



Savoring and Saving The Space Around You

By Brian Kaufman *Photos courtesy of Yard Elves*

A one-acre trout pond built by Yard Elves reclines in the sun near Estes Park.

preservation and integration: landscape and remodels

Your home is more than just a building. The trees, shrubs, flowerbeds and lawn add to the overall character of your home, as well as adding thousands of dollars to the home's value. When the time comes to remodel, your landscape will be an important consideration. But how do you protect your landscape during a building remodel? And should you remodel the landscape itself?

Sometimes remodels focus on the landscape itself. Changes to landscape can enhance a home's value while adding significantly to the lifestyle opportunities of the home's occupants.

Alan Horne is the owner of Yard Elves, a landscape company in Fort Collins. Horne's company is a true Cinderella story. "I came to town with a car, a sleeping bag and a television," Horne laughed. "I feel really blessed to have done so well in this community. Our staff is really excellent." Today, Yard Elves boasts more than 70 years combined experience between senior staff members.

Integrating changes into existing landscape and Integrating a landscape theme into the natural ecology is a challenge and Horne recommends proper planning.

"It's like a puzzle," Horne said. "You've got to be delicate and take your time, thinking things through and constantly readjusting." Jobs are done in sections with a solid day-by-day plan."

Yard Elves tackles jobs of any size. "I've done jobs from \$1,000 to two-and-half million," Horne said. "Every job is different. Every job is fun."

Often, the small jobs are the most challenging. "The tighter the space, the harder it is to minimize impact," Horne said, explaining that homes with close-in neighbors allow little workspace for heavy equipment.

Larger jobs involve different considerations. Aspen Rock in Estes Park gave Horne a chance to integrate his work into a beautiful natural landscape. The project had to be approved by the Army Corps of Engineers, ensuring that wetlands weren't harmed.

The original work included the construction on a one-acre trout pond. It was critical to both the homeowner and Horne that the pond appeared natural. "We had a lot of parties involved trying to minimize the environmental impact." The results were outstanding. Local wildlife began using the remodeled area as a habitat. "You'd see 100 head of elk jumping into the pond at once," said Horne. "Spectacular."

The homeowner was pleased, and ordered more work. The next step was a million-dollar waterfall, running the length of the property. Again, Integrating the work into the natural landscape was the goal. "We landscaped it to look like it was always there," Horne said. "As if they took the house and set it down on this beautiful setting."

The finished work appears natural, though every stone was engineered and placed in accordance with the remodel plan. Horne even added a mine shaft with a decorative small-gauge mining cart.

Showpiece job aside, Horne focuses on landscaping starter, middle class and high-end homes along with commercial properties. "Each customer has their own taste. There's so much diversity." Horne even crafts xeriscapes with interesting natural touches like dry streambeds and wooden bridges.

No matter what the homeowner's budget is, Horne advises finding an expert to help with landscape remodels, and to "Check references. Ask to see prior projects."

"People throw down rock, grass and a tree," he added. "[It's] better to design something colorful and functional. A good company can help."

Trails, an artificial waterfall and a stream and even a mining cart complete with tunnel all blend neatly into the environment around the home.

