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**GLORIOUS
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This photo: The zigzag pattern of the walkway at this central Phoenix home allowed landscape designer Troy Bankord to create three distinct areas for mass plantings in their front yard.

Opposite: Carved cantera cubes converted into a water feature provide a cooling effect in the garden.



JEFFREY GREEN (2)

Pure Bliss



*A renovated landscape gains a fresh look
with an enticing array of vegetation*

Text by Cathy Cromell



Above: Groupings of *Agave geminiflora* (foreground) and octopus agave (around tree) provide a sense of uniformity to the front yard. Left: Stone spheres complement the home's contemporary styling.

If you find yourself living with a landscape left over from an earlier design era, take heart. It can be updated dramatically with modern hardscape materials and a far more varied plant selection than was available 10 or 20 years ago.

Dealing with an outdated landscape was precisely the situation the homeowners found themselves in with this central Phoenix property. Located in an established neighborhood with mature vegetation, the yard consisted primarily of lawn and concrete. With the help of environmental





Above: The front yard features a miniature version of Stonehenge made of hefty rock known as "Oklahoma farm beams." • **Right:** *Muhlenbergia* 'Regal Mist' produces a stunning display of rosy-pink plumes in fall.

designer Troy Bankord, the couple's landscape was given a fresh perspective.

"Troy started by replanting the front yard and the east side of the house, and then we decided to extend the renovation to the entire landscape," recalls the lady of the house.

Towering pine trees that blocked sunlight gave the existing lawn a tired look. "Bermuda grass in Arizona needs at least five or six hours of full sun daily to thrive," explains Bankord, principal of T.M. Bankord Inc. "Less than that, and it will eventually die out." So, they kept the pine trees but removed



NANCY CHRISTENSEN



A pathway that begins at the side of the house opens the garden to exploration.
A fountain was positioned nearby to mask neighborhood noise.

the Bermuda. A straight, narrow sidewalk was replaced with 6-foot-wide pavers laid in a zigzag pattern. This new walkway provides visual appeal from the street and also creates a more interesting passage through the new plantings to the home's entry area.

"I like the effect of layering plants," Bankord says. "It adds dimension and, in this case, tied the tall trees into the other plant material." Below the existing trees are giant birds of paradise. Purple ruellia and the showy plumes of clumping grasses, such as

Mulhenbergia capillaris and *M. rigens*, make up the next layer. Lantana, salvia and annual flowers fill in at ground level.

Although the back yard featured a pool, spa and barbecue, there was considerable room to "play with" on the half-acre lot. The main house is set against the east side of the property, leaving an open expanse on the west. The homeowners opted to add another small building to fulfill a variety of functions. It frequently serves as "Matthew's Clubhouse," a place for their young



An eclectic mix of vegetation serves as a backdrop for several sitting areas and water features in the back yard. Plants were chosen to provide a combination of textures and heights.

son and his friends to play or watch television.

Equipped with bathroom and kitchen facilities and an outdoor barbecue just steps away, it does double-duty as a guest house and as an entertaining space. Wide sliding glass doors open to the patio and pool area. "Jim Gresham was the home's original architect, and we asked him to design this building as well," says the man of the house.

A soothing shade of cantera tile flooring material called Café

Dos lends a contemporary feel to the patio and pool deck. The interiors of the lap pool and spa were resurfaced with Pebble Sheen™, a product that looks like granite. Buffed and polished, it offers a smooth feel underfoot. Pebble Sheen™ has a reflective quality and looks beautiful when lit, note the homeowners. A stair-step tile spillway was added at the far end of the pool to create a tumbling waterfall.

"The spa always looked like it was sitting out in the middle of



JEFFREY GREEN (2)

A pair of brick columns situated near the spa creates a strong vertical focal point. Tropical bird of paradise, partridge aloe and foxtail fern thrive in this semi-shady spot.

nowhere, and I wanted it to have a cozier feeling,” the lady of the house remarks. Bankord suggested removing most of the old hardscape and adding brick columns to create a focal point. “We brought the landscaping closer to the spa, giving the feeling of being nestled into an outdoor room,” explains the designer. The area is particularly dramatic when lit at night.

Saltillo tiles that match those of the home’s interior also were

used to create a pathway around the house. The tile’s effect is to expand the home’s outdoor living area. Mature trees on the property’s perimeter provide filtered light, allowing lush green plants to thrive along the path. “Since the east side is close to patio walls, I wanted to soften them with a more relaxed look to the planting,” Bankord comments. He also planted citrus along the wall as a privacy screen.



The pool's clean lines and stepped water feature suit the home's design. Saltillo tiles repeated throughout the property connect the water feature to a covered ramada, outdoor fireplace and private sitting areas.

Bankord situated eye-catching accents throughout the property. Near the front door, carved cantera cubes from Mexico were transformed into side-by-side fountains to envelop visitors with the sound of moving water. He designed iron gates and rain scuppers to replace the existing wood ones, which were starting to deteriorate. To reduce splash and erosion from rain, Bankord placed chiseled stone vessels beneath the scuppers. "Rainwater

can overflow the vessels and soak into the ground, or be harvested to water houseplants," he explains.

The renovation took about a year, but it was worth it, say the owners. "We're homebodies," concludes the wife. "We like to relax and have people over. The landscape is now so well-suited for entertaining."

The couple's garden will be on tour during *Phoenix Home & Garden's Grand Tour of Gardens* to be held April 6. 🌿

See Resource Guide.