

NEW JERSEY'S HOME & DESIGN MAGAZINE

# design NJ

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PLAN YOUR LANDSCAPE

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SHORT HILLS, OLDWICK, COLTS NECK,  
FAR HILLS & MORE

# Planning a Landscape

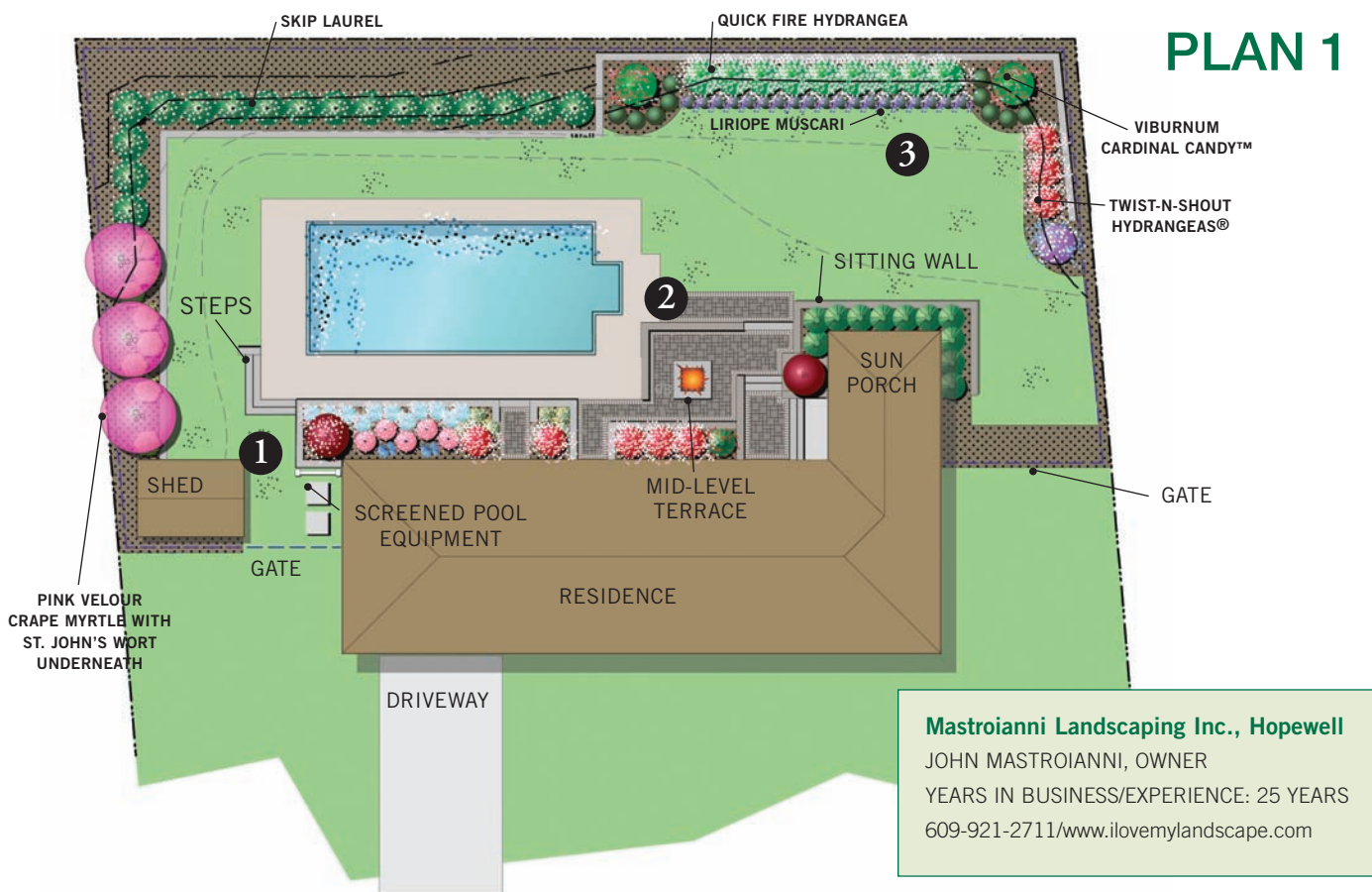
Three professionals offer creative solutions for the much-needed makeover of a Mercer County backyard BY LISA RACKLEY

WHEN A EWING COUPLE bought their 1960s-era house two years ago, they knew the property would need a makeover, so three landscape professionals were invited to come up with designs to beautify the backyard and provide solutions to several problems. The homeowners will tackle the exterior of the home first (such as siding and gutters), a sun porch second and then the backyard. However, they want to plan the entire project upfront — even though it will be done in stages — to ensure all exterior elements complement each other.

The couple came up with a wish list and a \$30,000

budget for the backyard to see what options the landscape professionals could address.

When the costs to address the sloped areas around the pool began to come in around \$15,000 (half of the budget), the couple asked the landscape professionals to each come up with different plans to see the full potential of the backyard. This was done with the caution that the project might be scaled back, modified or done in stages to make it do-able financially while still creating an attractive yard for the owners and their two small dogs and to use for entertaining family and friends.



## WISH LIST

- ✓ Fix hazardous slopes around the swimming pool perimeter.
- ✓ Relocate pool equipment to the side of the house near a shed.
- ✓ Rebuild the concrete patio around the pool or replace it with pavers.
- ✓ Update the deck or replace it with a lower raised patio.
- ✓ Choose colorful, low-maintenance trees, plants and shrubs while keeping the landscape appropriate for the neighborhood of \$300,000 to \$500,000 homes.



**Top:** The homeowners had temporarily replaced a rotting exterior deck with repurposed Trex and white PVC railing. They also installed a new fence but the shrubs and trees planted by previous owners are lackluster. **Bottom left and center:** Two sloped embankments that raise the level of the pool create a safety hazard when walking and mowing and also give neighbors a full view of sunbathers. **Bottom, right:** The areas along the foundation are visually uninteresting except for some black-eyed susans (*Rudbeckia*) and blue 'Nikko' hydrangeas (*Hydrangea macrophylla*) and are broken up with concrete paths and grass. Inconveniently placed pool equipment is obtrusive when mowing lawn as well as an unappealing site for visitors entering through the side gate.

## project details

### ENTRANCE FROM LEFT OF DRIVEWAY (1)

- Relocate pool equipment to the side of the house behind a new lattice screen fence.
- Add a raised planter across the rear foundation of the house to unify the space.
- Add a retaining wall around the pool, creating a thin but usable lawn area and allowing proper access to the shed.
- Add L-shaped stairs that lead to the pool area.
- Stain the concrete pool surround for a custom look (pavers are another option).

### SUN PORCH AND DECK AREA (2)

- Replace the deck with a midlevel terrace and a masonry fire-pit/patio area (defined by planter and sitting walls). Pavers, walls and plantings add color and textural interest.
- Add a barbecue area on the terrace that's accessible from the house and the pool area. The homeowners could add an outdoor eating area instead.

- Add a sitting wall around the sun porch to define a lawn play area for children and pets to run and play.

### PERIMETER (3)

- On the left side of the yard, add three pink crape myrtles (*Lagerstroemia indica* 'Whit III' Pink Velour®) with yellow St. John's Wort (*Hypericum* 'Hidcote' or *Hypericum perforatum*) tucked underneath them.
- In the same area, Skip Laurel evergreens (*Schipkaensis laurel*) screen the views of the neighboring property and hide a corner embankment.
- At the back right are Quick Fire hydrangeas (*Hydrangea paniculata*) and Liriope 'Big Blue' (*Liriope muscari*). They are bordered on the left and right corners by arched masses of Nikko Deutzia (*Deutzia gracilis* 'Nikko' ) and Viburnum Cardinal Candy™ (*Viburnum dilatatum* 'Henneke'), which have interesting blooms and berries from early spring into the winter.

These two computer-generated photo enhancements by Mastroianni Landscaping Inc. (which can be done for additional fees) show a three-dimensional view of the design plan, including a colored concrete patio, a mid-level paved terrace that leads to the sun porch and simulated lawn areas with plants, flowers and trees.



## budget breakdown

### OPTION A: \$59,800

- Deck demolition.
- Sitting wall around the sunroom.
- Fire pit and adjacent sitting walls.
- Pavers in fire-pit area, including steps.
- Midlevel terrace.
- Level lawn areas, including around the pool, shed and an uneven area on the right side of the backyard.
- Three planters with sitting walls and a drain along the planters between the pool and the house foundation.
- Concrete staining of the pool area.
- Relocation of pool equipment behind a new lattice screen fence.
- All landscaping (flower beds, trees, shrubs).
- Inexpensive soaker hose irrigation.

### OPTION B: \$36,800

- Level lawn areas, including around the pool, shed and an uneven area on the right side of the backyard.
- Three planters with sitting walls and drain along the planters between the pool and the house foundation.
- Concrete staining of the pool area.
- Relocation of the pool equipment behind a new lattice screen fence.
- All landscaping (flower beds, trees, shrubs).
- Inexpensive soaker hose irrigation.

### OPTION C: \$28,000

- Three foundation planters with sitting walls.
- Concrete staining of the pool area.
- Relocation of the pool equipment behind a new lattice screen fence.
- All landscaping (flower beds, trees, shrubs).
- Inexpensive soaker hose irrigation.
- Level the right side of the yard.

### OPTION D: \$28,000 AND LOWER

- The company would provide guidance on what work is important for practical and functional reasons. This option wouldn't greatly increase the home value because it no longer involves a concept that would tie the whole yard together and provide a wow factor. Also the homeowner should not expect to see a whole design concept.

#### NOTES:

*Professional irrigation systems and lighting can be added to maintain and enhance the property. Add \$5,000 to \$9,000 for each system.*

*"No matter how big or small your project might be, allowing a professional to help you come up with a budget and a plan and to get the work done properly the first time can help you meet your goals over time. It also helps you to do what makes sense for you and your family, still saving you money in the long run." — John Mastroianni*

COURTESY OF WOUTER HAGENS  
HAGENS/WIKICOMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG



St. John's Wort (*Hypericum* 'Hidcote') would sit under the Pink Velour® 'Whit III' crape myrtle on the plan. The yellow-orange perennials bloom from mid-spring to mid-fall.

COURTESY OF BAILEY NURSERY  
WWW.BAILEYNURSERY.COM

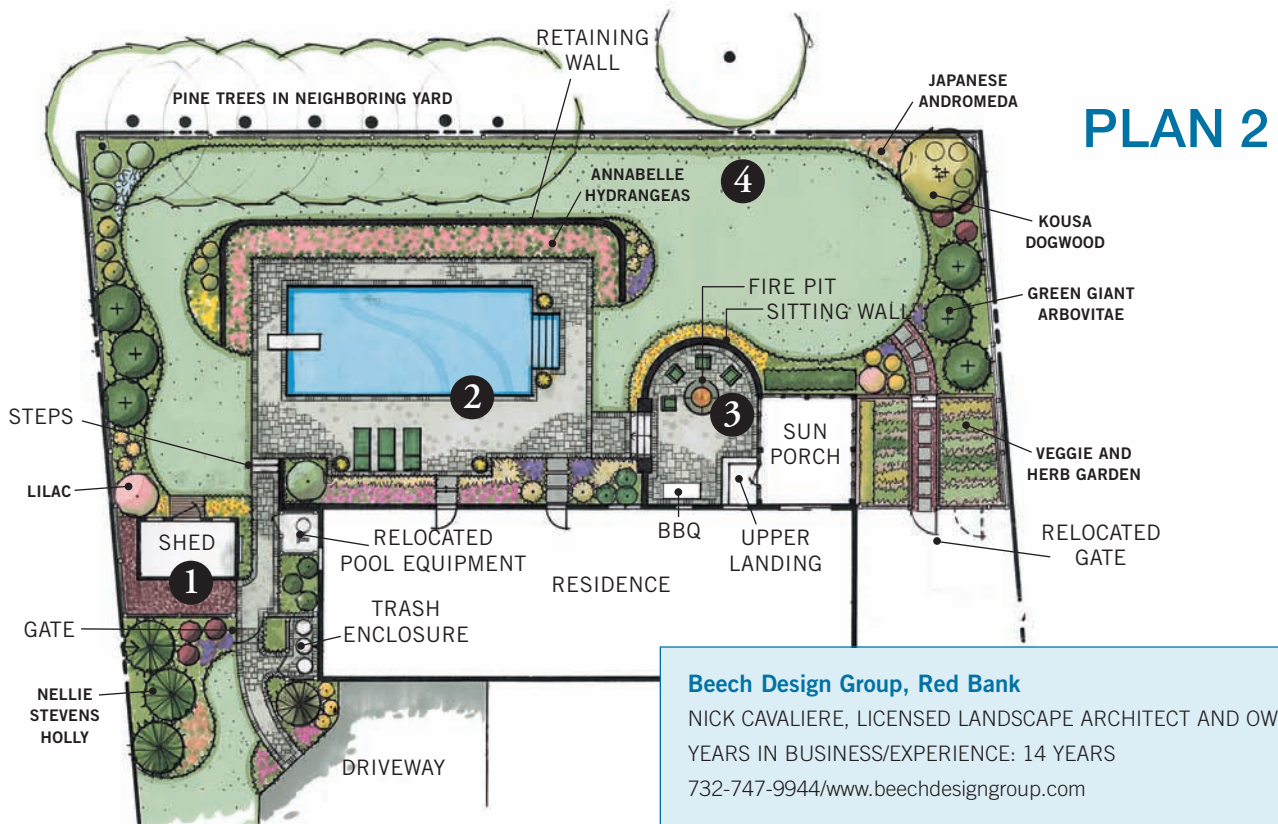


Twist-n-Shout® hydrangeas (*Hydrangea macrophylla*) would grace a section of the yard's perimeter. This lace-cap type of hydrangea is easy to prune and offers pink or purple blooms, depending on the soil's pH level.

COURTESY OF BAILEY NURSERY  
WWW.BAILEYNURSERY.COM



These bright pink perennials called Firewitch (*Dianthus gratianopolitanus* 'Firewitch') would brighten new planters along the foundation at the rear of the house. They are repeat bloomers and have fragrant flowers that attract butterflies and birds.



## project details

### ENTRANCE FROM LEFT OF DRIVEWAY (1)

- Keep the existing fence and gate near the driveway.
- Three new holly trees (*Ilex* x 'Nellie R. Stevens') along the left property line screen out the neighbor's driveway and camper.
- A four-foot-wide dry-laid paver walkway brings visitors around the side of the house and into the backyard.
- A hideaway lattice panel enclosure screens a trash/recycling area.
- Pool equipment is moved and hidden in a similar enclosure.
- Lattice panels added to the shed hold climbing vines such as morning glory (*Ipomea*) or clematis (*Clematis*).

### POOL AREA (2)

- The pool terrace, patio and walkway are tumbled brick pavers (higher-end budget) or saw-cut concrete tinted gray or tan to match neighboring pavers (more modest budget).
- The pool terrace (behind the garage) is increased to 12 feet to allow for lounge chairs. Large flower pots near the pool steps soften the hardscape and add color.
- A retaining wall at the back of the pool levels out the hazardous slope (the wall height is less than 30 inches, the point at which some towns require a guardrail). A row of pink 'Annabelle' Invincible® Spirit hydrangeas (*Hydrangea arborescens*) and some other shrubs keep people away from the wall and add color.

### PATIO/PORCH AREA (3)

- Replace the old deck with a raised terrace of pavers.
- Two steps down from the existing sun porch, a new free-standing wall provides additional seating and acts as a guardrail around the raised terrace.

- A built-in or movable fire pit provides a cozy spot to sit on chilly evenings.
- Columns and lights on both sides of the steps leading down to the pool can be added if the budget allows.

### PERIMETER (4)

- 'Green Giant' arbovitae (*Thuja plicata*) and assorted shrubs along the property lines create privacy and an attractive backdrop.
- Adding color are a lilac near the left corner by the shed and a Kousa dogwood (*Cornus Kousa*) and a relocated Japanese Andromeda tree (*Pieris japonica*) at back right. Forsythia plants (*Forsythia x intermedia*) looked spotty in their previous location along the back fence and were moved to the right side of the sun porch, creating a natural hedge.
- A mulch strip or two-foot narrow planting of Japanese pachysandra (*Pachysandra terminalis*) groundcover outlines the back fence for ease of lawn mowing.
- A row of cherry laurel (English Laurel or *Prunus laurocerasus*) along the back of the sun porch conceals its foundation.
- On the far right, an optional vegetable and herb garden makes good use of space beside the sun porch. The slope on this side of the yard is corrected with 2-by-12-inch cedar-board borders and a path of 2-by-2-foot bluestone stepping stones between crushed red gravel. A gate on this side of the yard is relocated to sit more in the center of the space.
- Grassy areas allow for horseshoes and volleyball during barbecues and give the couple's dogs and visiting children room to run and play.



'Annabelle' hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens*) would sit atop the retaining wall near the back of the pool. Also called Invincible Spirits,<sup>®</sup> they last from early summer to frost if pruned properly.



Purple Bloomerang lilac (*Syringa*) would be incorporated into flower beds throughout the yard and near the foundation of the house. This newer variety of lilac is mildew- and deer-resistant.



Greenleaf Neon Flash (*spirea*), a flowering shrub with bright magenta flowers in midsummer, would be mixed into the flower beds along the back of the foundation.

## budget breakdown

### PLAN A: \$60,200

- Demolition of concrete and site grading.
- Tumbled pavers for the pool terrace, raised patio, walkways, sitting wall, columns, steps and retaining wall at the back of the pool.
- Bull-nose pavers for pool coping.
- Built-in fire pit with a metal insert.
- Bluestone stepping stones and red gravel path.
- Irrigation.
- Plantings, sod mulch, bed preparation, topsoil, and vegetable and herb garden.
- Relocation of pool equipment.
- Lattice screening for trash and pool equipment and a trellis on the shed.

### PLAN B: \$31,500

- Demolition of concrete and site grading.
- Colored concrete pavement for the pool terrace and walkways.
- Bull-nose pavers for pool coping.
- Irrigation.
- Reduced plantings, soil mulch, planting bed preparation and topsoil.
- Relocation of pool equipment.
- Lattice screening for trash and pool equipment and a trellis on the shed.



COURTESY OF BELGARD HARDSCAPES

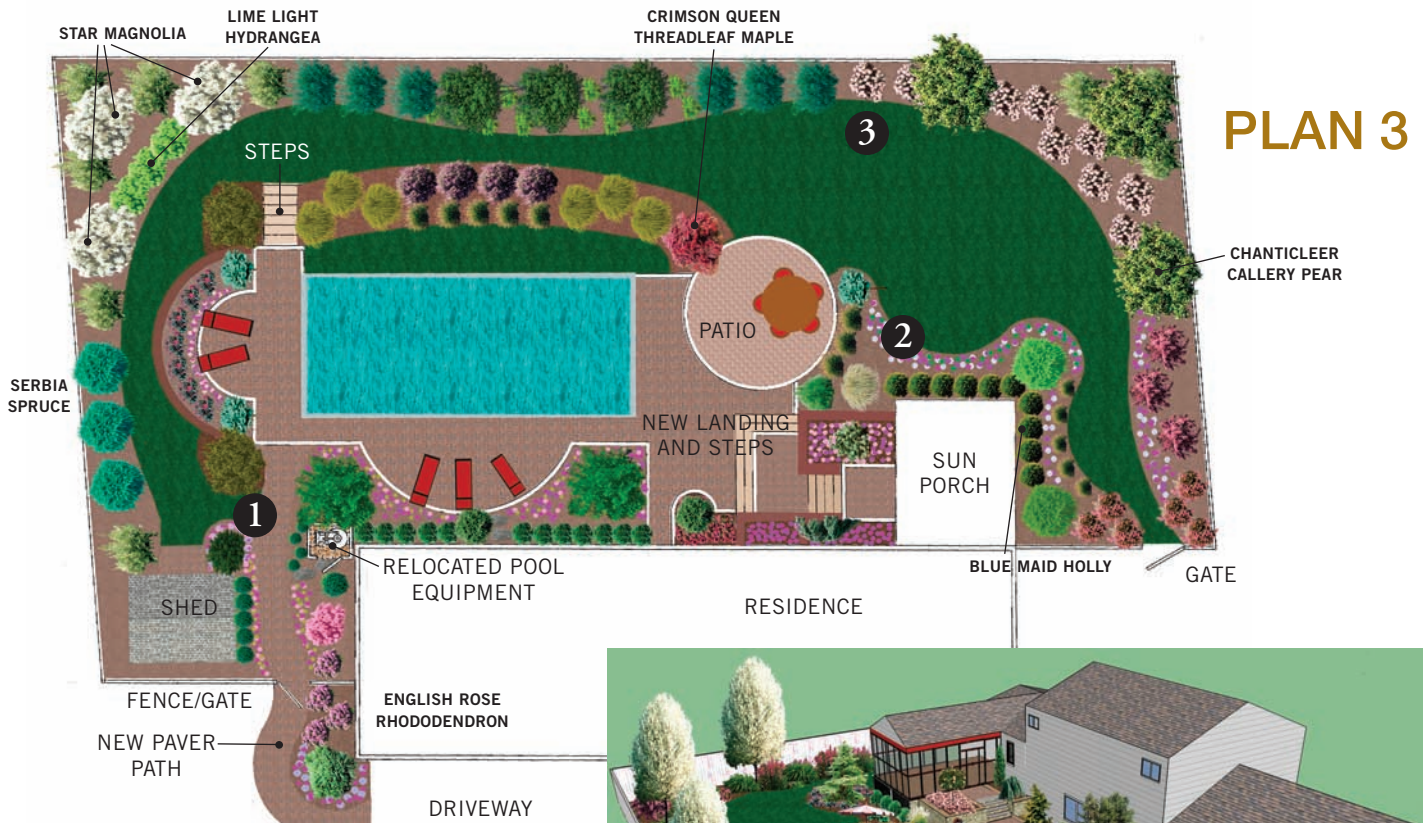
**Left:** Nick Cavaliere suggests various kinds of pavers as options for the retaining wall, raised patio area and fire-pit sitting wall. Shown is Belgard Hardscapes' "Country Manor" wall stone. Also shown are black-eyed susans (*Rudbeckia*), which he recommends around the outside wall of the new seating area and fire pit. **Below:** The hideaway enclosure from Walpole Woodworkers would hide trash bins and the relocated pool equipment while still allowing easy access. The company's Victorian Arch Lattice panels would add character and hold climbing plants on the side of the existing shed.



COURTESY OF WALPOLE WOODWORKERS



COURTESY OF WALPOLE WOODWORKERS



### Borst Landscape & Design, Allendale

JOSEPH TUTTLE, BSLA, LANDSCAPE DESIGN & SALES  
 YEARS IN BUSINESS/EXPERIENCE: 35 YEARS  
 201-785-9400/www.borstlandscape.com



## project details

### ENTRANCE FROM LEFT OF DRIVEWAY (1)

- A new paver path hugs the left side of the driveway and curves through the gate of the existing fence. Flower beds and plantings are added along the path and beside the existing shed.
- Relocate the pool equipment to an enclosure behind plantings at the side of the house.
- Replace pool patio with pavers and create curved sections for extra lounge chairs. Outline curved areas with flowering plants.
- Add six stone slab steps toward the back left of the pool area for access to the lower area of lawn. Excavate area.
- Install a retaining wall on pool's left side. Add plantings.

### SUN PORCH AND DECK AREA (2)

- Add a circular section to the paver patio near the sun porch for a table and chairs.
- Replace the deck with landings and steps leading to the sun porch. Planters surrounding these areas are filled with plants, shrubs or trees.
- Install curved flower beds around the sun porch to create a meandering path to the gate on the right side of the yard.

### PERIMETER (3)

- Line the perimeter with trees, shrubs and perennials. On the left side of the yard are 'English Rose' *Rhododendron* near the gate, Kousa dogwood (*Cornus Kousa*) on the left side and corner near stone-slab steps, Serbian Spruce, 'Star' magnolia (*Magnolia stellata*) in the back corner and 'Limelight' hydrangeas (*Hydrangea paniculata*), also in the back corner.
- Along the back are 'Manhattan' euonymus (*Euonymus kiautschovicus*), Shadblow serviceberry (*Amelanchier Canadensis*), 'Coast' leucothoe (*Leucothoe axillaries*) and assorted perennials.
- On the right side and around the sun porch are red-twig dogwood (*Cornus alba* 'Elegantissima'), Callery Pear (*Pyrus calleryana* 'Chanticleer'), variegated weigela (*Weigela florida*), holly (*Ilex meserveae* 'Blue Maid'), Deodar cedar (*Cedrus deodar*) and ornamental grass (*Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster').
- Planted areas at the back foundation of the house, pool and pool retaining wall include a mix of ornamental grasses, trees and perennials.



**From left:** Japanese maples are popular for their crisp red color. Borst suggests Threadleaf maple (*Acer palmatum* var. *dissectum* 'Crimson Queen'). • Callery pear (*Pyrus calleryana* 'Chanticleer'), native to China, resists most diseases. • The left corner of the backyard would feature 'Limelight' hydrangeas (*Hydrangea paniculata*), whose blooms turn from chartreuse in mid-summer to deep pink in fall.

## budget breakdown

Borst Landscape & Design divided the project into three phases — starting with hardscaping and then working from the house to the perimeter so the homeowner could see a natural progression. Expect to pay an additional fee for a three-dimensional view (see inset on page 113).

### **PHASE 1: \$15,241**

(SUN PORCH AND DECK AREA)

- Remove deck and the resulting debris.
- Install interlocking wall surrounding the sun porch.
- Install paved landings.

### **PHASE 2: \$36,897**

(PATIO AREA AND RETAINING WALL AROUND THE POOL)

- Remove concrete patio around the pool and the resulting debris.
- Remove old railroad ties that slope at the back of the yard.
- Grade property and remove debris. Prepare and plant new lawn areas.
- Add six stone-slab steps from the pool to the lower lawn, including the excavation needed for this project.

- Install paver patio areas and retaining wall at the left of the pool and remove debris.
- Install concrete border along the patio edge to hold the pavers in place.

### **PHASE 3: \$14,353**

(GARDEN PREPARATION AROUND PATIO, SUN PORCH, FOUNDATION)

- Prepare beds for new plantings. Transplant foundation plants already on site.
- Edge and rake out beds, dispose of debris and install topsoil, root fertilizer and peat moss soil.
- Install plant material and 10 yards of cedar mulch.

### **PHASE 4: \$16,138**

(PERIMETER GARDEN PREPARATION)

- Prepare beds for new plantings. Transplant foundation plants already on site.
- Edge and rake out beds, dispose of debris and install topsoil, root fertilizer and peat moss soil.
- Install plant material and 10 yards of cedar mulch.

Planting flower beds, shrubs and trees can be exciting and add value to your property. **Here are some tips when planning a landscape makeover:**

- ✓ Speak with and hire an accredited landscape professional, especially for a large project such as the one shown in this article, to help avoid costly errors.
- ✓ Look through landscaping books and magazines, attend garden tours and visit garden centers to learn what trees, shrubs and flowers you like, whether they grow in your climate and what level of maintenance they require.
- ✓ Beware of any business that offers design plans for free based solely on photos of your property. The plans may look good on paper, but the company may not take everything about your property into account and may not be equipped to help you execute the plan.
- ✓ Ask yourself questions: Do you enjoy spending a lot of time gardening? Do you want an irrigation system? A vegetable garden? An area to cook and entertain outdoors? Do you have children and pets that need specific areas? Do you want to have a pool now or in the future? Do you just want your lawn fertilized, cut and maintained?
- ✓ Get referrals and references from friends and relatives, interview potential companies and ask to see other jobs they've done in the area. The New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs ([www.njconsumeraffairs.gov](http://www.njconsumeraffairs.gov)) and The American Society of Landscape Architects ([www.asla.org](http://www.asla.org)) are examples of places to check for license numbers and certifications.
- ✓ Ask about upfront (non-refundable) fees for consultations before scheduling an interview with a landscaper. A design plan can take hours or days to create, depending on the size of the property, so don't assume all companies offer them for free.
- ✓ Before you sign, always, always read the fine print and ask questions if you don't understand your contract or if you have concerns about budget revisions. Ask for a line-by-line estimate of the work so you have a clear picture of what's included and what's not. For example, what happens if a construction vehicle damages your sidewalk or new plants die within a certain time after the project is completed?
- ✓ Understand that landscapers have operating costs just like any other company and have to make a profit to stay in business.
- ✓ Knowing what you can afford and what you want will help you and your landscape professional achieve your goals and perhaps some pleasant surprises you didn't expect.

THANKS TO BARBARA ABITA, WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THIS SECTION OF THE ARTICLE. SHE IS A CERTIFIED LANDSCAPE DESIGNER (BY WAY OF THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN) AT DAVID H. WRIGHT LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT LLC IN BRANCHVILLE.

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