



View from patio of a home site on Lake Lanier. This project, completed by Unique Outdoor Concepts, makes the lake seem like an extension of their pool.

Landscaping for Today's Enjoyment (continued from page 17)

and bonsai trees. The sidewalk and driveway have matching small round stones embedded on either side, and there are no sharp angles on the walk or driveway. With a few choice evergreen juniper trees, the front yard is transformed into a Japanese garden.

Stained or stamped concrete

Stained or stamped concrete driveways and walkways are going to be the norm in the near future. Cobblestone has become more popular to line driveways, but it requires deep barriers to keep aggressive grasses, like Bermuda grass, out of the cobblestones. Be creative and take advantage of the numerous colors of stain and stamped concrete now available.

Good landscapers guarantee their plants for a year and will replace anything that dies in that time frame. If you have questions or concerns, they will get right back to you to address the concern. When the landscaping is complete, the yard should be a functional, low-maintenance work of art to enjoy today as well as adding home value in the future.

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Investing in outdoor living in this economy is a financial windfall!

With the downturn in the housing market, many homeowners are questioning whether it makes sense to make a financial investment in improving their homes over the next few months. The answer is a resounding "yes!" Your home is typically going to be the most important and valuable asset you have and is a keystone to financial security for the future.

Keeping your property current and relevant to evolving lifestyle trends is the secret to maximizing the value of your property. More and more homeowners are choosing to create a quality outdoor living space as an extension to their home and are enjoying a new dimension in living. They are realizing long-term financial rewards in the process.

According to well-respected publications *Smart Money*, *Money Magazine* and *The Wall Street Journal*—a professionally designed and installed outdoor living area is the improvement most likely to offer the highest return on your financial investment.

Nationally, this type of project recovers about 115 – 120% of the original investment. In the South however, the average is even higher because homeowners can enjoy outdoor living year-round!

Outdoor living projects have proven to be a worthwhile investment. They typically take 2 – 4 months for completion, and are the only home improvement that consistently returns more than the cost of the project.

When preparing for your contractor's site visit please have the following at hand:

- A copy of your plat to send with them for planning your designs and submitting to the county for proper permitting
- A time frame for start/completion of your project (special dates or functions)
- Items that you must have included—vs. a "wish list" that can be planned in advance for the future
- A realistic budget on the items that you must have included in the initial phase of your project
- A rough idea of the style (shape, size, water falls, spa, fountains) of the water feature desired as well as fencing and landscaping ideas and budget
- Copies of other projects (from magazines and the internet) in order to discuss the items that you do/do not want/like (and have fun with that!)
- With good planning, construction projects do not have to be stressful. Make up your mind to have fun with each phase and truly enjoy the experience with your mate

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