

# Landscaping: the artful investment

**I**t's long been known that exterior landscaping — whether it's an elaborate combination of trees, plants, shrubs, and man-made accents or just a well-manicured lawn — adds value to a home. When it is well thought out and designed, an attractive landscape increases a home's overall value and selling price. It can also decrease utility costs and provide a personalized haven for the home's occupants.

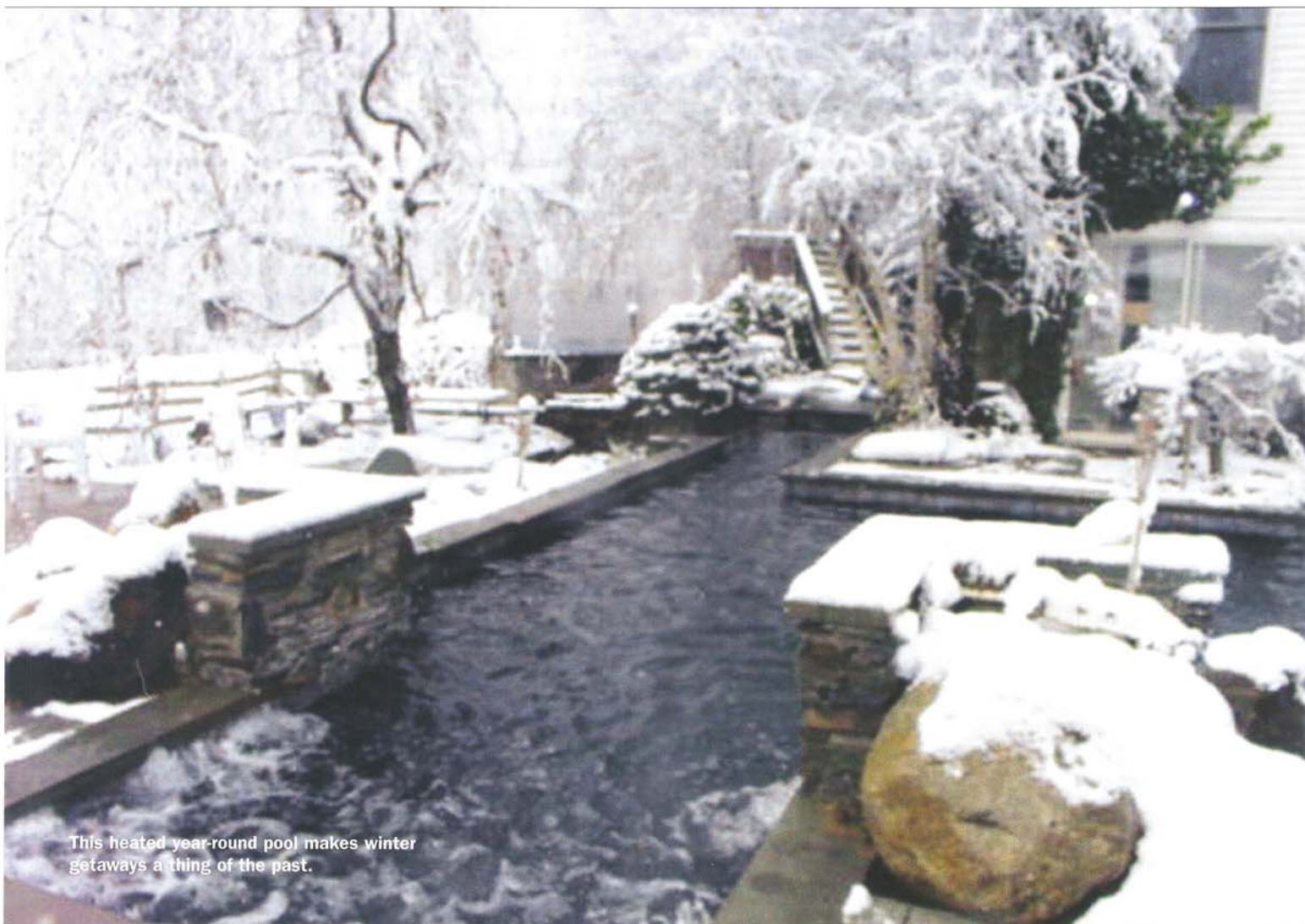
"Landscape design is an art," exclaims David Katz, who owns Elite Landscaping in Dutchess County. "Good landscaping is

a collaboration of elements, shapes, textures, and materials that blend together in a cohesive package. Landscaping is not just limited to vegetation," he adds. "It's the total picture."

In fact, a quality landscape will feature a variety of elements such as trees, shrubs and flowers, decks or patios, walkways, fences, and gazebos and sheds. "A good landscape design includes plant materials that are in scale and in balance with the house, as well as proper walkways and patios," explains Dennis Minelli, landscape

operations manager at Lehigh Lawns and Landscaping in Poughkeepsie.

A properly planned design should add outdoor living space to a home, provide privacy, and disguise any unpleasant views. More important, an enticing landscape should aim to enhance the existing architectural and environmental features of a home. "Landscaping — if it's done well — is equivalent to a house that's decorated," suggests Richard Shulkin, owner of Easy Lifestyle Real Estate in Newburgh, Orange County. "It's equivalent to the feel-



This heated year-round pool makes winter getaways a thing of the past.



**Garden oasis: this relaxing backyard patio from Elite Landscaping features stonework, shrubs, and flowers.**

ing that you get when walking into an empty house versus a decorated house.”

“Every house is different,” stresses Shulkin. “Landscaping is very personalized.” Most professional landscape designers will agree that each outdoor environment should reflect a homeowner’s tastes and lifestyle, and yet be harmonious, unified, and functional.

Homeowners can reap a multitude of benefits by investing in a professional quality landscape design, whether they hire an expert or do it themselves.

The fact that strategically planted trees and shrubs cut down on household utility costs is one such benefit. The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that planting just three properly located shade trees can decrease household utility fees by as much as \$250 per year. “Trees improve property value by adding shade, which cools the house, and providing privacy,” explains Minelli. Mature trees and shrubs also serve as barriers against wind and noise, while helping to reduce air pollution and soil erosion.

Another plus: An eye-catching landscape enhances a home’s appeal, creating a warm and inviting entranceway that serves to attract potential buyers. “The external appearance of a home is the hook that draws people in,” declares Shulkin.

“People do choose homes based on

curb appeal,” agrees Cynthia Lippolis, realtor and owner of River Towns GMAC Real Estate in Westchester County. But, she notes, “It’s a crazy market. Everything is selling right now. People will buy a house and then landscape it. However, landscaping is expensive, so when it’s already done, that’s a plus.”

Today, “more and more people are tending to make landscaping more upscale,” Lippolis states. Landscaper Minelli concurs: “They’re staying home instead of going on vacation to Europe, and they’re making their living spaces more comfortable.”

Current landscape designs run the gamut from traditional to exotic, but they all share a common goal: to create a soothing outdoor plan that is fully integrated into the surrounding environment. Some of the most sought-after looks in landscaping incorporate sophisticated design elements, such as exotic plantings, stonework, gazebos, waterfalls and streams, pre-constructed ponds and fountains, half-moon driveways, and even landscape lighting.

Katz warns, however, that these so-called trends are not always suitable for every home. It’s important for consumers to educate themselves about the possibilities in landscaping, he adds. “Just because a client wants a water fountain in the front of their home doesn’t mean that that will work

with their house,” he explains. “There might be a modification of that element that can be done.”

Of course, the big question is, just how much value can landscaping add to a home? “That depends on where the home is — location, location, location,” laughs Minelli as he repeats the age-old adage.

Elite’s Katz feels that the overall design of an outdoor environment also plays a key role in determining value. “People have a misconception about what kind of landscaping will add value to a house,” he says. Hodgepodge landscaping that has no unification — think of a single tree surrounded by mulch, set off with a decorative rock, a few flowers, and plopped in the middle of a lawn — doesn’t do much to add to a home’s value. “People will have the basic concept of a landscape, but then they stick in five or six different trees or shrubs rather than focusing on just one,” Katz adds.

Only a quality landscape design will significantly improve a home’s exterior appeal and drastically increase its worth. For example, “A house that sold not long ago for \$150,000 is now selling for \$349,000 after the owners did extensive landscaping,” says Mary Collins, a realtor based in High Falls, Ulster County.

“If your landscape design is done well you will get back every dollar you spend on it when you sell your house,” says Katz.



## GARY GOLDBERG FINANCIAL SERVICES

*This is not a time to be a go-it-alone investor.*

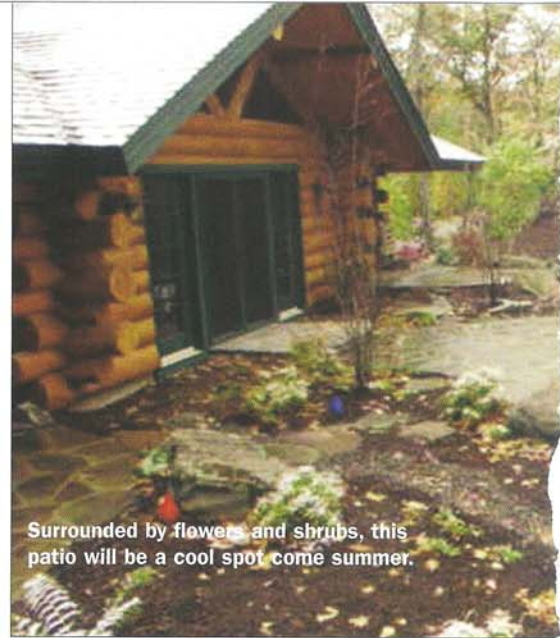
Call us for an evaluation of your current investment portfolio.

1-800-433-0323 ex. 218

**You will receive our opinion as to how we believe you should be invested going forward based on your level of risk, time horizon, growth or income needs.**

*For over 30 years there is no cost for this initial service.  
We hope you might become a client.*

Gary Goldberg Planning Services, Inc.  
A Registered Investment Advisory Firm  
75 Montebello Park, Suffern, New York 10901



Surrounded by flowers and shrubs, this patio will be a cool spot come summer.

Recently, his Wappingers Falls-based business completed a \$25,000 landscaping job for a client whose raised ranch home was originally appraised at \$300,000. The property includes a pool, which has been fully integrated into the surrounding environment, and is now worth over \$700,000, according to Katz.

That's great news for realtors and anyone considering placing his or her home on the market. Homes set in an attractive environment usually generate more interest from potential buyers and sell faster, notes Lippolis. The reason is obvious, says Minelli: "People don't want to buy a house that doesn't look nice." An alluring landscape, he adds, tells potential buyers that a home has been well-maintained.

Want to give your home that well-cared-for look? A truly well-designed landscape needn't require much upkeep — or much cash. Just remember, "It's the simple things that make a landscape," says Katz. "A good design doesn't have to cost a lot of money." Although expensive stonework may have a striking impact, gravel costs far less and can look just as nice when sculpted into sleek pathways and patios. "One of the things we do a lot is a fire pit, so people can have a little campfire," Katz says. "You put in a nice gravel patio, add some Adirondack-style chairs and you're able to go out there at night and just relax, or even roast marshmallows."

Pools are another popular element being incorporated into landscapes. Elite Landscaping recently completed a design with an outdoor pool that can be used year-round. "People talk about going away and spending \$5,000 on a winter vacation," says Katz. "It costs considerably less to heat your

## Art Glass Studios of Westchester



Restoration, waterproofing and maintenance of older stained & leaded glass windows

Design & construction of new panels to your design specifications

Bevelled glass & sandblasting available

**Commercial & Residential**

**845.528.1634**

**845.528.1586 fax**

<http://www.castlemall.com/artglass>



pool for three or four months and have a vacation in your own backyard all winter long.”

Inexpensive outdoor lighting, purchased at any home improvement store, can make a dramatic statement if it's well-placed to highlight one or two interesting features of the landscape. A simple planting of flowers can also brighten up the exterior of a house, although large perennial and annual flower gardens take a lot of time and maintenance.

“You shouldn't be doing landscaping just to pretty up your home,” concludes Katz. “Landscaping should be well thought out and add tremendous value to not only your house, but also your lifestyle. It should be functional and add excitement to your life.” ■

## Words to the wise

Hiring a professional landscaper? Here's what you need to know.

1. Do your research. Peruse home and garden magazines and clip pictures of landscapes that appeal to you. This will enable your landscape designer to get a sense of your style.

2. Consider your lifestyle. What's the purpose of the landscape? What do you want to do with the property?

3. Ask for references. Check out a landscape designer's previous work before you agree to anything. Make sure the work will stay within your budget and be completed on time.

4. Finally, keep an open mind. Often, “People don't know what they want,” says Katz. And that's okay. A good landscape designer should be able to create a plan that works for your home. — J.S.

# Hudson Valley

Serving the Hudson Valley for over 30 years.

## MAGAZINE

# 2003-2004 INSIDER'S GUIDE

## Target the fastest growing region in New York State

*Hudson Valley* magazine's 14th Annual Insider's Guide is the most comprehensive travel and tourism guide in the Hudson Valley Region.

*Hudson Valley* magazine will print and distribute an extra 70,000 copies, bringing the overall distribution amount to over 100,000 — offering our advertisers significant market penetration.

### Distribution includes:

- NYS Thruway Information Centers
- Hotels
- Major Attractions
- Trade Shows
- Chambers of Commerce
- Shopping Destinations
- Over 25,000 Subscribers

## Publishing: MAY

Space reservations: 3/20/03

TO ADVERTISE CALL YOUR LOCAL ACCOUNT  
EXECUTIVE AT (800) 274-7844