

# Fit for a Castle

**A**ffectionately called the “Jewel of the Front Range,” the tranquil community of Castle Pines Village, Castle Rock, CO, is located south of Denver, in rapidly growing Douglas County. A short distance from the lush greens and manicured fairways of the two Jack Nicklaus-designed golf courses is one of the first homes built in Castle Pines Village. It is still occupied by the original homeowners, but after years of neglect, the backyard landscape had begun to deteriorate.

In 2005, the homeowners turned to Designs By Sundown, an Englewood-based residential landscape architecture company, for help. Landscape designer Greg Bobich infused the surroundings with new life and new emphasis, transforming its rundown look into a landscape again, befitting the house it surrounds.

As a result, the two-month-long project received a 2007 Excellence in Landscape Award in the renovation category from the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado (ALCC).

**Community overview.** Castle Pines Village is a secluded, gated community of luxurious custom homes that offers residents an elegant, yet mountainous feel, nestled within ponderosa pines and rolling rock hills speckled with scrub oak, native grasses and delicate wildflowers. Yet, it is an easy commute to downtown Denver and a few hours’ drive to world-class ski resorts, such as Vail and Steamboat Springs. Other recreational opportunities for Castle Pines Village’s residents include swimming, hiking, tennis and working out at the Village Lake Fitness Center.

Development began in the 1980s and continues today. Fences between properties are almost nonexistent except to surround a pool.

*A Denver-area design/build company transforms a dilapidated landscape into an upscale destination for relaxing and entertaining.*

by JASON BRAMWELL

“Castle Pines Village does not want barriers limiting the natural flow and openness of the area. Wildlife, such as deer and elk, roam freely from house to house,” Bobich says.

Unfortunately, Colorado experienced severe drought conditions from 2000 to 2003. Cities enacted strict watering guidelines, forcing landscape contractors to come up with creative ideas to use less water. Hardscapes became an integral part of most landscape designs, as would be the case with this project. Outdoor living areas, low-water perennial gardens and numerous variations of carefully sited fire elements have become the norm for today’s landscape designs in the state.



The natural gas fireplace setting has become the “jewel” of this landscape. It is enjoyed year-round and has been the site of many family and neighborhood events.

**Assessing the situation.** Bobich’s first visit with the homeowners let him evaluate the condition of the landscape and its surroundings, as well as listen to their desires.

“The back yard had crumbling walls, and the water feature — which had not worked in two years — looked like a cesspool,” Bobich says. “There were piles of rhyolite stones with snakes infesting them and a large expanse of grass. Above were two more levels of deteriorating walls, a few aspen trees, scattered shrubs and ponderosa pines.”

The snakes even prevented the family dog, Ginger, from enjoying the back yard. Having a stretch of snake-free lawn where Ginger could roam was part of the homeowners’ wish list. They also wanted a fire feature, outdoor kitchen, spa area and screening from a newer home built on an adjacent hill that looks down into the back yard.

“The plan for the project took about two weeks to put together, with several site visits at different times of the day,” Bobich says.

Noticeably absent from their wish list was a water feature because the West Nile virus was at its peak in Colorado. Though water features had been very popular in



The wildflower sod on one side of the stone slab patio comprises more than 23 different varieties of native wildflowers, providing ever-changing color and interest to the property.

the area, the homeowners did not want to enjoy their new outdoor setting in the company of mosquitoes.

**The project begins.** Strict landscape covenants are enforced in this commu-

nity, and all design plans must be approved by a panel of homeowners and hired architects. Many plans get stalled at this stage and are sent back for revisions. However, Bobich had led eight other landscape projects at Castle Pines Village,



Part of the backyard renovation project was to remove the crumbling rhyolite walls and stagnant water feature behind the home.



A front-end loader removed roughly 200 cubic yards of soil from the area that now houses the fireplace and spa.



The spa area was carved out of what was once a weed- and scrub oak-covered hillside.

and his experience with the community's design rules helped get his newest plan approved quickly.

"Building a relationship with the members of the design review committee and understanding the goals they set for the community made it much easier to get the plan approved," he adds. "It was also nice to know beforehand about the rules for material staging — no materials are allowed on the street — and workable hours per day, which are between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m."

Next, it was time for demolition. The



A weeping Norway spruce was the ideal backdrop for a stone Buddha brought back from Asia.

first step was to bring in a front-end loader to excavate the walls, which dramatically altered the existing grade. The loader removed roughly 200 cubic yards of soil from the area that now houses the fireplace and spa, Bobich says. This soil was reused by the Castle Pines Village Metropolitan District, which oversees water, wastewater-treatment, street-improvement and

storm-drainage services in the community. The district also reused the tan rhyolite stones in its xeric gardens. The remainder of the yard waste was hauled off to be recycled.

Large cranes were needed on the upper terrace to place more than 175 tons of tan and gray granite boulders, as well as slabs of stone, to form natural staircases and a beautifully created boulder outcrop. The front-end loader carried boulders a quarter of its size among scrub oak masses that had to be saved, as well as around an existing ponderosa pine. This lone ponderosa pine was nurtured throughout the process and would become a focal point from inside the home.

Bobich says the demolition phase of the project did present some difficulties for his crew.

"The tight spaces were a real challenge for our equipment operators, and the stone masons had to chisel each piece of stone by hand," he adds.

**Plentiful plantings.** The plantings Bobich selected blended effortlessly into the environment. Many varieties of evergreen were used, including globe blue spruce, Bosnian pine, 'Hillside Creeper' pine, 'Mops' pine, Swiss mountain pine, mugo



Creeping Jenny is one of many perennials that give the property a natural look.

pine, 'Slowmound' pine and Tanyosho pine. A weeping Norway spruce was the perfect backdrop for a stone Buddha brought back by the homeowners from a trip to Asia.

More than 500 perennials were placed in nooks and crannies to simulate a natural look, including five different penstemons — 'Firecracker', 'Husker Red', 'Mersa Yellow', 'Pikes Peak Purple' and 'Red Rocks' — and three varieties of columbine, Colorado's state flower — 'Denver Gold', 'Rocky Mountain' and 'Red Spur'. 'Munstead' lavender, creeping Jenny, 'Elfin' thyme, Corsican violet, two varieties of coral bells and many other blooming plants completed the natural setting. The shrubs chosen are native to the area and include serviceberry, ninebark, chokecherry and several varieties of spirea, Bobich says.

**Outdoor amenities.** The large expanse of grass was mostly ripped out and replaced with a new outdoor living area.

"The outdoor kitchen and retaining walls were veneered with Colorado buff stripstone; a beefy, 4-foot buff capstone was used on all the walls; and polished slabs were used for the countertop and bar area," Bobich says. "The husband's only desire was to have a turkey deep fryer built into the kitchen area, and he got his wish."

This kitchen has all the amenities necessary to cook and dine alfresco. It is fully equipped with a 48-inch Viking grill with side burners, a Marvel outdoor refrigerator and a Fire Magic power burner for deep-frying fowl.

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Ginger can now enjoy the extra backyard space to roam and not have to worry about snakes.



Designs By Sundown's team of masons chipped and snapped every piece of stone used in the walls, fireplace and kitchen, providing the clients with a large outdoor entertainment area, Bobich says. A sub-contractor, Cutting Edge Concrete LLC, Englewood, installed the stamped concrete patio. It used a textured skin pattern replicating natural stone, which tied in nicely with the 170 tons of boulders.

Multiple relaxation areas were created in the back yard. Surrounded by dense Bosnian pines on one side and wildflower sod on the other, a restful, stone slab patio was created as a place for the homeowners to relax and read. The wildflower sod comprises more than 23 different varieties of native wildflowers, providing ever-changing color and interest to the property.

The spa area was carved out of what was once a weed- and scrub oak-covered hillside. Just by opening up this area, the usable space in the yard was doubled, according to Bobich. A Wind River spa was dropped into the spa pit to create the look of a custom spa. A maintenance-free Trex deck provides space for lounge chairs and coolers.



The kitchen is fully equipped with a 48-inch Viking grill with side burners, a Marvel outdoor refrigerator and a Fire Magic power burner for deep-frying a turkey.

Another feature of the landscape is a Siloam stone slab patio that overlooks the entire property. The stone has a soft carpet of creeping thyme that weaves among the joints in the slabs. Granite

boulders — some weighing more than 3½ tons — and dwarf conifers surround the installation. One of the focal points is a century-old, contorted ponderosa pine that casts its shadow on the entire area,



Stamped concrete steps lead to a patio made of the same material, which features the fireplace and kitchen.

creating a cool place to linger on a hot Colorado afternoon.

Bobich says the “jewel” of the landscape is the low-maintenance, natural gas fireplace setting, which serves as a spot for friends to gather to talk about their golf game or the natural scenery that surrounds them. Not only does the fireplace area provide warmth and beauty on a cool, summer evening, its careful placement — with its expanse and height — helps to block the neighbor’s view. This outdoor living area is enjoyed year-round and has played host to many family and neighborhood events. A Trex deck right off the house matches the decking found around the spa.

Outdoor lighting was installed to assure that the homeowners are able to enjoy their surroundings at all hours. Designs By Sundown’s lighting technicians chiseled lights into the walls to illuminate the kitchen and fireplace area. A task light assists the chef with the preparation of meals. Not to be left out, Ginger now safely enjoys roaming the new lawn created especially for her.

The Castle Pines Village project was one of 42 innovative landscapes honored by the ALCC during its Excellence in Landscape awards banquet Jan. 23 at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts. The awards competition honors unique landscapes that are designed, constructed, irrigated, renovated and managed by ALCC members. Designs By Sundown received five awards that evening.

“It is always nice to be recognized by our peers, but as long as the client loves the finished project, that is our main goal,” Bobich says.

Jason Bramwell is senior associate editor of AMERICAN NURSERYMAN.

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