



Hardscapes Around the Home

Hardscaping has become one of the hottest trends in exterior home improvement. It is a subspecialty of landscaping that involves stone or concrete and adds continuity and flow between your house and garden in the form of a patio, walkway, decorative wall, sitting wall, pillar, retaining wall, curb or driveway. These hardscape additions to your landscape can be created from concrete, brick, wood, pavers, and stone. There are a wide variety of materials to pick from to compliment your home's design and your budget.

When you begin researching hardscape options for your home, there are several things that should be considered. First, hardscaping should compliment the architecture of the home and work with the lines of the house and the materials used on the residence. If the home has rectangular forms, then rectangular shaped patios, planting beds, fences, walls, and water features will best match. Clean and simple designs are always best, since

combining various forms can be difficult to achieve successfully.

Next, realizing that both the front and back yard of your home should be an extension of the your style will present the perfect opportunity to create the atmosphere you desire. For example, wide walkways and landings will say "come on in" and comfortably direct people to the front door. "Many of our designs include front entry terraces, where a bench or small table and chairs can be placed," said Patrick Devereaux with Stone Oak Landscaping, Inc. In the back yard, many have made an extension of their home by incorporating outdoor kitchens, firepits and fireplaces. "We are seeing interest in outdoor dining and cooking, water in the form of a pond, waterfall, or fountain, seatwalls to create a visual boundary and provide additional seating, and structures like pergolas and arbors."

Finally, an element that many of us forget about is vehicle access to the site

Natural stone has always been very popular in our region due to its availability; however, concrete products have come a long way aesthetically in recent years and now provide an appealing alternative to stone as well as some cost benefits.

- Mike La Rosa,
La Rosa Landscape
Company, Inc.

where the landscaping needs to take place. This can become a huge issue if it is not well planned for.

All hardscape projects vary in size and design. Here are some of the more common hardscapes you might find to be beneficial in your landscape design.



RETAINING WALLS

The most common hardscape is a retaining wall. Retaining walls can serve different functionalities but in general they are used as a structural element. These walls manipulate grades and need to be professionally designed and engineered to incorporate the proper materials, drainage, and installation. Other purposes for retaining walls are to give a flat space three dimensions or added texture, making an area more interesting and exciting. They may also be used to carve out additional space for a yard or garden, and to construct egress walls for basement windows.

STAMPED CONCRETE

A hardscape trend that seems to be getting more attention lately is stamped concrete. Slab concrete is poured for driveways, walkways, and patios. Prior to the concrete drying, patterns and textures are pressed into

the concrete, giving it the look of a surface of your choice. There are many different surfaces to choose from, such as, cobblestone, brick, pavers, and wood. Pigment is also usually added to further duplicate the look of these patterns. Some maintenance is usually required with stamped concrete, but usually the benefits outweigh the required maintenance.

BRICK AND PAVERS

Other hardscapes, such as brick and pavers, have been showing up in all areas of homeowners' yards. Pavers are typically manufactured out of clay or concrete. Many landscape designs can be made from pavers because they can easily create unique shapes, textures, and designs. Many times with an uneven surface, brick and pavers are used because they will conform to the surface. They also provide more warmth and interest in any landscape.

All homeowners need to look at the big picture and make sure the landscape and hardscape are designed together. Paying attention to all the details will result in a quality project. With this in mind, it is important to begin working with a landscape professional early in the planning process in order to achieve the best results. Professionally designed and installed landscapes are an investment. However, homes with well designed and maintained landscapes sell faster and appraise higher.

Bret Achtenhagen of BRet Achtenhagen's Seasonal Services, Mike La Rosa of La Rosa Landscape Company, Inc., and Patrick Devereaux of Stone Oak Landscapes, Inc. shared their expertise for this article.

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It is important to work with a contractor who understands that the foundation of a paver patio or a retaining wall is critical to the long term integrity of the structure.

– Bret Achtenhagen,
Achtenhagen's Seasonal Services

