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COVER STORY

Casual elegance

*Country estate blends old and new,
formal and informal*

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A large, multi-story brick house with a prominent chimney and a gabled roof, surrounded by a lush garden with a stone path leading to a swimming pool. The house features a mix of old and new architectural elements, including large windows and a stone path. The garden is well-maintained with various plants and a swimming pool in the foreground.

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When the owner of a Connecticut country estate retained Hoffman Landscapes to renovate an existing landscape, his charge was simple and straightforward – make it great. Over a nine-month period, from fall 2005 to spring 2006, the Wilton, Connecticut, design/build company accommodated its client’s directive by meticulously blending together many of the traditional landscape elements already in place at the five-acre estate with a more contemporary look.

The owner ultimately selected Hoffman because its design team shared a like vision for the property. “We listened and responded to his view, rather than imposing our design on him,” relates Neil Brunetti, lead landscape designer on the project. “Constructing a series of multi-level terraces in the backyard to create a courtyard effect was part of that vision.”

Hoffman’s team built stairs with turf landings to make a visual transition from the home to lush, level lawns. In the

courtyard, up to 100 guests can dine and enjoy the masses of flowering shrubs and perennials, many of which were hand-dug from a property 200 miles away. The team planted 20,000 vinca and 15,000 perennials and ornamental grasses to soften the sloping topography in the back yard and aid in soil stabilization. It also constructed new stonewalls, seamlessly matching old and new stonework, and installed a new free-form swimming pool.

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“Instead of overlaying a design on the landscape, our team incorporated the design into the existing landscape.” — Mike Hoffman, CLP

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“Among objectives, the owner wanted a design that would complement his newly restored home,” explains Mike Hoffman, CLP, president of Hoffman Landscapes. “He wanted to be able to host both large formal and informal gatherings in a setting that preserved as much of the existing landscape as possible, including extensive rock outcroppings and mature trees. He insisted that we protect and preserve the old trees during construction, showing particular concern for a majestic maple. The tree now gracefully shades part of his new pool and, in the fall, its color display reflects beautifully off the deep blue water hue.”

Before beginning construction, Hoffman arborists fenced off mature trees to protect their root systems. A team also dismantled all the old stonewalls by hand and neatly stacked the old stones on pallets to preserve the mossy, aged appearance.

“The design called for a gradual transition from a formal to a more natural landscape as one moves away from the house,” Hoffman explains. “The terrace transitions from a pattern bluestone against the house to a more relaxed, oversized irregular fieldstone closer to the pool. The pool was placed at the edge of a hillside and is tucked within 10 feet of a thicket of maple and dogwood trees. Despite a natural shape, the pool accommodates lap swimming and a spa.”

The design and construction process was rather fluid, and the company and homeowner took advantage of opportuni-

ties. One of those opportunities arose during the excavation of the pool, relates Brunetti. “The original design called for a planting bed that would appear to be an island at the edge of the pool. During excavation, though, our crews unearthed a 5,000-pound flat rock. We seized the opportunity to substitute the rock for the planting bed. By pouring a concrete pillar to balance the stone near the pool’s edge, we were able to create the illusion that the stone is about to float off the top of the pool.”

Before the project was completed, the Hoffman team ended up moving rocks weighing upwards of 25,000 pounds and placing them strategically as visual accents throughout the five-acre estate.

“This is one of those projects where you are challenged to make the design fit the uniqueness of the property,” says Hoffman. “Instead of overlaying a design on the landscape, our team incorporated the design into the existing landscape. We melded together a steeply sloped topography, huge rocks, and mature trees into a plan that gave the owner the casual, elegant vision he had in mind.” Upon project completion, the company was retained to maintain the property. 🐦

Environmental Improvement Awards Program

Submitted by: Hoffman Landscapes, Inc.

Type of Award: Grand

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