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Dreamscapes

At home in the
great outdoors

By Mary Stipe

Close your eyes and imagine the landscape of your dreams. Odds are your dreamscape features more than a uniformly green lawn and perennial borders. Once content with a deck or patio, a swimming pool and a charcoal- or gas-fired grill, homeowners today have bigger plans. If you envisioned an elaborate outdoor kitchen with space for dining and entertaining, you're right on trend. Thinking of adding a waterfall? That, too, is a growing category.



Photograph by Elizabeth Glasgow

Here and on the preceding page, Greg Darvin of Pristine Pools and River Rock in East Hampton created a resort-like ambiance for an Amagansett homeowner. Three fountains were incorporated into the swimming pool, adding the soothing sounds of cascading water to spaces for sunbathing and entertaining. The stone fireplace anchors a sunken conversation area. Darvin built a "window" into the stone, framing a view of the swimming pool from the back of the fireplace.

According to a recent poll of their members conducted by the American Society of Landscape Architects, demand for outdoor great rooms that incorporate the functions of living room, dining room and kitchen into one space for family gatherings and entertaining is expected to grow in 2008. "Homeowners are reconnecting with their

outdoor space, often in creative and imaginative ways," noted ASLA president Perry Howard. "It's no surprise that people want to take elements that work so well inside their home and re-create them outside."

Just as elaborate built-in cooking stations have become an integral part of the outdoor kitchen — reflecting the

popularity of semi-pro ranges and cooktops indoors — a fireplace, or a more casual firepit, is often the focal point of the outdoor great room.

"The use of stone as a building material locally has changed and given us so much more freedom," says Greg Darvin, owner of Pristine Pools and River Rock in East Hampton. "Wood has gotten so expensive that, in certain cases, masonry is a more cost-effective choice."

One of the benefits of using stone, explains Garvin, is the ability to create smooth transitions within the landscape. "You can go from a very formal dining area with a fireplace," he says, "and then create a much more casual area with stepping stones placed right into the lawn."

Those stepping-stones may lead to a garden area with a stone bench for quiet meditation, to a circular "room" built around a firepit or to a pond or other water feature. "People definitely want to expand their living space outside the walls of their residences," says Timothy Barry, general manager of the landscape division at Dodds & Eder in Oyster Bay. "Taking a piece of property and dividing it into specific use areas is very important, whether it's lounging or conversational areas.

"The biggest detail, though," adds Barry, "is to keep it simple. After all, it's an outdoor space; you're exposed to the elements. You want to bring in the best materials, those that will stand the test of time."

Whether close to the Sound or the sea or nearer the middle of the island, the sound of flowing water is a popular addition to Long Island landscapes. "Water features are expected to rise from \$899 million to \$932 million in sales according to the Nursery Retailers Market Share Report for 2008," notes Scott Langdon, co-owner with Michael Rappaport of Aquatic Gardens LLC. "That's a growth rate of 12 percent." The partners, who specialize in installing water features such as ponds, waterfalls and streams, say "pondless" waterfalls are very big right now. "The water goes into stones," explains Langdon. "There's no standing water." Often used in commercial applications, pondless waterfalls are typically chosen when a homeowner wants a waterfall in the front of a property or in an unfenced area where a pond might present a danger to small children.

The most successful water features appear to be part of the natural landscape, rather than manmade additions, says Eric Hagenbruch of Finesse Landscape Design. "Everyone figures the higher the waterfall, the more dramatic. But some properties don't call for one," he explains. "Sometimes just a simple bowl of bubbling water is a better choice to bring soothing sounds and movement into the garden." 