



# elemental DESIGN

Ancient philosophy  
yields a perfect landscape

By Craig J. Heimbuch | Photos courtesy of Designs by Sundown

LONG BEFORE THE PERIODIC TABLE, the invention of the microscope or the development of particle physics, ancient philosophers and metaphysicians believed that all things living and dead, everything in the universe was made from a combination of four basic elements—earth, air, water and fire. People, buildings, mountains, animals, fish and togas—everything you can see, smell, touch, taste or imagine could be explained in terms of these elements.

Science has come a long way in the intervening centuries, but the human draw to these ancient elements remains strong, as is witnessed in this amazing Littleton backyard oasis. Designer Greg Bobich, of Designs by Sundown, said he often considers those ancient elements when designing.

“I tried to incorporate all four elements in this project,” he says. “When you do that, it creates a real nice balance. It just feels right.”

Balancing the natural world with functional utility is what landscape design is all about. But in this case, that balancing act takes on a new importance, a new means of communicating and communing with the world outside that creates a thoroughly modern, yet comfortably rustic feel. It’s like sailing or hiking in the Rockies, there is just a sense of belonging to the greater world around you that is elemental.

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## Earth

Beyond the picturesque setting in Littleton's foothills, the earth element plays a big role in this landscape design. From the fieldstone outdoor hearth and granite steps to the use of rocks as accents in flowerbeds and steps, solid earth is an element that dulls the edges of the property, bringing together the foreground and background, the immediate and the horizon.

"The rock is really stabilizing," says Bobich. "It keeps everything grounded," and helps the other dominant features blend gracefully into the surrounding terrain, he says. All the stone used is of Colorado origin, including multi-ton boulders used to create demarcations in the design, which create separate, yet connected, entertaining spaces throughout the back yard.

In addition, the homeowners "love the mountains" and wanted

to bring the feeling of the Rockies as close to their home as possible, Bobich says.

## Air

Great landscape design is the melding of beauty and utility. Bobich manages this meld throughout the design by creating small gathering spaces that fit within the flow of the overall design.

The three-level layout follows the terrain, but also creates opportunity with several sitting areas near fire and water features, an outdoor kitchen and, while the kids have grown, a ground-level flush trampoline for the times when family and guests just have to bounce. All of these are emblematic of the homeowners' close-knit family ties and a love of the outdoors.

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“The air part really creates a flow throughout the whole place,” says Bobich. “Between the fireplace and outdoor kitchen and pool and sitting spaces we’ve created a lot of opportunities for the homeowners to be outside.”

And where motive and opportunity meet is happiness. This space has so many functions, it hard to find an excuse to stay indoors.

### Water

Though the landscape does feature a pool and hot tub, Bobich said the use of water had just as much to do with other senses and the feel of a cool dip on a warm day or a soothing tub after a long night.

“Water creates a sound element that you hear throughout,” Bobich says. From the gently sloping waterfall that follows the

pathway down from the upper levels to that bubbling hot tub and splashes in the pool, the water’s influence goes beyond just the ho-hum swimming and soaking.

Visually, the vibrant turquoise of the pool and gentle swirl of the hot tub and waterfall create a break from the hard stone and muted earth tones of the surrounding landscape, while still maintaining the invitation to step outside and enjoy the world outdoors.

### Fire

When the nine-month process of design and construction began, Bobich said there only a few standing orders from the homeowner: make it a place to entertain friends, family and coworkers, keep the feeling natural and make sure that there’s fire.

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“The homeowner works in the natural gas industry,” says Bobich. Understanding this, the decision to involve fire in the design seemed a natural one.

Of all the stunning elements of Bobich’s design, perhaps none is more intriguing than the three fire features—two small spaces and a fireplace.

“Fire, to me, represents a place to congregate,” Bobich says. “It’s a place for people to sit around and enjoy each other’s company.”

The three features range from intimate, like the one near the hot tub, to cozy, like the circular sitting area near the pool, to downright charming, as witnessed in the fieldstone freestanding fireplace.

Blending the four natural elements of the ancient world might sound like a daunting task, but this home reminds us that gathering with friends among earth, air, water and fire is nothing short of elemental. 🍂