In October, five residential gardens were honored to be included in The Cultural Landscape Foundation’s Garden Dialogue series. The Cranmer Residence by Dig Studio in Denver, Colorado was one of the projects selected.

See Feature Article on page 8.
This issue will be the last issue of Exposures as we focus our energy on the Colorado Design Journal. This coming year will be the 3rd Annual Colorado Design Journal and we look forward to continuing to improve the dialogue around design issues while showcasing the best work from around the region.

Finally, I will leave you with a request; please consider volunteering. Whether it is to give back to the profession that has given you so much, to build lasting professional relationships, or to develop leadership skills, we ask you to step up and lead the conversation about design and the work we do – Landscape Architects have the values, vision, skills, and sensibilities that can make a difference in our communities and we are looking forward to an even better year in 2016 so please send us an email if you are interested in volunteering or have ideas to share!

David Gregory
2015 Chapter President
president@aslacolorado.org

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EXECUTIVE BOARD & COUNCIL OF DIRECTORS REPORT

The Executive Board is the elected governing body of ASLA Colorado and is currently chaired by Jeff Zimmermann, Chapter President. The Board meets monthly. The Council of Directors is a larger appointed group that meets quarterly to assist the Board by providing support for association programs. The following is a highlight of the general chapter Board and Council activities since the last issue of Exposures. Copies of the minutes and other relevant documents can be obtained by contacting Greg Williams, Executive Director, at 303-748-0321 or emailing info@aslacolorado.org.

April 2015
The Executive Board met in April. The meeting was chaired by Jeff Zimmermann, President Elect. Brian Nicholson reported on chapter financials. The chapter agreed to donate funds to ASLA National for the building fund. David Sprunt reported on GreenCO. An update on the ASLA National Midyear Meeting was provided. Plans for Landscape Architecture Month were discussed. Chris Loftus reported on plans for 2015 chapter events.

May 2015
The Executive Board met in May. The meeting was chaired by David Gregory. Brian Nicholson reported on chapter financials. It was noted that the annual sponsorship goal for 2015 has been met. David Sprunt reported on GreenCO. A $1,500 allocation was approved. Jeff Zimmermann reported on plans for the Awards Event. Chris Loftus and Brian Nicholson reported on upcoming events and requested $2,000 to support the James Urban workshop. The request was approved. David Sprunt reported on events in the state legislature. Area updates were given.

June 2015
The Executive Board and Council of Directors met in June. The meeting was chaired by David Gregory. Brian Nicholson reported on chapter financials. David Gregory and Jeff Zimmermann reported on plans for the Awards Event. Chris Loftus reported on upcoming events. David Gregory and Neotha Leslie reported on the Colorado Design Journal. Hunter White reported on donation plans. David Sprunt reported on government affairs. Area updates and Student Chapter reports were given.

July 2015
The Executive Board met in July. The meeting was chaired by David Gregory. Brian Nicholson reported on chapter financials. David Gregory reported on plans for the End of Summer Social and on plans for nominations for the 2015-2016 board elections. Hunter White reported on GreenCO. An update on the ASLA National Midyear Meeting was provided. Plans for Landscape Architecture Month were discussed. Chris Loftus reported on plans for 2015 chapter events.

This year we have made great efforts to reach out to our members in an attempt to engage in the collective creation of a platform for design discourse. At our Annual Awards Celebration in October, we hosted two excellent panel discussions – one on designer and contractor communication during the construction phase and one session on design quality of public realm here in Denver. In the pages that follow is our attempt to not only highlight the excellent work that is being done by our practitioners but to also bring into focus some of the issues and ideas that give design practice depth and provide meaning to our work.

ASLA COLORADO EXPOSURES / 5

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NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings! As we approach the end of 2015, I would like to take a moment to reflect on my time as President of ASLA Colorado. When we started the year, the City of Denver had just hosted the ASLA Annual Meeting and Expo and we had eclipsed previous attendance records while calling attention to the great City we live in and the great work being done here in Colorado. After being focused on bringing a successful Annual Meeting to Colorado for many years, one might ask: What next? What should be the focus of 2015?

ASLA Colorado has responded with a host of new events, programs, and volunteers. Currently, our membership is a strong as it has been in years, our finances are in great shape, and the economy is back in full swing. I would assert the profession of LA is as strong as it has been in many years here in Colorado!

This year we have made great efforts to reach out to our members in an attempt to engage in the collective creation of a platform for design discourse. At our Annual Awards Celebration in October, we hosted two excellent panel discussions – one on designer and contractor communication during the construction phase and one session on design quality of public realm here in Denver. In the pages that follow is our attempt to not only highlight the excellent work that is being done by our practitioners but to also bring into focus some of the issues and ideas that give design practice depth and provide meaning to our work.
August 2015
The Executive Board met in August. The meeting was chaired by David Gregory. Brian Nicholson reported on chapter financials. Guests from Confluent Design presented their concerns regarding proposed infrastructure changes at Red Rock Amphitheatre. It was agreed to refer this issue to the HAIS Representative (Ann Mullins) for review and recommendation. There was discussion about a licensure complaint. There was discussion about increasing membership dues in 2016 and no increase was approved.

David Gregory and Jeff Zimmermann reported on plans for the Awards Event. Chris Loftus reported on upcoming events. An update on ASLA Fellows nominations was provided. David Sprunt provided an update on government affairs.

Area updates were provided.

September 2015
The Executive Board and Council of Directors met in September. The meeting was chaired by David Gregory. Brian Nicholson reported on chapter financials. Details on the upcoming awards event were provided. An update on the event calendar was provided. Erin Degutis provided an overview on the Landscape Architecture Accreditation Board. Neotha Leslie provided an update on the Design Journal. Hunter White reported on seminar plans for the ProGreen Expo. Area updates were provided. The University of Colorado Denver students requested funds for an upcoming trip to Philadelphia as part of the “Learning Landscapes” program. Sarah Doyle reported on the student mentorship program.

October 2015
The Executive Board met in September. The meeting was chaired by David Gregory. The financial report was given and there was general discussion about potential cost overruns for the Design Journal. Special guest Andy Boien of Dovetail Solutions provided an overview of the public relations services that his firm provides. The Awards Event was discussed and a complete financial breakdown should be available once all the outstanding invoices are received, probably by December. The remaining 2015 events were discussed. A final copy of the Public Welfare Study was distributed.

November 2015
There was no meeting in November due to the ASLA National Meeting and Exposition.

December 2015
The newly-elected Executive Board met in December. The meeting was chaired by Jeff Zimmermann. The new board is as follows: Jeff Zimmermann, president; Brian Nicholson, president elect; David Gregory, past president; Rabb Berg, trustee; Amina Rank, secretary, Erin Degutis, treasurer; Chris Loftus, vice president programs; Joshua Brooks, vice president public relations, David Sprunt, vice president government affairs. Erin Degutis provided the financial report and asked for volunteers on the budget committee. Special guests Dean Pearson and Joyce Young from the Colorado State Board of Landscape Architects in the Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies were present to answer questions. There was general discussion about the 2017 licensure sunset review. It was agreed to create a special committee for this project. Special guest Scott Melkilejohn provided an overview of the sunset review process. David Sprunt provided the government affairs update. Jeff Zimmermann outlined his goals for his term as president. Greg Williams provided a PowerPoint orientation to new and returning board members. There was general discussion about retaining a public relations firm in 2016. The remaining 2015 events were discussed. A final copy of the Public Welfare Study was distributed.

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In August, The Cultural Landscape Foundation facilitated exclusive access to private gardens in Denver and Aspen with the opportunity to hear directly from the designers and their clients about their collaborative process. In the following pages, the designers of the five gardens featured, will share their work for those of us who did not have the opportunity to attend the event.

The Garden Dialogues series poses the questions—What are the secrets to great gardens? How do garden owners and their landscape architects or designers work together? Garden Dialogues bring together patrons and designers to reveal the creative process, the give and take, and the collaboration that yields a great garden. The event itself provides unique opportunities for small groups to experience some of today’s most beautiful gardens created by some of the most accomplished designers currently in practice.

Launched to critical acclaim in 2012, the program has become one of the most popular programs in TCLF’s history, with most Dialogues sold out weeks in advance. In 2015, Dialogues were held coast-to-coast, from March through October, at exceptional gardens designed by leading practitioners.
Perched on the high point of Denver’s Cranmer Park, the landscape surrounding the historic Italianate mansion responds simply and elegantly to the renowned Jacques Benedict’s architecture. The landscape was designed in four distinct phases over 14 years, from 1998-2012. Although the architect and contractors selected each time changed, the owners chose to collaborate with the same landscape architect in every phase. Registered on the National Register of Historic Places the Italian Renaissance style stucco cladded residence was designed and built in 1917 for Denver’s Manager of Improvements and Parks and Recreation. According to the National Landmark nomination form, Benedict felt that this home was “one of his masterpieces”. George Cranmer said that before he bought the property, “we used to come up to look at the sunsets and loved the view of the mountains in all kinds of light.” Views to the Rocky Mountain front range remain unobstructed to this day thanks to Cranmer designating the park as a kite flying park where tree planting was not allowed. A clever way to maintain his views!

Laurel Raines, from Dig Studio, began her relationship with owner Amie Knox in the late 90’s when Amie and her husband began to renovate the house with the help of Elizabeth Metz Architecture. At the time Amie was keenly aware of the house’s architectural significance and wanted to respect its beauty and grace. The landscape surrounding the home had been compromised and the original site boundaries abbreviated over time. The owner’s desire was to establish enduring outdoor living spaces, while responding appropriately to the intrinsic character of the architecture.

Located adjacent to a large park, the site has an unusual public setting. Narrow private driveways cross easements through park land. During the first phase a clipped privet hedge and stucco entry columns were added to reestablish the boundary between park and property. To mark the arrival to the home, a paved auto court was added with a sandstone walk, planters on pedestals flank the curved precast concrete steps which lead to the carved wooden front door. Three magnificent American elms, planted not long after the house was constructed in 1917, were retained. The elms - one of them a Denver Champion tree - presented a challenge in that any improvements could not substantially disturb the area within the drip line of these trees.
The manner in which the building met the ground was very important to both the owner and architect. No foundation plantings were allowed to hide the house’s beautiful base. Instead, a soft gravel band surrounds the home establishing an edge to the lawn beneath soaring elm canopies. Laurel convinced the client that a lower layer of canopy would add interest and scale to the front facade. Spring Snow crabapples add color in the spring and a sense of privacy from the living room windows facing the park.

Spartan junipers planted in groups of three provide privacy along the north and south property lines. These junipers are also the perfect backdrop to the owner’s Deborah Butterfield horse sculpture. Beyond a dwarf European cranberry hedge to the east, the private lawn bordered by Chanticleer pears and white perennials, was the perfect place for family play when the children were young.

The heart of the house faces east into a central courtyard bordered by loggias and interior gallery hall. The axial vista framed by the courtyard was cut short overtime when adjacent lots were sold in the 1960’s. To screen the non-historic homes, Laurel designed a semi-circular pergola as a terminus to the view. The pergola and stone table are used frequently for family meals. The owner wanted the rest of the courtyard to reflect a classic Italianate garden with stone pathways and evergreen plantings. The resulting Vardar Valley Boxwood parterre garden and understated glass-tile lined fountain complete the courtyard experience.

The second phase saw the addition of an outdoor spa area. To provide a level of privacy, the unused space behind the garage provided an ideal location for the spa that is also easily accessible from the back of the house. The historic landmark guidelines required no alterations be made to the homes exterior, so the new deck, arbor, planting, fire pit and hot tub were designed to be “floating” above existing stairs at a rear door. Since the space was not visible from the house the owner requested that the design be more contemporary in nature, a reflection of her love of modern art. An outdoor shower that would work year-round without freezing was devised to complement the trellis structure and drain the pipes after each use.

In the 2009 the owners purchased half of the adjacent lot to the north of their home. The additional space was perfect for Amie, an avid swimmer, to build a lap pool. Because the new site was not within the Historic designated property the client’s contemporary aesthetic could again be explored. During this phase Gretchen Wilson, from Dig Studio, joined Laurel to collaborate with the owner and Semple Brown Design. The pool house and outdoor shower were designed by the architect while Gretchen and Laurel detailed the lap pool, fountain, patio, basketball court, fencing, walls, fire pit, planters, lighting and plantings for a unique gathering space that seamlessly flows from interior to exterior. The glass fountain creates an illusion that the linear pool lifts vertically at one end. At the
opposite end the 83 foot long pool extends out of grade accentuating its linear quality and dramatically framing the scenic views. To allow Amie to swim year round, heated paving and a pool cover were integrated. Together the pool and pavilion boldly contrast and complement the earlier landscape and historic home while providing a new viewpoint overlooking Cranmer Park and the Rockies to the west.

The latest addition to the landscape is in the south garden. With kids grown and dispersed Amie finally had the chance to plant a vegetable garden. Dig Studio designed raised beds in a pattern corresponding to the historic facades. While buff stone was used for the pool house addition, the raised beds were built from Red Colorado sandstone to reflect the more historic elements of the architecture. Every year Amie and Laurel go shopping to buy annuals for her planters and gardens, a reflection of the relationship they have built working together over many years.

The garden as a whole displays the evolution of landscape design over time: from the traditional formal lawn surrounding the historic home’s front facade, to the ornamental, drought tolerant planting that the modern pool floats within. The project is timeless at all levels from the lasting materials to the simplicity of form and function. The visibility of the site and historic architecture from the public open space makes it a landscape that people can view in passing, admire the history of Denver and learn more about Benedict.

ABOVE
At night the glowing geometric forms of the fire pit, pool, fountain and pavilion exude a dramatic atmosphere. Image credit: Dig Studio

ABOVE
The original East vista was blocked, so the pergola was designed to terminate the courtyard’s central axis. The fountain recalls the original courtyard design which was a simple low fountain. The parterre garden pays homage to Italianate architecture. Image credit: Dig Studio
When Martin Mosko and Luke Sanzone of landscape architecture firm Marpa Design Studio first met with owners Scott and Kelly at this ranch in Boulder, CO, they began a design conversation that was marked by cooperation, integration, and what architect David Barrett of Barrett Studio Architects calls “deep listening.” Mosko had worked with Scott and Kelly on their first house, and together they decided to bring in Barrett to build their new home.

They began with a site that was relatively flat except for one high mound where there was a log-style overlooking the entire property. All agreed that this house would be torn down, and the new one set back from the ridge. The goal was to build a new house, barn, and riding arena that were at once modern, comfortable, and warm, carefully attuned to the natural surroundings while obscuring the neighboring houses and road.

Martin, Luke, and David spent many hours together and separately walking the property, sometimes meeting with the owners, sometimes just being there to observe and experience the sights and sounds of the land. This quiet contemplation was the first element of listening: to the land, to the wind, to the wildlife that inhabited and crossed the space.

The second part of listening was careful consideration of what the homeowners wanted from this site, both from the architecture and the landscape. The professionals asked many times how important the spectacular view of the mountains was to the owners, and every time it came in “about fourth in priority,” according to Scott. They knew they’d be out in the pastures and the open spaces, connected with the environment all the time. They didn’t need to see the same thing from their living room. Taking them at their word, Luke and David collaborated to create a...
quiet, private environment that leaves tantalizing segments of the “ta da!” view without orienting the house toward it. Another request from the owners was that there be no water on the west side of the house, as the wind would inevitably blow it back up against windows and walls, making for a maintenance nightmare.

The design began with a series of sweeping gestures of both land and buildings, laid out in complementary arcs. Luke remembers that when Martin brought a clay model of the site to a meeting, everyone began taking turns at cutting away and building up different forms to figure out how the house would fit into a different topography they would create.

The house uses a variety of materials: glass, concrete, and Corten steel. Luke designed a garden that seamlessly joined the architecture, the outdoor space, and the environment. His design is simple, elegant, and uplifting. The south side garden is a celebration of the form known as the “vesica pisces,” a shape that is the intersection of two circles with the same radius so that the center of each circle lies on the circumference of the other. One side of the form is the house; it is faced by the opposing form in the garden. Corten steel edging shapes the landscape close to the pool and patio, while the outer circle of the garden is shaped by land forms Marpa designed. The house and the landscape use similar materials, forms, and colors, making an integrated whole. The area is planted with trees and low ground covers.

One challenge of this south garden was the question of how the cultivated area of the garden would meet the wild landscape beyond. The transition is gentle rather than startling, with the ground covers meeting the wild grass in an arc. The earth was formed into several large berms, or mountain forms, and the same rock set in the cultivated garden was used in the form of low-set boulders on the mountain. This helps to integrate the garden with the untamed portion of the land behind. The mountain forms hide the view of houses on the other side, and emphasizes the view of the natural Flatirons mountain view beyond. The connection between the microcosm of the garden and the macrocosm of the natural environment is heightened.
On the northeast side of the house Marpa created a cozy sitting garden, sheltered from the wind and the heat of summer sun. This small space is a main view from one of the rooms of the home, and is filled with color all year long.

In both the north and south gardens, choosing garden furniture proved difficult. The continual wind sweeping the site put all traditional seats and tables at risk of being blown away. This was solved by Kelly’s ingenuity: she designed her own garden furniture, made of concrete capped with the same Cor-ten steel of the house and garden. It fits perfectly with the aesthetic of the place, and stays in place!

Creating the entry garden was another example of the cooperation of all parties. The path to the front door winds up through boulders, grasses, and ground covers, setting the tone for the xeric and native-looking appearance of the garden. One morning, when some of the boulders had been set, Martin told everyone he had a dream vision of how the front should look, and that the boulders would have to be rearranged to match that vision. Scott and Kelly trusted him enough to allow this, and everyone agreed that the result was perfect.

The house was designed as a combination of contemporary vocabulary with the Japanese principle of “wabi sabi”: the appreciation of beauty in imperfection and the natural cycle of growth and decay. The wood used in the siding was reclaimed from old buildings and combined with native stone. The Marpa design connected with and extended this principle into the landscape, with the use of old, well-tended trees carefully chosen and trimmed so that the scale of the garden is maintained with the distant views. The clean, simple lines of the patios and the pool, the use of glass and steel, and the radial drifts of ground covers, and the small lawn within the vesica pisces shape, are all part of this aesthetic.
Pondbank House

design by Herb Schaal, Denver, Colorado

Palladian concepts of symmetry and harmonic proportions were utilized in the design of Pondbank House in Cherry Hills, Colorado. The home is uplifting and a statement of respect for the ideas of timeless beauty and harmony. Unusual for a classical home, there are many sustainable concepts quietly embedded in the design. Geothermal heating and cooling systems, solar photovoltaic systems, energy efficient design, and electrical conservation concepts make this home truly "one-of-a-kind." Pondbank House was created by Don Ruggles and Melissa Mabe-Sabinosh of Ruggles Mabe Terrell Architecture.

In keeping with the grand Palladian architectural style of Pondbank House, noted Colorado landscape architect, Herb Schaal, FASLA, created an impressive series of complimentary Mediterranean garden spaces, carefully preserving many mature trees and relocating 25 large caliper trees. Applying sustainable principles, local stone was used for terracing and High Plains adapted plants were specified for water conservation. In addition to diverse planting schemes, including over 250 species, there are many wonderful pieces of garden art and sustainable garden details, such as decorative fountain walls that distribute roof and storm drainage to terraced plantings. The house and gardens are designed not only as a residence, but as a spectacular setting in which to showcase an amazing collection of significant paintings and sculptures and to host philanthropic events.

The design process utilized an abundance of models, examples and drawings, involved over two years of collaborative meetings between the landscape architect, owners, architect and builders, and was followed by a three-year construction period. During construction, many details were further developed and refined with mock-ups, resulting in spontaneous changes, substitutions and additions. Three years after completion, the design team is still intact and fine-tuning the project.
ENTRY
Set well back from the street, Pondbank is approached though a golf course like setting. The fairway of undulating turf, with low points like sand traps, also functions to detain storm water. The driveway meanders with sweeping views, and an allee of Sugar Maples is spaced to allow parking for 35 cars on reinforced turf during events. Arrival is through a magnificent courtyard with a fountain surrounded by an arcade of artworks. The ground surface of the court is actually “on deck” over the lower floors of the house. Three feet of special soil mix was used to support the planting of mature Redbuds and Arborvitae. Working with Living Design Studios, Melissa Mabe-Sabinosh created the unique decorative ironwork elements that blend with the classical architecture.

EAST GARDEN
Along the east side of the house is the walled parking court, with a cutting garden that includes dozens of different annuals and perennials to provide the majority of flowers for interior arrangements throughout most of the year. Also on the east side is a fenced kitchen garden adjoining the breakfast room and kitchen area. This garden includes raised beds with culinary herbs, vegetables and fruits for fresh everyday use. The espalier apple tree produces five different varieties against a walled backdrop, and an outdoor grill and seating make for casual outdoor dining. A garden greenhouse with potting bench extends the seasons and provides an architectural focal point on axis with a linear lawn. Decorative perimeter ironwork, by Living Design Studios, keeps the dog in and the rabbits out.
FEATURE | Residential Gardens

SOUTH GARDENS
Spectacular garden views unfold from the second floor loggia, which is a primary entertaining area. On the pediment above the loggia is a beautiful original sculpture, Flying and Floating, by notable local artist Kathy Caricof. This artist’s work is enjoyed in both public and private collections and is featured at the Newman Center at Denver University. The sculpture is a representation of the owners among iconic Colorado symbols, including a sunburst backdrop, two stylized figures effortlessly float among the ripples of the Colorado River, and flying above the Rocky Mountain Landscape.

A cascade garden was created to gracefully deal with the necessary grade transition of 20 vertical feet from the upper level to the walk-out lower floors in a short distance. Terraced walls of Masonville Sandstone and stacked one-ton boulders hold the slope in place while providing the opportunity to create an attractive water feature. This cascading feature provides great viewing from the ground floor study and an extended overlook from the kitchen garden above. Access to the pool at the bottom of the cascade is provided by a cantilevered step detail borrowed from rustic stonewalls on the Italian coast.

A colonnaded balcony overlooks the swimming pool, where laminar flow jets arch gracefully over the water and transform this feature into an Alhambra like fountain. The arcing patio around the pool is Mexican travertine to match the façade and can accommodate tables for 100 guests. A small strip of lawn at the patio edge is designed with an “infinity edge” to visually blend with the larger lower lawn, leading to a serene pond and skyline views to the snowcapped Rockies. The lower lawn serves as guest overflow, transition to the natural landscape, and storm water detention.

To the left is an artfully designed playground for the grandchildren, with twin play structures by Cedarworks. Each child has their own tower with a view scope overlooking the pond and mountain skyline. Plantings around the play area include some interesting plants and vegetables for the kids to harvest and tend. A ground cover area to the north is for the pet cemetery.

To the right is a strolling garden with a pattern of interconnected circular paths around garden sculptures to create a multitude of routes and sculpture viewing angles. Deep within this immersive garden is a moon-viewing arbor sighted to face the rising full moon in spring and fall. A concave natural rock holds a shallow film of water to create a mirror that reflects the image of the rising moon to gazers sitting in the arbor. Plantings in the adjacent beds were selected for evening effects, including fragrance, light colors and reflective leaves.

WEST GARDENS
The gardens on the west side of the house are more private and adjoin owner and guest bedrooms. Leading from the lower swimming pool deck is an ample curving stairway with landings at each of several rustic stone wall terraces, which provide grade transition on the west side of the house and the opportunity to allow roof runoff to percolate into the ground. A system of spouts, handsomely detailed in the walls, disperses the runoff and naturally irrigates the plantings. For special events, the system can be illuminated and recirculated to showcase the water effects. Taking advantage of the intense sunlight in this location, grasses and butterfly attracting plants (such as Buddleia, Echinacea and Gaura) are predominant. The uppermost terrace consists of a connecting pathway through a naturalistic landscape, including columnar trees, lavender, grasses and shrub roses, which, in combination with the rustic stone walls, evoke the Mediterranean feeling. Small fruit trees are integrated and give this landscape an agrarian look.

Centered in the West Garden is an “aromabo,” a unique gazebo structure covered with fragrant Autumn Clematis. The structure is surrounded with fragrant perennial plants like Stargazer Lily, Variegated Sweet Iris, Lemon Thyme, Garden Sage; and annuals like Scented Geraniums, Alchemilla, Gardenias and Citrus for an aromatherapy experience. A little further along the path is a stone wall with a moon gate to a very private bathing garden with spa and outdoor shower under a large relocated Ginnala Maple. The garden is themed with Japanese details, hardy bamboo, Mondo Grass, a bonsai pine and sculpture from the owner’s collection. Black pebbles imbedded in the paving reinforce the theme and add foot reflexology opportunities.
FEATURE | Residential Gardens

DESIGN TEAM

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
Herb Schaal, FASLA
herb.schaal@bellvueemporium.com

ARCHITECT
Don Ruggles, AIA
Ruggles Mabe Terrell Architecture
doni@rmtarchitecture.com

GENERAL CONTRACTOR
Jeffrey K. Barnett
J.K. Barnett Ltd
jkb@jkbarnett.com

LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR
Philip Steinhauer
Designscapes
pesteinhauer@designscapes.org

METAL WORK
Living Design Studios
LivingDesignStudios.com

MASONRY
Kurt Bares Masonry
(303) 949-6037

STONE SCULPTURE
Kathi Caricof
Caricof Studio
(303) 921-5836

LEFT AND RIGHT
Image credit: Herb Schaal
FEATURE | Residential Gardens

A tree reflected in a rectangular pool—it is the spirit that the landscape presents, yet the creation of this soothing garden was inspired not by philosophy but by a practical embrace of the ecological challenges of its future. In addressing the significant threat that wildfire can pose in this high mountain climate, the design espouses unique beauty and serves as a precedent for the achievement of home within a powerful native context.

PROJECT NARRATIVE
Fire mitigation is a major ecological issue throughout the Rocky Mountain West. A defensible landscape is responsive to ecological processes, and a healthier landscape emerges from proper mitigation. Stillwater, in Pitkin County, Colorado, sought to balance the rigorous requirements of county-enforced fire mitigation with an aesthetically engaging design. To facilitate this process, Bluegreen orchestrated collaborative charrettes with wildfire specialists and code enforcers to develop new strategies to better integrate the seemingly conflicting agendas.

The design team determined preservation of the native landscape on this two-acre, contemporary homestead to be paramount and sought to enhance it through a carefully developed plan that relates architecture and landscape in synergistic expression. As such, the majority of the property remains native aspen and ponderosa pine forest with an understory of shrubs and grasses. These existing features are complemented by layers of crushed granite pathways and stone walkways that wind through sweeps of lush perennial plantings following the architectural footprint of the home.

Stillwater

design by Bluegreen, Aspen, Colorado

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LEFT
Layers of crushed granite pathways and stone walkways wind through the lush perennial plantings following the architectural footprint of the home.

Image credit: Bluegreen
Elements of an effective fire mitigation strategy were embraced in the creation of intimate spaces that reference and expand upon cues from the architecture. While a ten foot required perimeter of defensible space, and limited vertical plantings in proximity to the architecture excluded groves of trees and large masses of shrubs near the outdoor living spaces, the integration of continuous stone and aggregate pathways simultaneously define these spaces and serve as a fire break. As planting in these areas needed to remain relatively low in height and density, Bluegreen sought to enhance the graphic quality of these beds, employing a bold foliage palette to emphasize broad landscape strokes that are legible from the pathways and truly pop when viewed from the upper floor of the residence. The careful composition of colors and textures softens the surrounding hardscape, creates variety and interest and complements hues in the adjacent architecture.

To address drainage issues related to the interface of steep terrain with the architecture and to further articulate the defensible space, stormwater is directed into a central water feature, which emulates a granite-lined mountain stream. Construction debris from the stone veneer walls is repurposed as liner for the bottom and edges of the stream, creating pools and riffles which flow between the main home and guest house. The percolating water offers a soothing aural experience before terminating into a small reflecting pool. Grasses, hostas, and native shrubs accent the architecture and reinforce the natural landscape. To supplement the capacity of this feature, planting beds are carefully situated to capture runoff originating in the autocourtyard.

Interior rooms embrace the surrounding landscape. The granite-lined mountain stream collects runoff, naturally cools the space and provides relaxing sounds as it flows between the residence and the guest house. This carefully crafted feature is traversed by a steel grated boardwalk. This boardwalk acts as a bridge connecting two terrace “banks,” each responding to the geometry of interior rooms. Sunlight is filtered through the grate, reaching plant mass-
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es on the edges of the stream below. On the corresponding terraces at the southern side of the residence, a stone walk weaves through a sculptural field of vertical stainless steel poles terminating in an entertainment terrace. These poles provide definition to the space while offering a place to hang a robe or towel. An intimate spa captures the views over the bluff and ponds below, emphasizing the site’s connection to the greater landscape. Outdoor living rooms such as this one wrap around the home, forming a strong connection between the interior and exterior spaces.

Layered privacy walls echo architectural elements of the home and provide additional fire protection. These walls create enclosure while facilitating passage into other landscape zones. They also reinforce patterns that exist within the architecture as each void in the lichen-covered granite wall frames a landscape specimen. The vertical viewing void at the entry court translates the image of a mature aspen to the still water of a rectangular pool beyond. Vertical voids are reiterated in the planting pockets, which punctuate the paving with masses of lavender.

Stillwater elevates a responsive landscape to a garden that is as graceful and compelling as it is functional. Artful forms inspired by the surrounding landscape compose a series of experiences that play a performative role in not only the reduction of wildfire threats, but also effective control of seasonal runoff.

LEFT
The careful composition of colors and textures in the planting design softens the surrounding hardscape, creates variety and interest and complements hues in the adjacent architecture.
Image credit: Bluegreen

ABOVE
Interior rooms embrace the surrounding landscape. The granite-lined mountain stream collects runoff, naturally cools the space and provides a relaxing soundscape as it flows between the residence and the guest house.
Image credit: Bluegreen
From the gentle rise of tilled-rubble walls to the patterning of open meadowland, the area surrounding Aspen bears the marks of an agrarian past. At the Double Bar X residential community, land that now caters to the contemporary ranch-dweller once supported an array of agricultural activities complete with human-sculpted earthworks and diversions that are still evident in the preserved homestead and primary meadow that now serve as communal amenities.

At one site, DBX3, these historical tracings are further celebrated in the landscape through the layout of program, establishment of borders and edges, site circulation, plantings, and the management of water on site. In the design of each of these elements, the challenge for the Bluegreen team was to ensure that the design intent, materials and textures honor the latent history of the site, while embracing its contemporary context. What evolved is an expression of thoughtful transition from active ranch to family-oriented respite that offers a novel interpretation of the agrarian homestead.

**LEFT**
Weathered wood, steel and stone accentuate the realignment of a historic irrigation ditch turned water feature, harkening back to the rudicity of its agrarian origins.
Image credit: Bluegreen
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PROJECT NARRATIVE
As the project progressed, Bluegreen served as an integrator of space and time, working to both accommodate the programmatic desires of a large family residence, and to maintain the rural character of the historic landscape. To do so, the team worked in close collaboration with the clients, project architect, interior designer, contractor and engineers utilizing a process of on-site analysis and iterative charrettes to arrive at a common design vision. What emerged was a shared reverence for the relics and rustic qualities of the site’s agrarian past, a desire to incorporate the surrounding landscape beyond the site’s borders, and the functional intent to design spaces for a growing family to rest, dine, discover and play for generations to come.

Throughout the development of this shared vision, the concept of transition remained at the forefront of the design, both to honor the ongoing transformation of the site, and to match a family in flux with flexibility and diverse opportunities for outdoor engagement. Programmatically, the concept manifests itself as one traverses the site from architectural center to rural surround, and as one circumnavigates the residence, alternating between the formal and the informal, the collective and the more intimate. Along the way, plantings and materials reinforce these subtle shifts as the surrounding landscape is drawn into the site, and landscape architectural elements extend out to meet it.

Upon arrival, one is ushered into a paved auto courtyard that is embraced by the architecture and opens into a warm, welcome garden. This formal courtyard dissolves into an informal north lawn whose open program allows for spontaneous gatherings and gaming shaped by the family’s ever-changing recreational interests. Edges are blurred between the north lawn and the agrarian field beyond with carefully designed native gardens. A strategically placed line of trees reinforces the view plane, serves as a windbreak, and provides selective screening. Intimate bedroom patios overlook this active space and the adjacent Maroon Creek; however, complex layering ensures privacy for relaxation and contemplation.

Shared spaces continue to the eastern side of the property,
where the agrarian backdrop gives way to the tranquil meanderings of Maroon Creek. A series of outdoor rooms extend from the architecture and continue their subtle alternation between the secluded and the communal as they relate to one another, and respond to cues in the landscape. A woodland spa is tucked away within this collection of ‘rooms’ and features a rustic fire element to provide ambience and a contrast to the integrated wild. As one continues southward, outdoor family dining is encouraged through seamless indoor/outdoor kitchen connections, and the protection of an architectural overhang. A cozy hearth and outdoor furniture for family celebrations are organized on a wooden deck to limit impact to the slope below, and views to the Creek, Elk Mountain Range, and surrounding ranch land are borrowed by the perched terrace.

Wrapping the southern edge, the landscape character shifts to incorporate a native sage knoll that serves as the background for a shared courtyard that connects to a roof garden between the main residence and the guest house. The knoll will remain in its natural state with some focused editing of plant material and added screening, creating two points of interest linked by a rustic path. Private patios anchor the shared courtyard for the peaceful enjoyment of the family grandparents, and wildlife paths extend outward to a mountain lookout and ranch memorial, both of which emerge from the rural surround and filter into the conservation easement that wraps the eastern and southwestern edges of the property.

From welcome garden to native knoll, the plantings at DBX3 echo a language of transition and serve to soften or enhance edges while drawing features of the surrounding landscape into the site. Responding to the character of the existing vegetation, and to the intended uses of the programmed areas, plantings pull from the architecture and appear in more formalized arrangements closest to the house, and dissolve into naturalized configurations as they extend outward. Playing off adjacent vegetation types, cottonwoods are pulled into the design on the Maroon Creek edge, sage creeps in near the native knoll, and serviceberries and a diverse mixture of native grasses characterize the plantings that interface with the agrarian meadow.

ABOVE
Complex plant layering ensures privacy for relaxation and contemplation, while maintaining a visual connection to the agrarian fields and mountains beyond. Image credit: Bluegreen
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As the plantings aid in transition, shield, and provide textural interest and color, they also serve the auxiliary function of enhancing storm water infiltration in each of their planting beds which double as bioretention basins. The first residential project within the City of Aspen to completely treat storm water on site, DBX3 elegantly blends aesthetic qualities with performance capacity in its treatment of plantings across the property.

In synthetic collaboration with the vegetation and the architecture, landscape architectural elements alternate between definition and dissolution as they reach out into the surrounding landscape. Stone walls reference remnant site walls and deteriorate into groundplane features; formalized stone pavers close to the house soften into gravel, and then crusher fines as one moves from the formally designed to the naturalistic; weathered wood, steel and stone accentuate the realignment of a historic irrigation ditch turned water feature, harkening back to the rusticity of its agrarian origins.

Through its contextually relevant materials, diverse programming and integrative treatment of plantings and landscape architectural features, DBX3 reconceptualizes the agrarian homestead as a place that elevates the contemporary family experience of the outdoors, while remaining true to the rural character that has instilled the site with intrinsic beauty and historic significance over time.
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