

# landscape design



Native trees and ornamental grasses surround the yard; beyond the lawn at the right is a 12-foot-wide vegetative buffer that edges the wetlands setback.





# NO-SPY ZONE

How to create a neighbor-friendly screen of trees, rocks, and grasses to shield your family's outdoor life in even a small backyard

BY JANE K. DOVE

**The homeowners had a vision:** lazing on their new backyard terrace, watching their kids frolic in the new pool. But they yearned for *privacy*, and their house stood on a highly visible lot, measuring less than an acre, in New Canaan. Just to fit the pool, the terrace, and a children's play area into the backyard would take a cunning designer. The required 25-foot wetlands setback would, at one point, come within a foot of the pool shell. This made it hard even to obtain a permit for construction. But the owners' first concern was privacy. Could their landscape designer create a neighbor-friendly visible shield—a screen around their backyard that their neighbors, too, would find pleasing?

Brian Cossari, a landscape architect for Hoffman Landscapes, Inc., a Connecticut design/build firm, led the team that took the project on. "None of the homeowners' requests were out of the ordinary," he notes. "Many families here in Connecticut face these same challenges. Residential lots abut one another, so sometimes adding elements like pools and patios is like putting a puzzle together—outside."

Cossari had to address the wetlands issue first. "We solved the problem with a site plan that included a vegetative buffer for wetland mitigation," he says. "The 12-foot-wide buffer provides a natural check on runoff. We bridged the gap between the pool and the buffer with a narrow grass strip. The pool and related earthwork were approved with the required permit."

Planting birches, red twig dogwoods, and a selection of flowering native trees enhanced the appearance of the new



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ABOVE: A three-tiered patio provides several distinct recreation areas and provides a view of the children swimming in the pool. LEFT: Sturdy concrete unit pavers create a casual, rustic look.

buffer. Large rocks were interspersed for visual interest. As time goes by, the wooded area will fill out, creating a varied backdrop. The project was fully completed in June 2007; last April, the vegetative screen and buffer planted in 2006 withstood a 100-year storm.

Once the crucial wetlands issues were resolved, Cossari moved on to ensuring privacy. He retained native specimens and used new plantings to enhance the screening provided by existing mature trees. Tall ornamental grasses were incorporated into the design. The result is a tranquil backyard enclave that provides plenty of privacy, even though the neighbors are not far away.

Cossari made every effort to preserve existing trees and plants and integrate them with new ones. The plantings selected include a variety of species, among them tall ornamental grasses, birches, dogwoods, hemlocks, and hydrangeas. Bright seasonal color is provided by rosebushes, day lilies, and a variety of easy-to-maintain perennials. Cossari chose earthy light-brown and light-red concrete unit pavers—they look like rocks, and are grouted with polymetric sand—to harmonize with the plantings and create a casual, rustic look. The original maple and beech trees were pruned; they provide a tall focal point as well as needed shade. As an added bonus, the pool and patio area is screened from the road by a four-foot-tall wrought-iron fence and a planted

mixture of bushy fairy roses, catmint, and daylilies. The lower grade of the pool shields it from sight from the road, providing an extra measure of the privacy sought by the owners.

“The entire project is a satisfying answer to a mix of challenges often posed by suburban sites,” Cossari declares. His peers at the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET), a national association of green-industry professionals, obviously agree. In the association’s Environmental Improvement competition last October (it recognized superior design in the beautification and preservation of the landscape around us), Hoffman Landscapes won one of PLANET’s grand-prize awards for its ingenious solution to this outdoor puzzle. *TME*

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Hoffman Landscapes, Inc., a design/build firm established in 1987, has 75 trained landscape architects, designers, horticulturalists, masons, and carpenters. The company manages projects from the idea stage through excavation, installation, and planting; its offices in Wilton, Greenwich, and Washington serve all of Fairfield, Westchester, and Litchfield Counties. [www.HoffmanLandscapes.com](http://www.HoffmanLandscapes.com); 203.834.9656

