

ASLA Colorado Awards 2011: Category 4A-residential over \$100,000

Project Name: Room with a View

Project Location: Castle Pines, Colorado

Brief Project Summary: The Front Range in Colorado has some of the most beautiful vistas in the country, and maximizing those views not only pleases homeowners, it also increases property values. The landscape architect tackled this particularly tricky project, keeping its spectacular view front and center. Steep grades and exposed bedrock, protected visual corridors and maintaining the feeling of the rugged landscape atop the ridge while weaving in a particularly complex program were the objectives of the project. The result is a design that intertwines clean lines, color and texture into the landscape beyond.

Purpose of Project: Set atop a prominent ridge and visually exposed to the valley below, the underutilized site provided the client with the opportunity to create spaces for entertaining, exercise and taking in the Front Range views. After further discussions with the client and on first review of the site, however, the landscape architect immediately realized that the project would entail much more than installing a pool and hardscapes. The client is a prominent business person who entertains frequently but also wanted a private sanctuary for relaxation and exercise. Entertainment space needed to include large and intimate spaces to accommodate parties of all sizes. The hardscape and gardens needed to be beautiful and utilitarian, but it also needed to look like it was meant to be there, seamlessly blending into the mountainside. Finally, the views, from inside and outside the house, couldn't be compromised.

Requirements:

- Building envelope review and adjustment and municipality approvals
- Preservation of mountain views from inside and outside the home
- More efficient water features, including a pool and spa to be used for exercise and entertaining
- Use of materials and plantings that helped the home and property blend in with the surrounding environment
- Recycling and reuse of plants, dirt and existing materials, for environmental reasons, but also because access to the site to bring in new material was difficult.
- A floral garden of native, low-maintenance plants
- A site design that included: an infinity edge pool, upper and lower terraces for large gatherings, sunken terrace for more intimate events, water feature and water wall, reflecting pool, fire pit for smaller gatherings, an exercise spa and spa house for year-round exercise, storage and entertaining needs, ample planting space, perennial garden, vegetable garden and planters for annual plants.
- Meet a tight six-month construction deadline after three years of design, planning and approvals.

Scope: The project began as a pool, but quickly turned into an entire landscape renovation, eventually including a lap pool, multiple entertainment and relaxation spaces and a spa house. Adding difficulty to the project was an already sensitive site, a steep grade, protected visual corridors and difficult site access. The landscape architect led the entire project, from budgeting and planning to design and construction. The landscape architect was the prime consultant on a team of six consultants, including an architect, hydrologist, structural engineer and civil engineer. The work included:

- Site analysis, including grade, soil, sustainability and plant evaluations
- Initial concept and budget development and design sketches.
- Landscape design concepts for all areas of the site
- Demolition and existing material preservation plans, including strict guidelines for site disturbance and protection and reuse of existing materials. The "cut and fill" was zero, meaning no fill dirt was hauled on or off the site.
- Creation of bid and construction documents for contractor coordination, scheduling, and execution.
- Weekly site visits to oversee demolition, plant layout, construction and contractor overview.

The installation of the project began with addressing the incredibly steep grade, which began almost at the home's back door. To accommodate the grade, exposed bedrock issues, the view and the client use requirements, the pool was built almost 12 feet above grade, which allowed the pool to be oriented almost parallel to the house. The space between the pool and the house is dotted with planting areas that serve not only as colorful beds but also as drainage intakes to

minimize the slope changes within the hardscape areas. The pool also serves as a reflective surface to capture the large expanse of sky, especially when viewed from the great room inside the house. With a double-sided infinity edge on the pool, the views of the valley below and the mountains beyond are uninterrupted from both inside and outside the house. The landscape follows the grades of the architecture and steps across the site from east to west. Beautifully detailed concrete walls and large stone steps bring the user down through a garden to the lower courtyard where the fire pit and spa house are situated.

The spa house was added to the project to address the client's desire for year round exercise. The landscape architect created the initial concept and developed the design of the spa house, but brought in an architect and structural engineers to complete the construction documents. A deck made of sustainably harvested IPE that is rot and fire resistant, both important factors when designing in Colorado because of wildfire risk, jets out from the spa house and appear as if it is floating above the water. The reflecting pool was designed to be dark and shallow to minimize the use of water to create an appearance of depth while capturing the expansive sky above. The result was a year-round retreat for the client.

Sustainability and an already sensitive site played significant roles in the design as well. The landscape architect responded to the existing grades and bedrock to create a design that resulted in no fill dirt hauled on or off the site. The team also consulted a hydrologist to ensure historical runoff rates were maintained. The upper patio is dry set to decrease runoff and increase water penetration. The lower courtyard incorporates a subsurface drainage system designed to carry roof runoff. The system allowed the hardscape to have a minimum amount of slope and allows the water to recycle back into the landscape. The water is then carried into the designated drainage basin at the low point of the property, while some water is diverted for supplemental irrigation for the vegetable garden.

Philosophy and Intent: Creating a very usable and beautiful space while maintaining one-of-a-kind mountain views drove this project. It took nearly three years to design and plan and gain county approval for the project, but once the construction began, the timeline was condensed to six months. The site was located atop a visually distinct ridge and surrounded by natural rock outcroppings, native scrub oak and pines. The prominent ridge not only affords dramatic views of Pike's Peak and Mt. Evans, it is also a significant landform amenity for surrounding residents. The original land planners developed strict design guidelines to respect and preserve site attributes of other residents' views and public views. The final design accommodates the lifestyle and needs of the owners while preserving the aesthetic of the ridge itself. The landscape architect had to work with a difficult existing grade, reused site material and instilled streamlined construction methods to ensure an economically and environmentally sound project.

Role of Landscape Architect/Contractor: The landscape architect planned, designed and managed this project from conception to final walkthrough. The landscape architect was key in coordinating consultants and on-site administration and keeping the project on schedule. By designing and managing the project, the landscape architect was able to maintain design and construction integrity while utilizing sustainable ideas and details.

Special Factors and Significance: The views, a difficult site atop the ridge and integrating into the surrounding landscape were the most pertinent factors in the design. The goal was to maintain and enhance the views while creating minimal disturbance of the existing and surrounding landscape. Special attention was given to reusing all the soil, boulders and other existing materials, protecting existing plants and trees and preserving those million dollar views. The team accomplished its goals by including vista and reuse guidelines in the original design and construction plans. In the end, the landscape architect minimized construction waste and water runoff that may have affected home sites below. The team also reused boulders and stones as retaining walls and slab steps and as crushed gravel mulch for garden areas. All of the large trees and native plantings were incorporated into the new design and carefully tagged and protected during construction.

This project is particularly notable because of the role the landscape architect played and how the team took a challenging and sensitive site and transformed it into a usable outdoor space that appears as if it was always there. The existing site was full of native vegetation and framed beautiful mountain views, but it was completely unusable for the client. The landscape architect paid close attention to the limitations of the site and married them with the wants and needs of the client, creating a seamless extension of the house – a room with a view.