



PHOTO: CAROLYN BATES

Adding to the Elements

Installing stone walls and rock accents, patios, and even walking trails can only heighten the natural beauty of any Vermont home-owners' property.

By Leslie Wright

Cindy Knauf of Stowe uses rocks (*above*) as natural art. "This granite boulder, found on the property, was hollowed out by a local stone sculptor to collect rainwater," says Knauf. "This 'event' along the path is meant to refer to *tsukubai*, a water basin along a Japanese tea-garden path." (*Right*) Scott Wunderle of Terrigenous Landscape Architectural Services in Chester says that dry stone walls require little maintenance and last forever.

LANDSCAPING IN VERMONT, like living in Vermont, presents its challenges. Whether it's frost heaves in spring or road salt in the winter, these are facts of life in this part of the world. Overcoming nature's obstacles is what gives the Green Mountain State its character. Landscapers here, the smart ones, know that it's not worth fighting what they have no power to change and that working with the masterpiece that Mother Nature has already created makes much more sense than trying to fight her. Think Thoreau versus Wordsworth. In Vermont, Walden Pond is a better fit than an English topiary garden.

Scott Wunderle and his wife Jana, both graduates of Rhode Island School of Design, see art in the natural landscape and draw on the shapes and forms they find on home-owners' properties for their own designs. The couple owns Terrigenous, a landscape firm in Chester in Southern Vermont.

"The work we do is pretty secluded, for the most part. It's rural and it lends to pulling design work from the architecture of the house or the landscape," says Scott.

A project the couple is currently working on is at a site with a stream and beaver ponds. The Wunderles created tiered patios out of dark-gray limestone from Ireland with curved circular stone walls surrounding them. Each tier is joined by curved gran-

ite steps 16-inches wide. The overall effect is to mirror the property's beaver ponds.

IN VERMONT, STONEWALLS ARE as endemic as beaver ponds. Dry stone walls—walls made by laying stone on stone without mortar—are a wise choice for form and function. Vermont's springtime freeze-and-thaw cycle—the same one that makes the sap flow from the state's sugar maples—causes the ground to heave. Stone walls made with mortar crack as a result, notes dry stone wall specialist Deane Rubright of Shoreham.

"Mortar walls really aren't built to hold by themselves," says Rubright, who recently built a dry-laid retaining wall 75 feet long and 7 feet high that holds up a camp on Lake Champlain.

Rubright looks to the bounty of natural materials he finds in the Addison County areas where he works. There's the craggy gray Panton stone from the Champlain Valley floor and round field stone from mountain towns like Ripton and slate from Forest Dale. Across the lake in New York State, Rubright finds creamy-colored sandstone. He once built a wall entirely out of white limestone he found on a property in Middlebury. Each stone was moss-covered and selecting the stone took more than a week. "(The client) wanted it to look old and she

PHOTO: SCOTT WUNDERLE



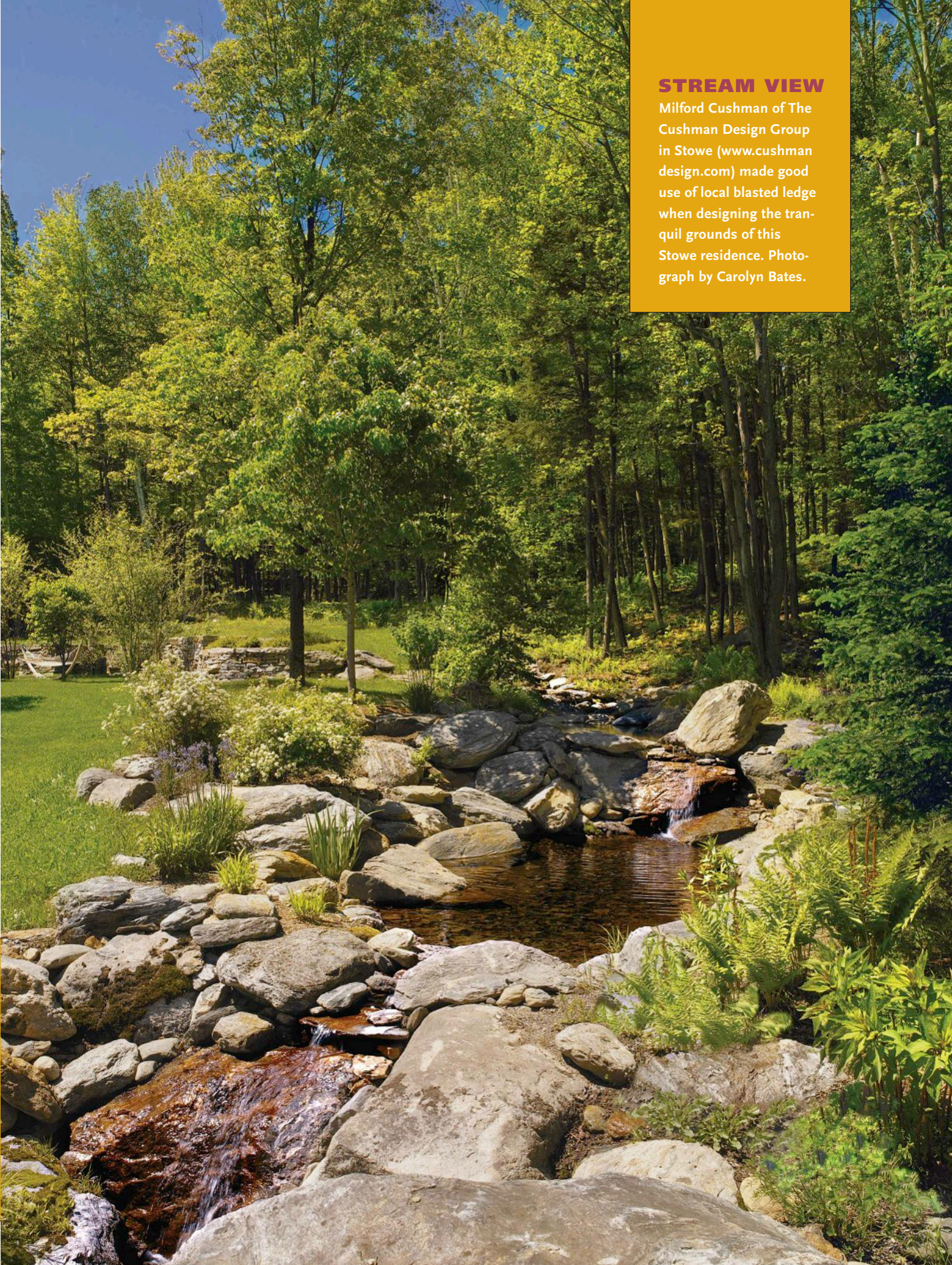


wanted to use her own product,” Rubright says. “As soon as we were done, it looked like it had been there forever.”

Depending on the size and dimensions of the wall, a dry stone wall can cost at least twice as much as one made with concrete blocks, says Scott Wunderle, but they last forever with little or no maintenance.

PONDS CAN BE AN AFFORDABLE alternative to stone walls, says Mike Lizzari, operations manager at Landshapes in Richmond. Like stone walls, ponds are a feature that’s right at home in the Vermont outdoors. Landshapes installs ponds starting at about \$3,200. With proper maintenance, ponds can be enjoyed nine months of the year and can be stocked with fish year-round, Lizzari says. “We’ve done swimming ponds in people’s back yards.

GARDEN VIEWS The work of Cindy Knauf, landscape architect, Stowe: *(Pond)* “To feel rooted to the ground and promote flow between inside and outside, the landscaped areas on the west side of the house were designed in terraces that step down the hill from the house foundation—the stepping stone path, the cut-flower garden, the wildflower meadow, the pond. The swimming pond in the background reflects the silhouettes of trees and the color of the sky, and draws the eye to the distant view.” *(Patio)* “So that the house appears settled into the land, the square pattern of the green slate in the upper terrace is repeated in the landscape in the purple slate patio, the teak tables that hold the bonsai plants, and the square mass of woodland iris which sweep around the base of the weeping white pine.” Photographs by Carolyn Bates.



STREAM VIEW


Milford Cushman of The Cushman Design Group in Stowe (www.cushman-design.com) made good use of local blasted ledge when designing the tranquil grounds of this Stowe residence. Photograph by Carolyn Bates.

GARDEN VIEW *Home owner: The Burton family, South Burlington*

“Our gardens were designed by George Zavis, a landscape architect who owns Hannabelle Garden & Company in Cambridge,, Vermont, with his wife and business partner Joanna Hall,” says Debbi Burton. “The stonework was done by Larry Arnold, who worked for them at the time. Our home is in South Burlington, in a family neighborhood, and though you can’t see any houses in the photo, we are on a corner lot with three houses adjoining our backyard. We planted the hedges years ago, which created a wonderfully private setting. In the fall of 2002 we asked George to expand the patio in anticipation of our daughter Annie’s wedding the next summer. The stone is bluestone, and the furniture came from the Lighting House on Shelburne Road in South Burlington. We enjoy morning coffee in the garden, and we have dinner on the patio many nights in the summer. Atrium doors open from our dining room to the larger patio, and another door opens from the living room. The garden seems like just another room to us.”

Photograph by Carolyn Bates.





PATIO VIEW Shepard Butler Landscape Architects of Thetford Center crafted this masterly curving stone patio. Photograph by Carolyn Bates.

You just think it's a pond that's been there forever, but it's so clean it's a swimming pool," Lizzari says. "With ponds, the customer can get a pretty big impact on their property."

Patios, like stonewalls, also require a little local know-how when it comes to installation. A long-lasting patio starts with stabilizing fabric and a thick foundation of crushed stone, Lizzari says.

Rubright steers clients to blue stone over slate, because slate's smooth surface can be slippery. Blue stone has a natural no-slip surface, he notes.

Lizzari recommends natural stone over concrete pavers for patios because stone holds up better to salt and ice melt. Concrete slabs with stone veneered to them are to be avoided because they tend to fall victim to frost heaving, he says.

WHEN CONTEMPLATING LANDSCAPES it's easy to forget that half the year in Vermont there aren't leaves on the

trees and daylight is in short supply. Scott Wunderle sees winter through the eyes of an artist.

"I think about winter a lot. I love the winter. I enjoy the structure of the winter. The structure is reduced. It's much more sculptural in my mind," he says.

One way to get more enjoyment from the winter landscape is through discrete lighting. Light from a window can cast a warm glow on features close by a home. Lights built into rock walls can illuminate snow and ice and will cast indirect light onto nearby features. Wunderle cautions that lighting must be done carefully.

"If it's not done right it looks like a mall," he says.

Perhaps the ultimate in using the organic landscape is to create hiking and walking paths—great ways to take full advantage of the Vermont outdoors, Lizzari says. "People tend to stop living on their property when they hit their woods," observes Lizzari.

Landscapes will clean out wooded

areas, removing brush and clearing away dead trees, opening up the forest floor and adding a new dimension to the landscape that enables home owners—and their pets—to enjoy their property even more.

Perhaps the ultimate in melding art and nature is a landscape sculpture by world renowned dry stone artist Dan Snow of Dummerston. Snow creates free-standing dry stone objects that evoke ancient works of lost cultures. Whether blended into a garden or standing alone in a field, a Snow work becomes the focal point of any landscape. Snow says his clients are "folks that really enjoy their surroundings who like to see something unique and something long lasting." Working alone, Snow hand-selects and hand-fits each and every stone in his creations. "I like the chase, I guess. Trying to find materials is often the part that's most fun." **F**

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