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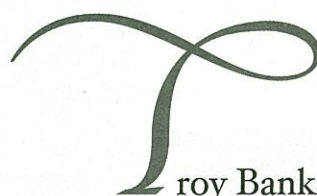
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Environmental Designer

Troy Bankord's passion for gardening translates into inviting spaces that flow from indoors to out



Troy Bankord is an idea person. Ask him for suggestions on how to transform an ugly walled-in yard into something special, and he'll come back with countless possibilities. Ask him to

expound on these, and you can practically see the wheels of his imagination turning.

"I can pull up to a job and see the completed project in my head the minute I get there," he says. "I'm not about throwing in just any old plants. Instead, I'll ask myself, 'How can I make this look the best I can?'"

It has been almost 20 years since this Master of the Southwest started making his mark on Valley gardens, and there is little doubt the innovative designer will ever run out of ideas.

Born in the small town of Pecatonica, Ill., close to the Wisconsin border, Bankord, 41, grew up in a family of interior designers and contractors. "When I was a kid I was always being dragged to auctions and garage sales, or I was scraping wallpaper off of walls. My parents were big on renovating," he remarks.

In addition, the couple next door owned a professional landscaping company, and their property looked like a park, according to Bankord. At age 7, he

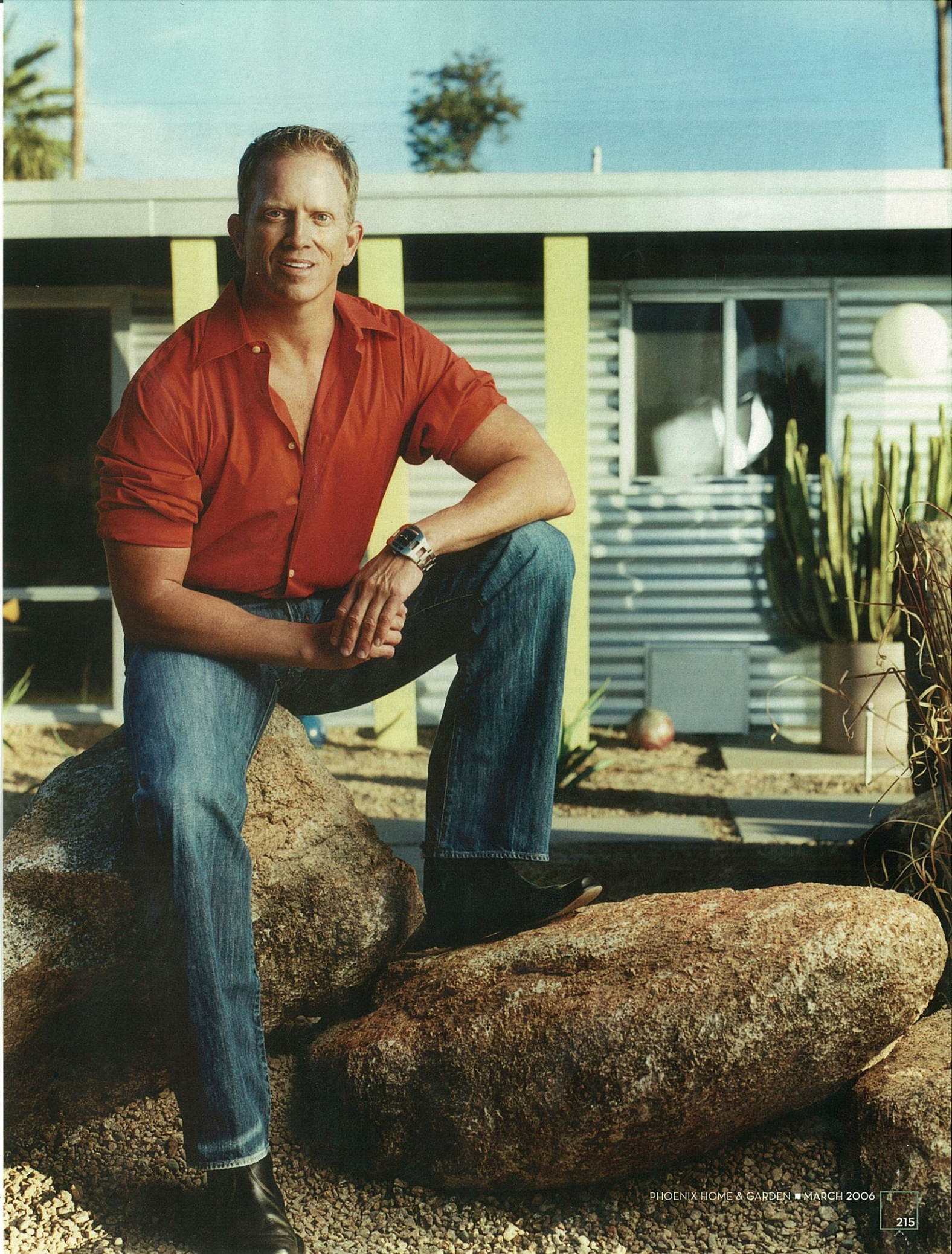
started following them around and asking questions. It wasn't long before he was deadheading flowers and working in his own garden. "I was very inspired by all of this," he says.

Although Bankord spent his summers taking on lawn and landscape jobs, he headed to Milwaukee after high school to attend Marquette University. There he earned a bachelor of arts degree in broadcast journalism and a double minor in political science and business. "The growing season in the Midwest is short, so pursuing a degree in landscaping didn't seem to make much sense," he explains.

Bankord excelled at his studies and after graduation planned on becoming a broadcaster. He arrived in Phoenix in 1986 with resume in hand and interviews lined up with Channel 3 and KNIX.

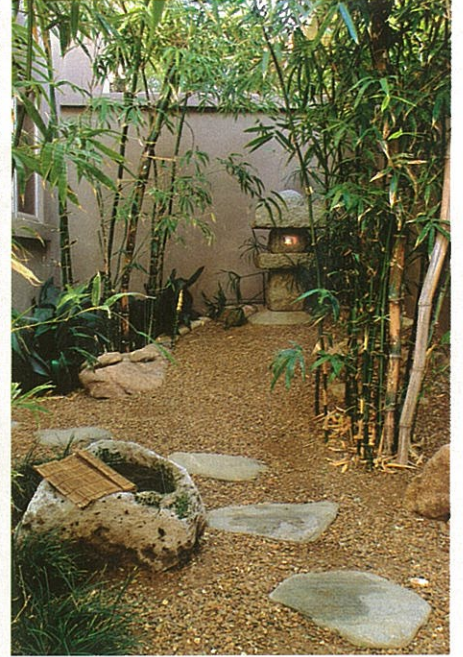
"I stayed with my cousin Barbara [Bankord], who was a landscape designer in the Valley and one of the forerunners in the use of true native landscape plants,"

TEXT BY NANCY ERDMANN ■ PORTRAIT BY DAVID FENTON





Above left: Adding to the serene feel of this patio, landscape designer Troy Bankord placed wok-style pots filled with pink pentas and green potato vine next to permanent plantings.



Above right: A narrow atriumlike space was reworked with the addition of bamboo plants, boulders, steppingstones and a water feature to create a Zen look.

“What comes to mind when I think of Troy is the word *fearless*”

he recalls. “She would take me around to some of her jobs because she knew I had a passion for gardening. One day she turned to me and said, ‘Troy, I don’t want to sway you from anything, but we could really use some good maintenance people in this town.’

“I thought about it and remember telling my parents that I was moving to Arizona to start a landscape business. They weren’t very happy about it,” he admits. “Their response was, ‘With the education you have and the money we spent, you’re going to dig holes for a living?’ We didn’t talk for a couple of weeks, but eventually they came around. Of course, now they’re the first ones to wave a magazine around whenever I’ve been published.”

Bankord, whose work has appeared in *Phoenix Home & Garden*, as well as *Sunset*, *Atomic Ranch* and *The Arizona Republic*, has come a long way since his early days in Phoenix. His business has grown from garden maintenance to a full-scale landscape design and construction firm called T.M. Bankord Inc. In addition, his landscapes have appeared on *Phoenix Home & Garden*’s Grand Tour of Gardens, and in 2003 and 2004 he wrote a monthly column for the magazine.

“It’s interesting how it’s come full circle,” notes Bankord. “I get a degree in journalism, but go into landscaping. Then I end up writing a column on land-

scape design. It’s made me realize that I’m doing what I’m supposed to be doing.”

Many of his clients, such as Tempe resident Lois Ripley, would agree. “There are a lot of people who can dig holes and put in plants, but very few who can arrange them in such a manner that they look cohesive and beautiful,” she observes. “Troy took what I could only dream about and made it into a reality. He is, above all, an artist in the landscape.”

“What comes to mind when I think of Troy is the word *fearless*,” states Valley interior designer Michael Scott Garvin, who has paired up with Bankord on a number of projects. “He is completely courageous in his approach to his work. And for lack of better phrasing, when he comes on a job he thinks outside the box. He is not afraid of reinventing the wheel.”

Bankord is known for his attention to the little things. “Troy definitely has an eye for detail and is a perfectionist who takes great pride in his work,” says a client who lives in Arcadia. “After the completion of our garden, we were having a large party,” she recalls. “Troy was out there that day polishing, hosing and cleaning to make everything look just perfect, as if it were a party at his own home.”


One of the things Bankord prides himself on is his ability to take an existing landscape and enhance what



Bankord designed cantera pots and ram's-head spouts for a French-style garden. The hand-carved containers are planted with *Agave weberi* and elephant's food. *Pyracantha* was espaliered onto iron trellises to create a diamond pattern on a low stucco wall.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD HAAK

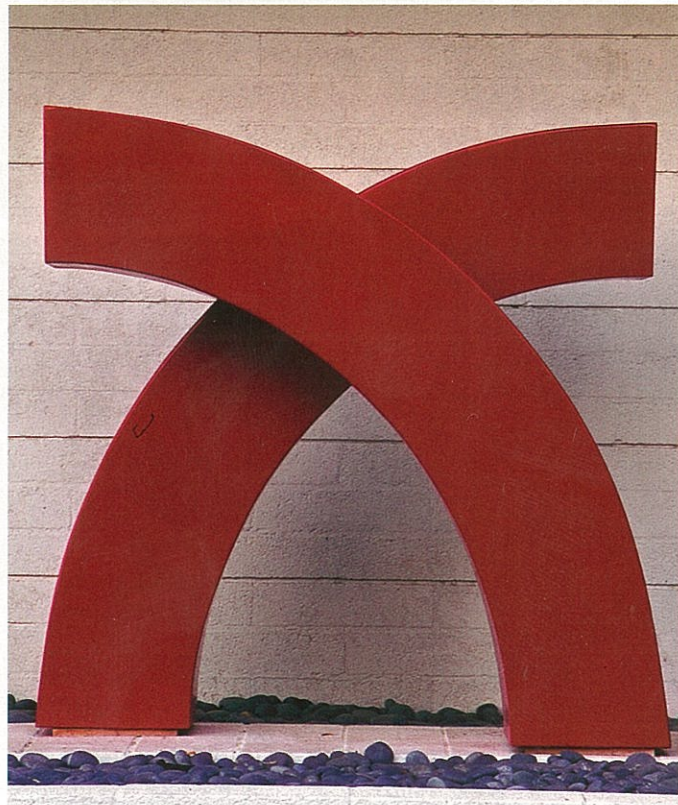


To make outdoor spaces more functional for entertaining, Bankord enlarged the lawn and patio areas of this Arcadia residence. Once all white, several exterior walls were toned down with charcoal paint to reduce glare and connect the house to the landscaping.

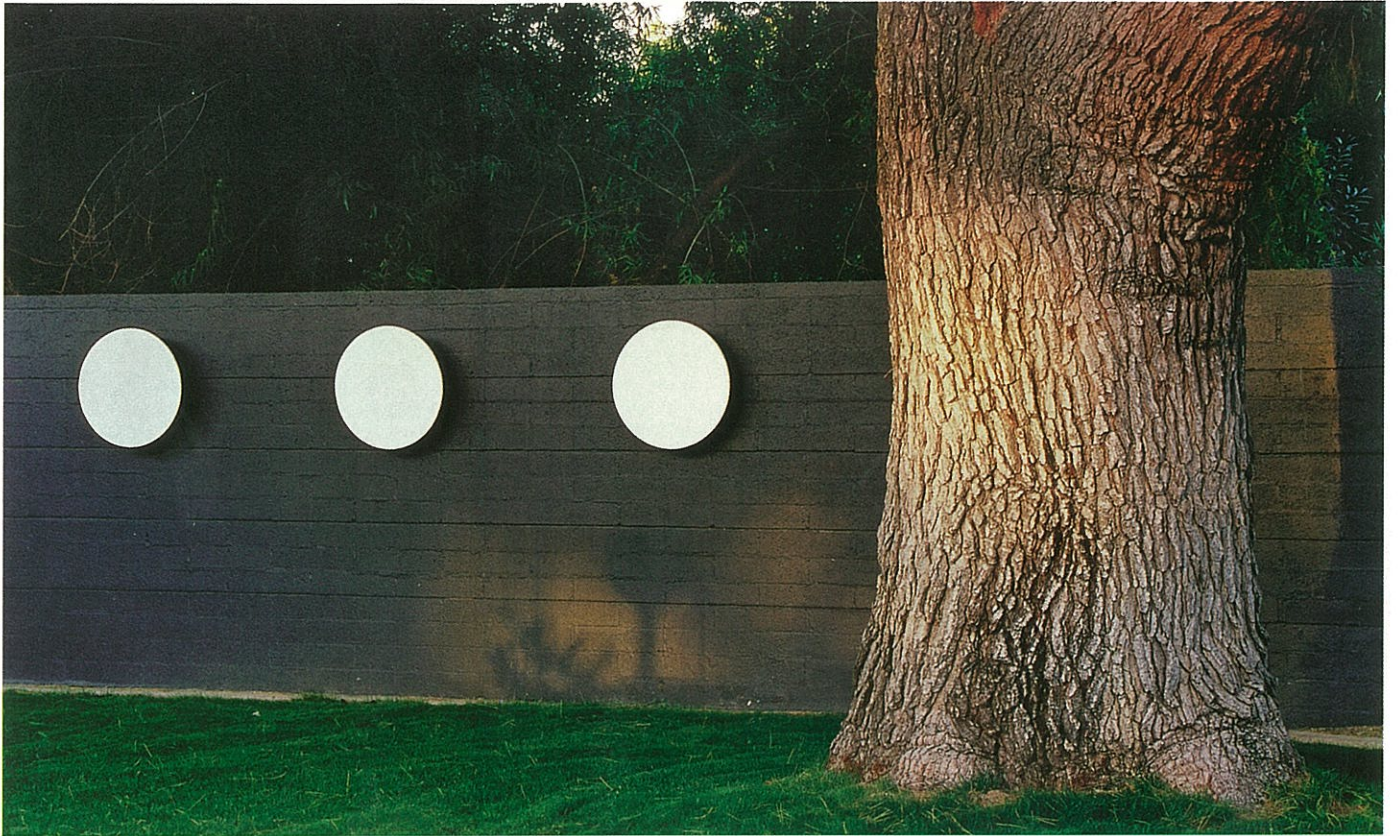


Above: Here trees were shaped to make an architectural statement. **Below left:** Bankord added bold container plants, sophisti-

cated night lighting and cushioned bancos. **Below right:** On the same property, he collaborated with artist John Bartolomeo.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD MAACK



Above: Concrete discs salvaged from a 1960s office building appear to float against a charcoal-gray wall. Below: A pair of handcrafted stainless steel gas fire pits warms the back yard of a Contemporary-style home.





Above: Bankord's renovation of a Ralph Haver-designed home included sandblasting the exterior, introducing corrugated metal, and adding yellow accent beams, bowling ball lawn

ornaments, concrete pavers and a simple desert palette. **Opposite:** The addition of a ramada, seat walls, a mature iron-wood tree and other plants revitalized this Phoenix back yard.

"I consider myself an environmental designer"

is there. "I don't have this need to put my thumbprint on everything," he says. "The way I approach a job is to figure out what it's going to take to draw my clients outward. It can be as simple as a few steppingstones or a quiet space with a bench, or as grandiose as a water garden or expanses of hardscape on which to entertain—whatever I can do to make a space usable."

Although he has no formal landscape training, Bankord seems to have an innate sense of what will work in a garden and what won't. "I'm very observant," he says. "When I first started out, I would ask myself, 'Why is that plant doing that?' I'd look at its watering schedule, at the time of year, how it responded to certain fertilizers. Suddenly, everything clicked, and I remember realizing that I 'got' it."

"I just knew that by looking at a plant I would know if it was a high-water user or a low-water user," he recalls. "I could tell by the style of a leaf if it would take full sun or not, or if it would acclimate. I knew exactly when to cut things back. It was a real turning point."

Bankord also studied everything he could on gardening. He attended seminars at Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix, experimented with plants, clipped pages from magazines, and observed the work of other Valley designers. Travels to such destinations as Cali-

fornia, Mexico and Europe kept him busy scouting gardens, and he would come back to Phoenix filled with ideas that he incorporated into his jobs.

Not one to specialize in any particular style of landscape design, his work ranges from Santa Barbara, Contemporary and French to Italian, Japanese and xeriscape gardens; and it is the variety that keeps him charged up.

More recently, he has become a fan of Mid-century Modern architecture and has completed a number of home and garden renovations in this style. "I find it exciting, invigorating and dramatic," he states. One such project was an Al Beadle home published in *Phoenix Home & Garden* in April 2004.

Bankord, who considers himself an environmental designer, often works with clients on the indoor/outdoor elements of their homes. He consults on fabrics, furnishings, artwork, mirrors, lamps, paint color—anything having to do with creating spaces that flow from the inside out.

"A garden doesn't have to just be a garden; it can incorporate a lot of interior elements as well," he explains. "My goal is to help clients create beautiful spaces, whatever it takes." □

See Sources.

