

Reinventing a landscape: www.heraldtimesonline.com

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When landscaping becomes old and tired, the time comes to start over from scratch.

John and Pat have lived in their Elm Heights home since 1982. The home looks great but the old landscaping was aging badly.

"The yard before was on tiered levels," explained Pat. "The deck was on the top, and there were different levels with retaining walls made of railroad ties. It was beautiful to have dinner out here in the old days; we used to have dinner for up to 100 people at times."

The terraces in the old yard featured both wood and limestone furniture at different levels along the sloping hillside, with ivy at the sides. At the bottom was an asphalt basketball court.

"Our children learned to ride their bicycles on that court," Pat remembered.

"The landscaping with the retaining walls and basketball court was done by the previous owner in 1976," John noted. "He did a magnificent job, but after all those years, insects had eaten into the wood, and it was all worn out. The asphalt of the basketball court was cracked. It was time for a change."

Mark Longacre of Longacre Construction has been Pat and John's longtime contractor.

"Out neighbors had him first, and we watched him work for them," said Pat. "I asked him to come over and do a job for us because for months we had observed how careful he was. He's done both indoor and outside work for us, a lot of things over the years. We really appreciate him. He recommended Steve Harriman, who recommended Scott Gilstrap."

The three companies - Longacre Construction, Harriman's Bomanite, and Creative Environments - worked together on a comprehensive landscape plan that would reinvent the back yard and bring it back to a space that was attractive and usable.

All the work had to be done in proper sequence so that the construction, the concrete pouring and the garden work would not get in the way of each other.

"We were originally just going to replicate the existing terraces with brick and stone, but then we saw we could actually have a better design for less cost," noted John.

"The way the three of them coordinated the project was unbelievable," said Pat admiringly. "They were always around whenever the others needed them. Mark was the general contractor and they worked up the overall plan themselves. We simply told Mark we wanted something different."

Baker Stonework tore out the old retaining walls and rearranged the contours of the slope to match the new design. Steve Harriman removed the old basketball court and poured a new one of Bomanite (a trademarked process that involves coloring and texturing concrete) using a reddish tint and a sand finish. Steve then designed a new Bomanite patio of faux sandstone to serve as a base for the handsome old limestone picnic table and benches, which had served so many gatherings so well.

This limestone table and bench set dates back to the 1980s. At that time, Pat and John saw in the newspaper about a gift that Governor Orr was sending to the government of China: a huge carved limestone bison, created by master stone carvers Virgil and Lester Boruff.

"We read about it in the newspaper and said 'we'd like to get these folks to carve furniture for us.' And they did!" said John. The picnic set consists of a circular table with four rounded benches placed around it. The Boruff brothers also made several other benches that were placed in different locations around the yard.

The project evolved beyond its initial concept. When Mark added a half-circle projecting step to the edge of the deck, Steve matched the design with semi-circular Bomanite steps just below. Pat and John originally assumed they would have a plain deck, but when Mark found that Pat had always wanted a hanging swing, he came up with the idea of a pergola to hang the swing from. Pat also mentioned that she had always wanted a garden shed, so Mark added it at the side of the house, flanking this "utility area" with attractive lattice fences.

Pat had gardened for years in the back yard before the big remodel.

"I had a wildflower garden until the gas company came twice and dug it up and destroyed it," she noted.

Her new garden features perennials such as liriope, Echinacea, catmint, "Moonbeam" coreopsis, "Knock-out" roses, and shrubs including crape myrtle, boxwood and holly. There's also a new shade garden located where an old deck used to stand, filled with painted ferns and other shade plants. The gardens are neatly mulched and edged with pavers.

"I'll plant annuals in the spring," Pat said with obvious anticipation.

The deck is built of western red cedar and was joined together invisibly, without nails.

"That one little detail makes an enormous difference in the appearance," John pointed out.

Pat and John are delighted with their newly landscaped back yard, which has already served for the backdrop to several family gatherings. They have the highest praise for Mark Longacre, Steve Harriman and Scott Gilstrap.

"People should know how well these three folks work together," John said. "It really impressed us, watching them do the planning. They were creative enough, in the process, to improve on their original plan. It's like I'm seeing the yard for the first time, every day."

"It's beautiful," summed up Pat.

Contact Mark Longacre of Longacre Construction at 339-8066; Steve Harriman of Harriman's Bomanite at 812-829-2086, and Scott Gilstrap of Creative Environments at 812-279-3224.

The deck was built with stained western red cedar. Photos by Carrol Krause



The old limestone picnic set is set to good advantage by the new Bomanite patio beneath it.



The cedar deck was fastened invisibly, without nails, for a cleaner appearance.



Bomanite steps duplicate the circular shape at the edge of the deck.

