

Landscape designers can make your dreams become reality

Landscaping your home is an important investment. Research shows that a well landscaped home sees an average of a 15% increase in the real estate value, according to the American Landscape Contractors Association.

But not every-
one is a do-it-yourselfer. For those people, hiring a professional landscape designer is the perfect way to go.

Joanne Kostecy, owner of the award-winning Joanne Kostecy Garden Design, says there are several reasons homeowners should consider hiring a professional. "A professional will listen to you and your family's needs and will give solutions to the problems you may have. The professional will give you a design that is probably more than you ever dreamed of."

Kostecy, a member of the Pennsylvania Landscape and Nursery Association's (PLNA) Board of Directors and a governor of the American Association of Nurserymen (AAN), has had the opportunity to create new outdoor living environments for numerous customers in the Allentown region.

"When you talk to a designer, you can identify your needs - whether they are a children's play area, a vegetable garden, or a sitting area - and the professional team design the space to meet those needs. The professional asks questions to see if you like ideas being proposed and works within your budget. I think it's my job to give the customer what he or she wants."

Taking an ordinary space and creating a special outdoor living area or entry area is the goal of a professional landscape designer. "We consider unity of design and space, creating beauty, a peaceful setting, and connecting our customers with nature as aspects of our design," she says, adding, "The designed space draws people into it."

Kostecy says the fronts of homes have always been done with foundation plantings. "There are so many other ways to develop an entry space. That area should invite you and your visitors into your home. A designer can help create an entry way that has intrigue and depth. It creates a focal point and makes you want to be a part of it."

"When a professional landscaper sees your property for the first time," she explains, "she or he sees things you may not have noticed. Their trained eyes find ways to enhance your property. We offer spaces that people may have envisioned, but don't know how to achieve."

Kostecy has discovered that many new homeowners often don't spend much time outside their new homes because there's

too much going on in a space. "The knowledge a professional brings can help your property have a full year of continual bloom, achieving the effect with flowers, berries, bark colors, and seed heads of ornamental grasses and perennials."

In addition, Kostecy cautions homeowners that some discount retailers may be selling plant material which is inappropriate based on the amount of gardening you want to do.

"Professionals are familiar with the material and can advise you what's best suited for your home."

And for do-it-yourselfers, a landscape designer can help you create an area you want to work in. "Just because you have a designed space, doesn't mean you can't continue to garden," Kostecy notes. "The designer can work with you to choose the plants material which is inappropriate based on the amount of gardening you want to do."



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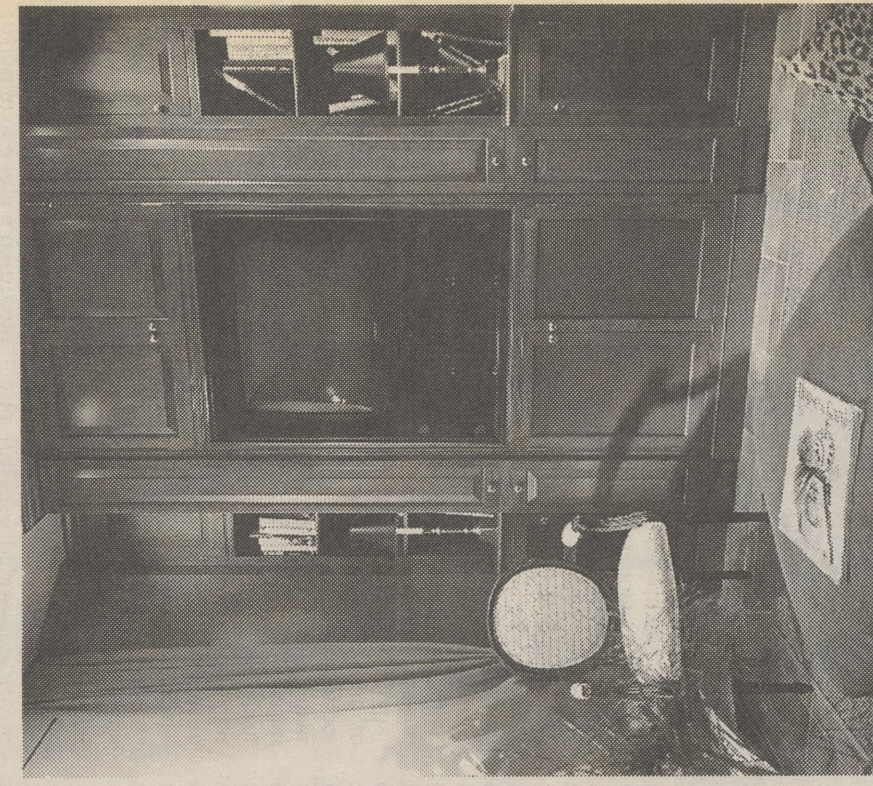


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Like grandma's day, kitchen is today's hub of the home



Wood Is Winner
Wood is the preferred material for today's cabinets, according to Maria Weingard, an award-winning Rutt designer, and this is true whether a kitchen is California contemporary, a Mid-western country style, or a neoclassic for a New York townhouse.

Weingard feels this is because "wood is warm and familiar."
"It's a true classic," she says, "it's always right. And these days we see it in more natural finishes. When cabinetry is painted, it is often combined with natural wood frames. Or base cabinets might be painted a deep traditional color while upper cabinets are stained in a natural wood tone. This is part of new interest in the unlit kitchen, which appears to have been assembled over time, combining pieces that look as if they were collected by successive generations."

However, at the same time as the heirloom look is coming on strong, Rutt's designers say that kitchen lay-outs are changing drastically.

Oertle mentions the new under-counter refrigeration/freezer units as one ingredient that is changing the basic U-shaped kitchen, and Pettigrew talks enthusiastically about today's sophisticated electronics.

A lot more than dinner is cooking in today's kitchen. Over the past decade, this space has emerged as the hub of family life, and noted designer Debi Oertle of Rutt of Chicago even calls it the "nerve center of the household."

The family kitchen has become a multi-media message center/activity room/communal post," says Oertle. "It's a busy place that goes way beyond cooking and dining. It's where we watch a movie, check our E-mail, surf the Net, curl up with a book, craft a wreath, or play a mean game of Scrabble."

"In a way, the kitchen has returned to the role it played at grandma's house. Once more it's the gathering place for family and friends, the warm heart of the home... And this means that the kitchen has to be as beautiful and comfortable as it is well-equipped and functional."

Planning Counts

That's a tall order, admits Oertle, but with good planning it can all come together.

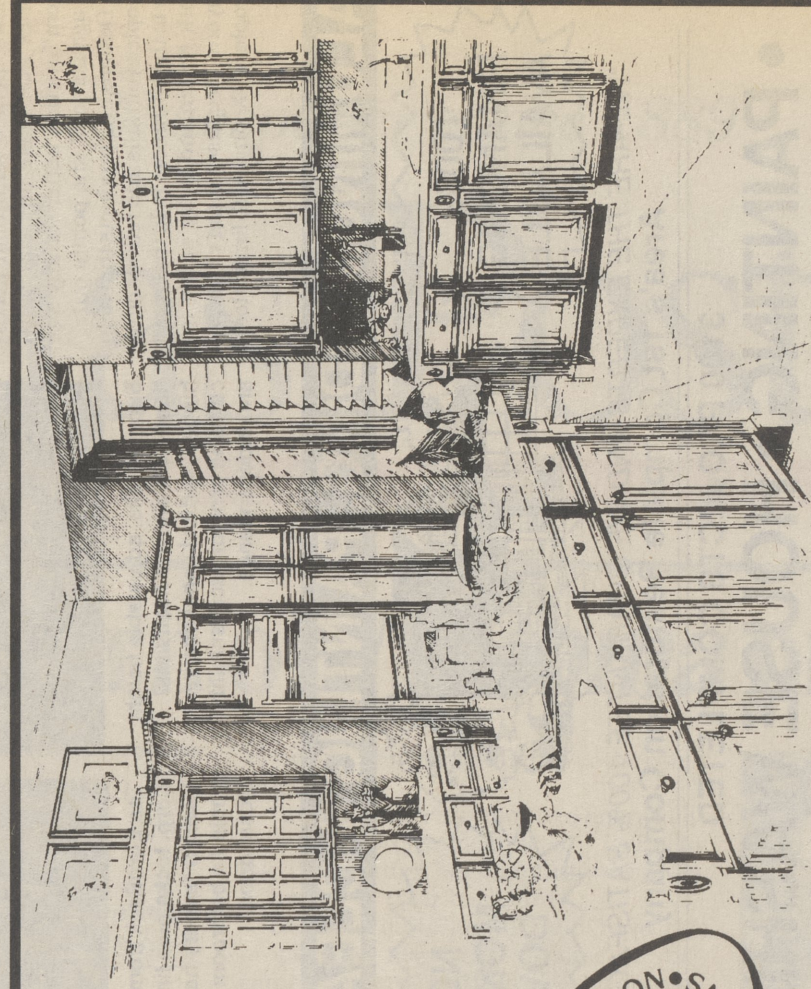
"First, accept that there is no one-plan-fits-all," she says. "A family kitchen is a highly personal room, and since a number of people are involved, it's a good idea to let everyone have his or her say before anything is even put down on paper."

Cabinets Set Style

The warm, good looks you want in your kitchen are actually the easiest to design, according to Oertle and Pettigrew. That's because it's the cabinetry that sets the style, so once you've decided the nitty-gritty of the kitchen's functions, select a cabinet design and finish that you love.

But like most professional designers, Oertle and Pettigrew prefer to work with custom cabinetry. "When the cabinetry is crafted to order, it's so much easier to fit everything into a kitchen," explains Oertle.

The home entertainment center is often part of today's family kitchen. The beautiful cabinetry offers lots of good-looking storage. Even the columns pull out to reveal collections of tapes and CDs.



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