

The rear of the Byler/Zaya home overlooks a natural environment outfitted with several sitting areas, a wide array of plantings and a water garden. Lighting enables the couple to enjoy the grounds well into the evening. The rear of the house contains (left to right): a master suite, a family room with timber framing and a dining area/kitchen. The landscaping earned a grand award for best exterior during last year's Parade of Homes.

When Barbara Byler and Anthony Zaya made plans for their home, they paid close attention to one detail that is often overlooked — landscaping.

A Blind Date Leads to A Dreamscape

by Sue Long

The Ties That Bind

Zaya knew it was infatuation when Byler asked him to come to her home to help her with a few things around the yard. "I thought, 'No problem,'" remembers Zaya. "'Do a little yard work, fit in a little romancing...'" Zaya didn't know that he was dealing with a true outdoors girl. "She had me out there for ten straight hours!" exclaims Zaya.

Zaya and Byler met through a blind date but, unlike many such fix-ups, the two hit it off immediately. A shared love of home environments strengthened the relationship. Zaya works in the building industry, specializing in timber framing, while Byler, a sales representative for a line of women's clothing, enjoys decorating, golf and, most of all, gardening.

After their marriage, the couple decided to build a home of their own. "We looked for a [building] lot for about a year," says Zaya. They finally found the

perfect spot just outside of Lititz. The attraction? A large oak tree near the corner of the lot and a southern exposure that would utilize the sun's energy. It also offered great landscaping possibilities — a priority for the couple.

The Byler/Zaya home is unique. The back of the house, which contains the living areas, now serves as an extension of the outdoor living area and vice-versa. Zaya says he hates "faux anything," so the interior of the house was outfitted with all natural products, including wood, marble, granite and tile. Banks of windows were installed to supply the living areas with commanding views — and sounds — from the garden areas and surrounding countryside. As a result, sunshine provides the living area with light and warmth from morning until evening. "Sometimes it's so sunny in the family room," says Byler, "that I feel as if I need to wear sunglasses. And in the morning, when

the sun hits the master suite, you really do feel like getting up."

A Feat of Landscape Architecture

The lot presented a formidable challenge, however, as a large portion of it was situated on the side of a hill. Enter RGS Associates, a land development/landscape architectural firm, that typically oversees projects on a much larger scale (past jobs have included retirement communities, churches and commercial/industrial ventures) to develop a master plan. The first step was to situate the house on the lot. Other challenging goals included designing an entrance courtyard; devising a driveway layout; and creating an outdoor living area that would contain a waterfall/pond, retaining walls and stairways, patios, a terraced herb garden and a bocce court. The firm also provided the

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homeowners-to-be with a concept planting plan and site grading.

The firm's Dick Stauffer explains that such projects are undertaken as a "partnering process" whereby all in-

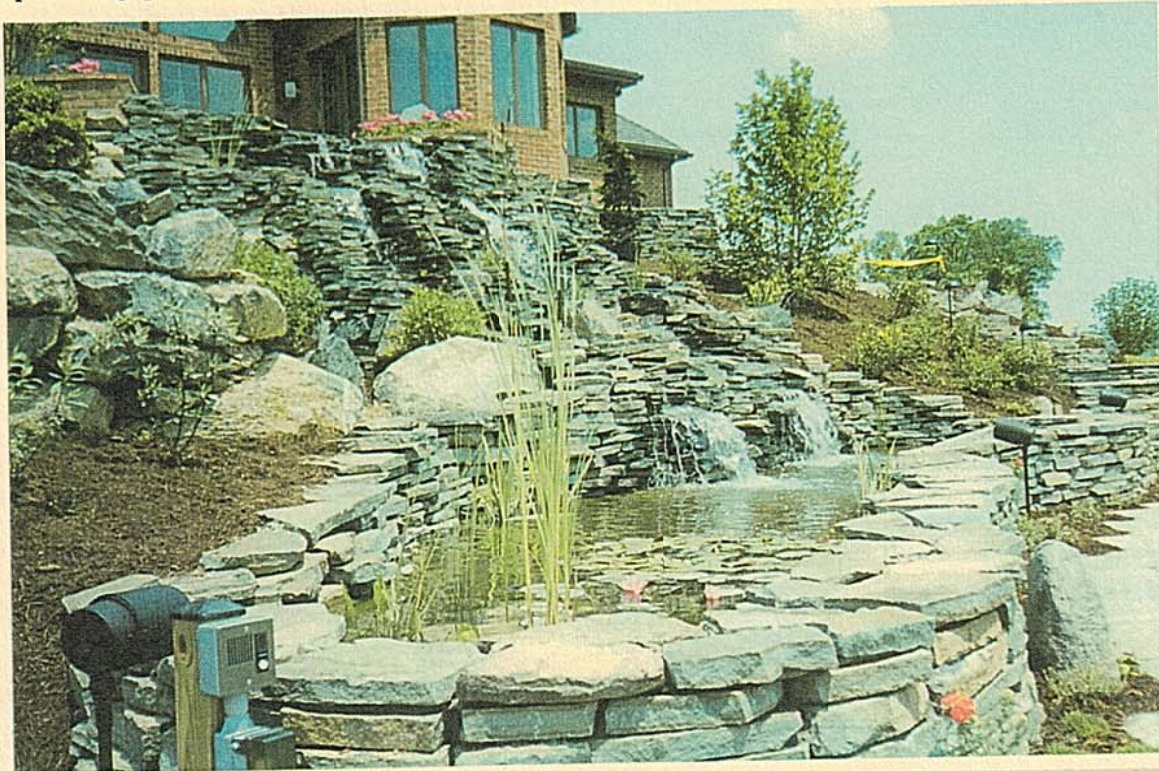
blend well with the house and the one-acre lot on which it would stand.

Like many contemporary landscape plans, this one incorporates a mixture of styles. The front of the house holds formal living and dining rooms and an office and in keeping with that, Dresser devised a landscape design that echoed that theme. A circular driveway — land-

To create the desired multi-levels in the back area, 500 truckloads of fill were brought in and 66 tons of rock were incorporated into the design. "The neighbors wondered what was going on," admits Zaya. The uppermost elevations contain a patio and kitchen garden where Byler grows herbs. A nearby waterfall descends into a pond.

A flight of stairs leads to another terraced patio and a stone path exits the master suite to yet another terraced patio, where a spa will soon be installed. A pond-side, flagstone-covered patio is found at the lowest level, where it is ultimately accessible from the other three levels. Beyond the multi-level configuration, a grassy lawn and a "field" of wildflowers thrives.

Landscape architect Mary Dresser was responsible for designing the lay of



The waterfall/pond during construction and the final results.

involved — homeowners, architects, home builders, interior designers, landscape architects and a host of subcontractors — participate in the job from the outset. Zaya liked the approach, explaining that establishing a rapport with those responsible for building your home is as important as the end product itself. Zaya especially liked the enthusiasm that RGS project manager David Christian, a registered landscape architect, brought to the landscape design process.

Zaya and Byler definitely wanted water to be a part of the outdoor environment. Travels to Santa Fe, New Mexico had given the two an appreciation for the soothing effects that water provides. "We had seen lots of water features in the galleries," explains Byler of the inspiration behind the design of her own water garden.

The Drawing Board

The couple worked with RGS landscape architect Mary Dresser to design an outdoor environment that would



scaped with boxwoods and other ornamental plants — and a sunken, semi-circular brick/stone walkway lead to the front door. Christian explains that the design of the driveway caused some concern because of the steep grades involved.

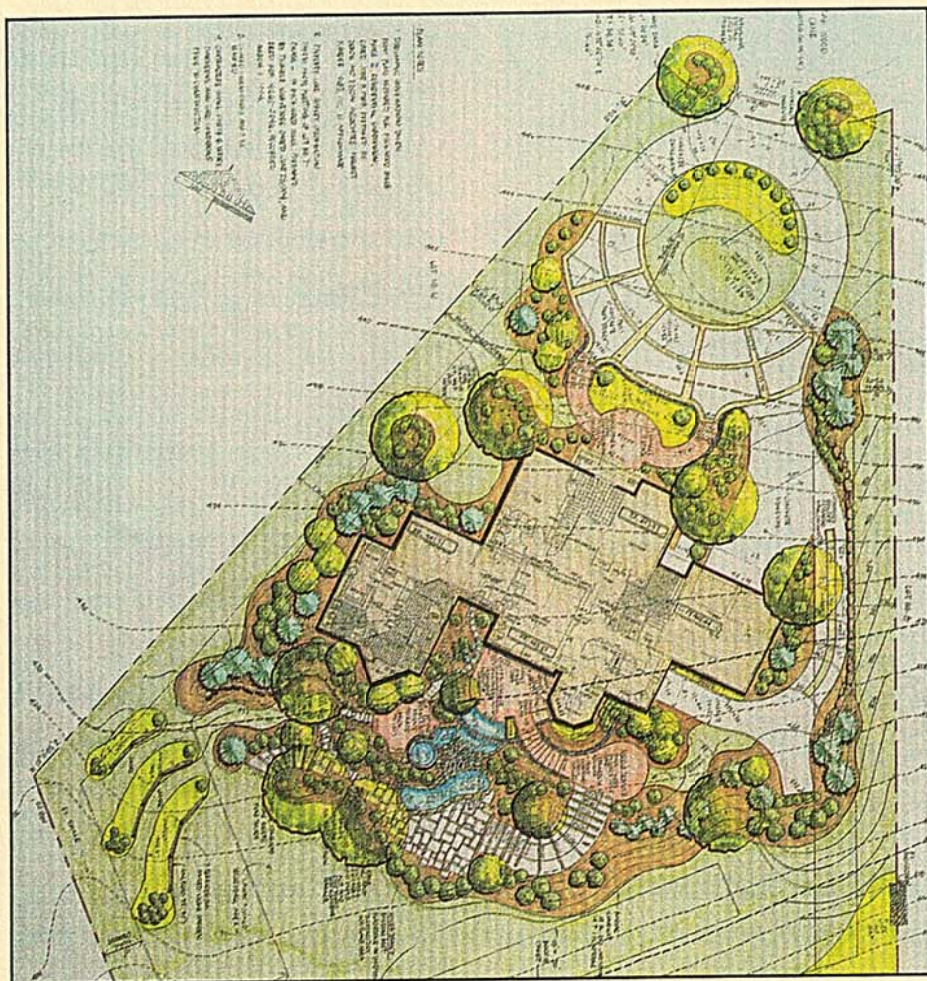
In contrast to the formal elegance that marks the house's front exterior, a free-form natural environment dominates the hillside at the rear of the house.

the land and the physical relationship of the site's amenities. When asked about her role in this particular job she shares: "It's so rare to create a master plan and then be able to carry it out in its entirety, without phasing it. For me, designing the Byler/Zaya residence was a dream come true."

Adding Finesse

Dresser worked closely with Brad

The overall plan as designed by RGS Associates. The firm's David Christian maintains that landscaping should account for eight to ten percent of an overall home building budget.



Groff and Doug Caldwell, co-owners of Wrightsville's River Valley Landscapes and former classmates at Delaware Valley College. Groff dreamed of designing golf courses until he took a class on landscape design that paid

homage to natural environments.

River Valley's first task was to construct a rock wall that would add interest to the waterfall, as the waters would cascade over this wall, and then stream down into the pond. Groff envisioned

shadowstone for the job so, armed with a photo the couple had given him, he visited a supplier in Boyertown who deals with unusual rocks and stones. He found what he was looking for and showed a sample of the shadowstone to the rest of the team. (Shadowstone was also used to form a sitting wall around the pond.) Larger rocks and boulders were found locally at the Lancaster General Health Campus and the McCaskey High School building projects.

Groff and Caldwell were also charged with securing all the plantings — ranging from flowers to trees — for the project. They were given the freedom to select plantings that were more mature than are the typical plantings for a new home. The result was a landscape that appeared to be at least five years old and so, according to Groff, was able to make an instant impact. "At our age," jokes Zaya, "we didn't want to wait."

River Valley gave the design a variety of plantings and trees including boxwoods, forsythia, cherry carnelian (which flowers as early as March), rhododendrons, serviceberry, snowbells (which offer interestingly twisted branches), magnolias, burning bush, red maples, beech trees, dogwoods, evergreens, ornamental grasses, perennials (including day lilies, which are planted into the rocks), annuals and herbs. This blend offers color on an almost year-round basis.

The future will bode well for the design. "Ten years from now it will look so natural that it will be difficult to believe it was all man-made," guarantees Groff.

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Groff says he feels grateful for having been given an opportunity to work on this project, explaining, "We were able to do really creative things."

Other Players

While the key players in the project set to work, others made contributions as well. Interior designer Pat Stadel provided assistance in selecting the mix of stone that would be used for patio surfaces. Masons then went to work utilizing flagstone, shadowstone, stepping stones and brick, which was dry-laid or mortared into place. Architect Jack Hackman contributed by adding the area's subtle lighting design; mushroom-shaped fixtures were placed along the garden paths to softly illuminate the waterfalls and the trees.

Finally, Spectrum Home Cinema and Sound provided the outdoors with a sound system, with speakers hidden inside faux rocks.

The First Spring

Zaya and Byler are ecstatic over the project's results. "It's the details that you appreciate," says Zaya, noting that the longer he lives there, the more his appreciation for the home grows. Byler likes the fact that while the back of the property is fully exposed to passersby, the careful placement of the terraces and plantings creates complete privacy.

The couple has enhanced their yard by providing plenty of feeders, bird-

houses and bird baths for birds to come and enjoy. Finches, blue jays, doves and other species have been taking advantage of the amenities.

Byler also says that watching the yard come to life over the past several months has been fascinating. "I don't want to go anywhere," says the avid gardener, who feels that digging in the dirt is the best way to deal with stress. She also finds the house and outdoor living areas ideal for entertaining. "Great traffic flow," Byler points out.

Zaya has a newfound appreciation for working with professionals such as those that transformed a bare hill into the dazzling creation that is it today (and, with time, will only get better). "The whole experience humbled me. I thought we could do it on our own. But, working with people such as Mary, Brad and Pat proved me wrong. There's such a subtlety about their work. They captured the exact mood we were after." ■

Credits:

Site Design/Landscape Architecture: RGS Associates

Landscape Architect: Mary Dresser

Project Manager: David Christian

Landscape Contractor: River Valley

Landscapes

Architect: Jack Hackman

Home Builder: Lefever Builders

Finishing: Lefever Excavating

Excavating: Bilran Excavating

Masonry Contractor: Todd Masonry

Interior Design: Pat Stadel

Timber Framing: Summerbeam

Woodworking, Inc.

Sound System: Spectrum Home Cinema

and Sound

Electrical Contractor: Webber Electric

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