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# PROJECT PORTFOLIO

A SCRAPBOOK OF DESIGN/BUILD OVERHAULS

*Mediterranean dining*

## THE MISSION

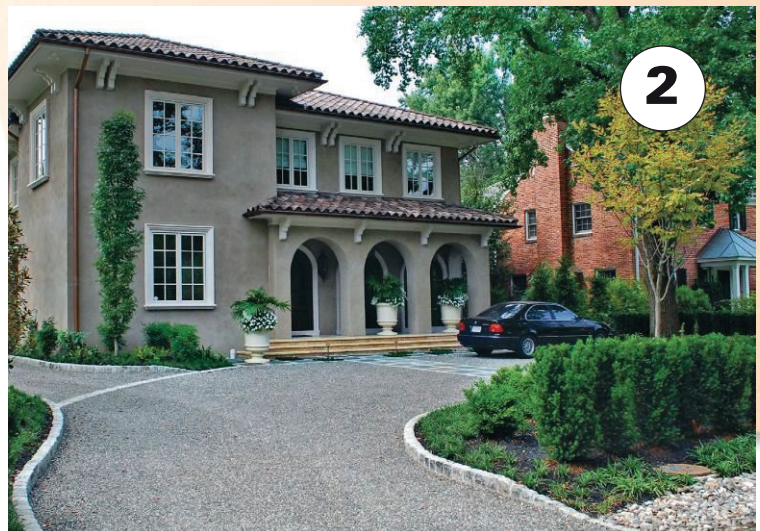
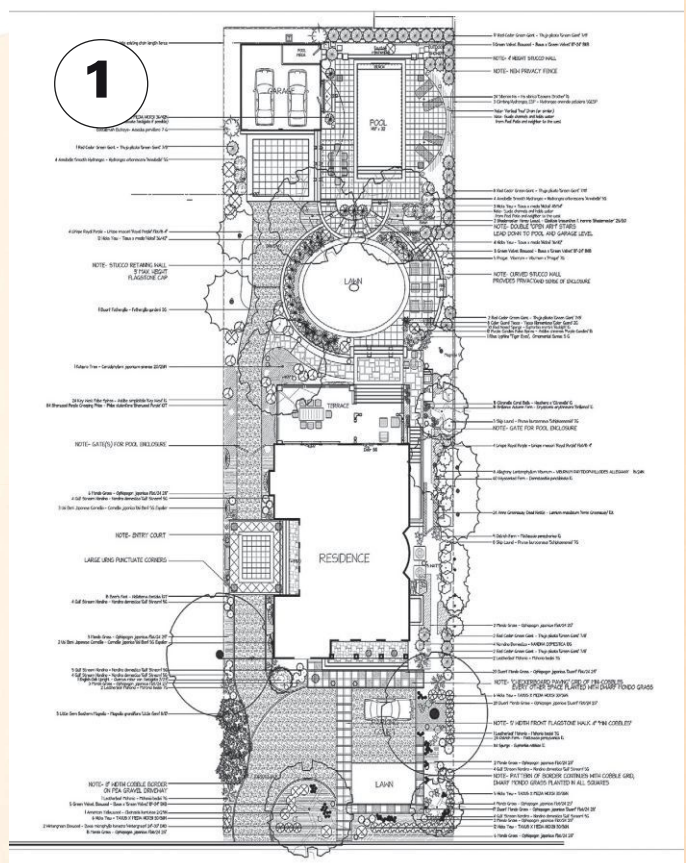
A garden and outdoor dining spot evoke Old World design and contemporary flair for this Virginia home.

Olney, Md.-based Botanical Decorators was faced with quite a “must-have” list from its client—including an upper-level terrace, a covered patio space, a grilling station, a fireplace, a level lawn area, a driveway to the garage with parking for two cars, a pool and lush, colorful plantings. Winter weather, a steeply sloping backyard, and lots of regulations with which to contend were just a few of the obstacles that lay ahead, but Morgan Washburn, Botanical Decorators’ landscape designer for the project, knew his team was up to the challenge.

First, it had to tackle the backyard slope. “To properly develop this site, we custom-designed an 1,800-gallon rainwater harvesting system to capture and reuse more than 85 percent of the stormwater runoff,” he explains. “This allowed us to maximize our allowable impervious surface area, and accomplish all of the client’s requests in an environmentally responsible manner.

“For the driveway, we installed a gravel paver system that absorbs runoff and will not compact,” he continues. “The captured water is then used to irrigate the landscape.”

Having the driveway enter from the left side allowed the team to create an inviting interior courtyard. “While the paving pattern of mini cobbles and flagstone produces a stepping-stone look, the clever play of the flagstone and mondo grass inlays creates a separation between the front porch and the courtyard,” notes Washburn. “Our plantings were kept simple, with plays of textural greens and a columnar sweetgum to lend a Mediterranean vertical line.”





PHOTOS: ROGER FOLEY (2 & 4);  
BOTANICAL DECORATORS

## THE WORK

### 1 | The master plan.

**2 | The right direction.** The curve in the driveway downplays the service entrance to the left. Cobblestone inlay gently guides you to the front of the house. The columnar sweetgum lends a Mediterranean accent.

**3 | No reservations.** The upper-level travertine terrace with custom-designed railings is an ideal place to dine al fresco, offering a view of the gardens and pool.

**4 | Blooms where they're planted.** The custom cast planters overflowing with plants can be viewed from the street and the living room. A random paving pattern with mondo grass inlays buffers the parking area.

**5 | Fireside chats.** Beyond the pool, a gently curved wall features a contemporary fire feature—ideal for after-dinner gatherings.

**6 | Nature's wall.** Green Giant arborvitae screens the neighboring view. It's also a lovely backdrop to the cool-colored poolside plantings.

*For more than 30 years, Botanical Decorators, Olney, Md., has provided design-build-maintenance services for residential projects in Washington D.C., Maryland and Virginia. Botanical Decorators designs, builds, installs and maintains outdoor spaces that "let homeowners and their families enjoy them to the fullest." For more information, visit BotDec.com. Plus, see the Web Extras section of LandscapeManagement.net for more photos of this installation.*



## Stormwater woes

Twin Oaks Landscape differentiates itself by fixing clients' stormwater problems.

**C**HRIS SPEEN, GENERAL manager of Twin Oaks Landscape, in Ann Arbor, Mich., was looking for a differentiator. There were a lot of landscape businesses in his area and they all offered the same services. He wanted to not only stand out from the crowd but offer a unique service that could drive additional revenue. He set out to find what was lacking in his area—and what he found was a need for stormwater management.

"A plumber goes as far as taking care of the internal problem and getting the water outside, but what happens after that?" says Speen. "That's where we come in."

Launching this new service was no small feat, and Speen had to team up with a civil engineer to offer it properly. The civil engineer completes drawings and puts the certified stamp on official plans. Since the job involves roadways, drainage ditches and retention ponds, there's a lot at play.

"We tell our clients it's an opportunity to protect their asset or infrastructure," explains Speen. "In the past, people may have ignored the retention pond for 20 years and then have to put a ton of money into solving a problem. We talk to them about a maintenance program where they're paying a smaller fee for an ongoing service and they can often prevent those problems. If we can do a little bit of work each year, it's much easier for a group like a homeowners' association (HOA) to budget for that than to wait 20 years and have to fix a huge problem that wasn't budgeted for."

While the work got started with HOAs, Speen also has contracted with municipalities and does work on a smaller scale for individual residential properties that have stormwater management issues.

To start the service, the biggest investment was the partnership with a civil engineer, Speen says. Twin Oaks has a design/build division, so it already had an excavator and a compact loader, plus an underground camera with scope.

"The resources were already there, so the question was, how do we get the equipment we already have to do more work?"



A before-and-after look at a Twin Oaks stormwater management project.



The service has seen a return on investment and it drives off-season revenue.

"We were booked for December and January working on stormwater management," Speen says. "It's the time of year when you can typically only make money doing snow services, so we've found this has been great winter work."

Though it has been successful, Speen cautions that it takes hard work. To get a client on a stormwater management program, it can require six or seven meetings before any income is generated.

"It's a big time commitment," he adds. "We primarily research jobs that bring us income throughout the year—on a monthly payment plan—as opposed to one-time jobs, though there are times these can work out as well."

Because the size and scale of the jobs are so vastly different, there's a range in pricing. Speen has some accounts that pay \$500 a month, while others pay up to \$6,000 a month. "The key is getting the details on the client's budget and what they're prepared to spend, and then building a plan that works for them," he says. "Our company is not focused so much on price, but on value. We offer high value by conducting the service the right way, and ultimately saving them thousands by managing their stormwater runoff properly and in good timing."

Payton is a freelance writer with seven years of experience writing about the landscape industry.

### » SERVICE SNAPSHOT

**COMPANY:**  
Twin Oaks Landscape

**HEADQUARTERS:**  
Ann Arbor, Mich.

**WHAT?** A stormwater management service

**WHY?** "In this business, people ask all the time: 'What do you do specifically?'" says General Manager Chris Speen. "Once they like your landscape services they want to know what other services you offer. So we were looking for something different, a long-term relationship based on trust and loyalty."

**HOW?** "We teamed up with an engineer and started to separate ourselves from the pack and gain new business with this new service," says Speen.

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# Maurice Dowell

*President of Dowco Enterprises Inc., St. Louis*



**Who's your mentor?** I have an informal mentor, Bob Coulter. Through his services, he has earned my respect. Bob is a shining example of an individual who can hold up the mirror of what a coach looks like. He's a friend, an individual who's shown me so many attributes of a leader. I'm amazed. Bob listens. He cares. He deeply wants you to succeed at whatever you're doing.

**As a Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) Trailblazer, you are a mentor yourself. What advice do you give?** What I insist upon is that you have a dream, you

have a goal and then ask yourself, "What am I doing today to achieve that goal?" When we all begin to think that way, it changes life.

At work, we sit down as a management team once a year and project our goals as if they've already happened. And then we open them the following year. It really keeps us focused on where we want to go. You take a copy and put it on your mirror and that way you're always working toward that goal.



**What's your goal at work every day?** Stay humble and really enjoy the moment. I make sure to surround myself with the best talent available. My job is to show them where the sidelines are and where the goal post is and just get out of the way.



**Did selling suits at Sears enlighten you in any way?** It goes back to the humbling thing. Over the winters I would work there, and in the summer I would leave and grow my landscaping business. Once, I left Sears for a year and when I returned they were going to pay me minimum wage because I lost my seniority.

I said, "Forget it," and one of my coworkers called and said, "What are you doing? Get back in here and take this job." Two weeks later I met my wife, Donna. She was a jewelry girl. It's worked out ever since. When you humble yourself, life has a way of providing for you.

**What aspect of your business do you pride yourself on most?**

We're very clean, we're very organized, we know who our clients are. Our goal is to increase our dollar per customer. That's why we focus on the upper echelon. I cannot focus on selling to a customer who has no potential. Having such a narrow focus probably doesn't bring me as much additional business as I could get—but it brings me the right business.



## OFF THE CLOCK

**WHAT'S THE FIRST THING YOU DO WHEN YOU GET HOME FROM WORK?** I walk my yard with my wife and we connect. I'm a landscaper. I look at the plants and the waterfalls. We look out on a lake. It's just beautiful.

**THE BEST THINGS IN LIFE ARE...** Simple.

**WHAT'S YOUR GREATEST INDULGENCE?** This goes back to my wife. We sit in the hot tub and talk and have one-on-one time. That's one of the things we enjoy the most, and I look forward to that. It's been 28 years now.

**IF YOU COULD GO BACK IN TIME, WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY?** I would have hired a consultant and gotten involved with PLANET and other organizations earlier.



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