

Stone columns and twin iron gates define the courtyard space but allow one to sneak a peek of what's inside.

Two are **BETTER** than One

I had the opportunity to landscape one of the two Arkansas Symphony Designer Houses of 2009. It was a great house with a wonderful yard. While the house was categorized as a patio home, it was situated on a good-sized lot, and even had a large pond. “Patio homes” rarely have the European flair and inherent style of this house. Visions of a formal fountain, benches, wrought-iron gates and plenty of stone danced in my mind. Soon my thoughts and designs were on paper. That landscape I designed for the Symphony House has remained, and the house eventually became my clients’ home. The landscaping, a formal look with a contemporary edge, now stands out in the neighborhood.

Not only did I landscape this house in the past, I was lucky enough to have also worked with these clients before. What is interesting about what I did for the Symphony House is that the landscape looks as if I designed it just for them. The homeowner has a great eye for detail, and she likes a traditional look spiced up with “funky” elements. And this yard has its share of those.

The plot thickened. The homeowners bought the lot next to their home, and built another house for another family member. Now, I had an opportunity that many landscapers only dream about: I joined two yards to become one continuous statement. The second house has a much larger front yard, perfect for a front yard pool. So I designed a custom pool with great lines and functionality.

Meanwhile, my first objective was to design two separate front courtyards and adjoin them, so friends and family could pass back and forth. The original house has stone columns, with wrought-iron fencing and gate. A thick hedge of dwarf Burford holly (*Ilex cornuta* ‘Burfordii Nana’) tracing the iron rails gives the illusion of a living wall. The other house has stucco walls covered in Boston ivy (*Parthenocissus tricuspidata*), and an arched entrance with a metal door into the courtyard. The metal door became the focal point, and now, in reality, the front door. The original intended front door of the house is not visible from the street.

Bottom left: Stepping stones with grass in between not only solve drainage problems, but break away from the normal walkway. Remember to always “dare to be different.”

Bottom right: Groupings of pots add color and texture, and the English boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens*) topiaries are simply elegant. The solid metal gates become the front door and create a dramatic focal point.

Full beds of seasonal color make a huge statement. ▽





Simply refreshing, this pool is in the front yard. Three stone bowls gracefully pour refreshing water into the pool below. But the showpiece is the sheet of water overflowing the custom-designed water wall. The sound is so soothing.





Once you walk out this entrance door, the vista of the pool takes over with its sweeping lines and breadth. I wanted the observer to feel as if he or she were at a resort. "I'll take a mojito, please."

Three stone bowls grace the edge of the custom-shaped pool. We installed a huge standing sculpture, designed to provide both height and the soothing sounds of flowing water that cascades like a sheet of glass into the pool. Shaped like a contemporary square arch, the design of the sculpture breaks away from the more traditional look of the house. The unexpected sound of the water echoes between the two houses, like a jungle waterfall. Yet it's so peaceful that you could easily find me taking a nap in the lounge chair nearby with a mojito in hand. (Do you see where I'm going with this?)

A crisscross design of blue tiles lies at the bottom of the pool, but the real point of interest is that when you walk to the front door, you have no choice but to walk on water. And, no, you don't get your feet wet. This illusion is made possible because, instead of concrete or rock stepping stones, a thick sheet of shatterproof glass is the bridge. Look down and you will see lapping water and the patterned tiles winking at you from beneath. No credit to me – the homeowner designed this wonderful element. The perfect finishing touch.

Overflowing containers full of lush plants help soften the hardscaping and lines of the pool. They look like living floral arrangements. Here's your tip of the day: Think big. Don't be shy about using oversized containers. Big pots are easier to water and require less maintenance. I placed a drip system for these containers that enters through the bottom of each pot. The water lines are under the concrete walkways and patios, and feed directly into the sprinkler system. No piping is visible.



The key is placement of your pots. I like to use groupings whenever possible, and I like my containers packed full of plants. I find potted plants grow better when placed closely. Why? I think a thick cluster of plants helps shade the pot and keep the plants' tender roots cool.

I situated minimal landscaping around the pool since it takes up such a large space. But what's there is planted in straight lines and in large drifts. The look is clean and simple, and the use of strict lines means no competition with the hardscape of the pool. The pool is edged with 'Wintergreen' boxwood (*Buxus microphylla*) and horizontal plantings of lime sweet flag grass (*Acorus gramineus* 'Ogon'). Both plants are low maintenance and serenely captivating. And the boxwood and grass don't shed leaves into the pool. While the contrasting greens are soothing, some seasonal color is necessary.

For a bit of whimsy, don't forget about other design elements, such as a fabricated bottle tree. Forged from iron, this tree is virtually indestructible, and the colorful wine bottles thrust onto its "branches" shimmer in the sun. Reflections of colorful light dance across the stucco walls of the house at all times of the day.

△ **Unique and personal elements such as this Buddha create a retreat that shouts ever so softly ... just relax.**

Top left: "Spice it up" – this bottle tree from Botanica Gardens in Little Rock adds a funky flavor to the elegant and traditional home.

If you don't have a lot of space, concentrate on your hardscape. Follow up with an unusual layout of plant material. Keep it simple, and augment with colorful and contrasting textures. Consider creating your own courtyard with masonry walls or a green hedge. A custom design that reflects your personality is better than a generic one. Always lead with your designs. Never follow. Then lie back, enjoy the view, and maybe mix a mojito, made all the easier because one of your oversized pots contains mint. 🍹

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