



# Lavish Landscaping

YOUR HOLIDAY OASIS AT HOME

BY SUSAN M BOYCE



Rain or shine, you can still enjoy a relaxing soak in this grotto-style hot tub. Photo courtesy of Raincity Rock & Waterscapes.

**Summer's here. Time to relax, chill out, escape the everyday. How about a holiday somewhere exotic where you're surrounded by lush greenery and the gentle singsong of a brook? Maybe a round of two of golf after a day spent by the poolside. Just peace and quiet and time for yourself.**

But if your hair curls at the thought of a long, tiring plane ride and the hassle of packing and unpacking your suitcases, here's another option. Why not simply step through your patio door into your own backyard? No packing, no airport line-ups, plus you know exactly where to get best pizza delivery and there's always another paperback on hand.

#### **A Vacation at Home**

Experts agree, the hottest trend in landscaping today is creating a mini-retreat right at home by extending your living room into the great outdoors. "Homeowners want to

take year round advantage of the fresh air and our mild climate," says Bob Rasmus, president of RJR Construction Management. "Covered decks and spaces linking the house and pool are perfect examples of one way to achieve that — it's all about enhancing your quality of life and extending the season."

Jason LaRonde, owner of Pacifica Nurseries agrees wholeheartedly and notes people are now willing to invest time and cash to make it come true. "Landscaping is finally catching up to interior design in the minds of consumers," he says. "As the trend to nesting increases, homeowners are

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**Jason LaRonde**

Outdoor fireplaces and kitchens are a popular new feature in many backyards. Photo courtesy of GD Nielsen Developments.



"People are also paying attention to their lifestyle when they design their outdoor landscaping," adds Greg Nielsen, owner of GD Nielsen Developments. "It's no longer just throwing down some turf and plants." In one project, Greg's client had a passion for golf, so a secluded corner of the yard was converted into a private putting green — complete with sand trap. "Thinking about how you live — whether it's indoors or outdoors — will help you make the transition between the two flow effortlessly."

#### **Down by the River**

The public's love affair with water shows no sign of diminishing according to Ryan Spong, owner of Raincity Rock & Waterscapes. In fact, many homeowners are letting their imaginations run free when it comes to incorporating pools, ponds, waterfalls, and even rock waterslides into their outdoor "living rooms."

One hot new trends Ryan sees is the grotto-style hot tub often built adjacent to a swimming pool. Half open to the sky and half tucked into a mini cave-like enclosure, this

seeing the value of spending significant money on their outdoor spaces. Let's face it, people tend to think nothing of spending \$3,000 on an ensuite showerhead that probably no one else will ever see. So why not pay the same amount for a tree that everyone sees every time they arrive at the front door?" In fact, Jason adds, attitudes are changing so rapidly it's more and more common for clients to part with \$20,000 or even more for a single tree depending on its size, rarity, and age.



West Vancouver dream backyard in progress. Pool, barbeque & patio retreat. Photo courtesy of RJR Construction.



Giving the illusion of a naturally occurring pond, this water feature seems to flow organically from one corner of the house. Photo courtesy of Arbor Outdoor.

variation on an old theme is the best of all worlds. "We do live in a rainy climate," he acknowledges. "By having a grotto, you're protected from rain and snow as you sit in your hot tub, but you can still be outside." Add plants, shrubbery, and rockwork, and Ryan says the finished product can look exactly as if it were a naturally occurring outcrop of stone.

### Sizzling Alfresco Cuisine

Outdoor cooking is taking a distinctly gourmet twist in today's gardens as the ubiquitous patio barbeque morphs into a full-scale outdoor kitchen. Built-in wall ovens, countertops providing more workspace than your average compact condo, grills, rotisseries, bar fridges — these kitchens are as masterfully designed as their indoor equivalents.

"When you are considering your design," Bob says, "it's important to remember that you'll need a minimum of ten feet to be able to sit at a table and still move around." Another tip is to place your outdoor kitchen so it's convenient to your interior one — easier for clean up and passing food or supplies between the two.

As landscaping continues its evolution beyond merely plants, decks, and perhaps some funky exterior lighting, here's another thought to ponder. A beautifully landscaped property is not only a joy to live with but can add as much as 20% to the value of your home. And here's something else you probably didn't know. It can also save you money — some estimates say up to 25% — on heating and cooling throughout the year as trees provide windbreaks to reduce energy demand in winter and cooling shade during hot summer months.

So forget the tropics. Just chill down the Riesling, whip up a batch of appies, and get set for a great summer vacation at home.