joystick via programming with circuit boards or wiring harnesses," explains Gregg Zupancic, product marketing manager for John Deere skid steers and track loaders in Moline, IL.

The electrohydraulic joystick soon will be able to automate many of the repetitive functions on a loader. For example, the machine will have a memory that will return a fork to a certain height for moving pallets. It will also allow the bucket and boom to be pro-

continued on page 102



Gehl's newest vertical-lift model, the V270, hit the market in February.