

# Building Scene

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Marilyn Fitchett editor/953-2102



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This landscape plan for the Country Club Village Community House in Northville Township, designed by Gibbs Planning Group in Bloomfield Hills and developed by Haggerty Hills Limited Partnership, includes several formal landscaping elements. Large

trees, benches and ornamental lighting surround and capture the space in the courtyard. Shrubbery, fencing, lighting and flowers surround the pool deck, separating it from the courtyard lawn area.

Flower beds mark paths to the tennis courts and a formal garden to the side of the clubhouse. Trees line the parking areas, and elaborate flower beds (not depicted) frame the front entrance.

## Landscape architecture: just a formality

By Gerald Frawley  
staff writer

Formal gardens and landscaping, once the pride of kings and queens, have fallen by the wayside in recent years.

For the last decade, natural and informal landscaping have been the norm. The goal of the landscape architect was to make the trees, shrubs, flowers and lawns look so natural that people would believe a building sprang up in a clearing overnight, and there was no need to hire someone to keep it that way.

But formal landscaping could be on the verge of making a comeback. Bob Gibbs, president of Gibbs Planning Associates in Bloomfield Hills, said although he hasn't seen a

rush toward formal landscaping requests, when he presents ideas to his clients there has been a keen interest in the concept.

"The new formal landscaping is really a hybrid of the natural landscape and formal gardens," Gibbs explained. From the natural landscapes, site plans borrow the use of indigenous materials; from the formal gardens, site plans borrow design styles.

In formal landscaping, plant materials are not positioned to simulate random growth; they are designed to achieve a variety of effects, he said. In addition to being pleasing to look at, a well-designed formal landscape can direct the vision, capture space and create the illusion of space.

**NATURAL LANDSCAPING**, Gibbs said, was being driven by several factors, primarily the ease of maintenance and the belief that naturalism is better.

In the past, maintenance of formal landscaping required a great deal of time and labor, Gibbs said. Old formal landscaping sometimes meant weekly lawn mowing, flower cultivating, shrub trimming and leaf raking.

Much formal landscaping also included exotic plantings that required special treatment to survive in the Michigan climate, he said.

Today, botanists have developed slow-growing, hardy varieties of trees, shrubs, turf and other plant materials, Gibbs said. These, he said, need little maintenance — at most

one or two trimmings a year.

"A lot of shrubs are being bred as dwarves . . . new techniques of planting . . . new varieties of plants and choosing the right kinds of maples, evergreens and shrubs have made a big difference."

As for the other driving force behind the growth in natural landscaping — natural is better than man-made — Gibbs said people have become bored with it and are looking for something different.

Gibbs said he doesn't know exactly what the appeal is in formal gardens, but people recognize and appreciate organization.

The drive to formal landscape is also partially driven by architecture, Gibbs continued. "Architecture is getting much more interesting — nowadays people are buying homes with far more detail."

Since the house's architecture is so well designed — and looks it — it is only natural that the landscape should be as equally well-designed. Architects and landscape architects are frequently working together in designing homes and surrounding sites, Gibbs said.

**MIKE LEHMANN**, president of the Lehmann Design Group Inc. in

Huntington Woods, said he's doing more formal landscaping than he once did. "I'm seeing more people looking for more variety in work."

People in southeastern Michigan, he explained, seem to be fairly conservative and traditional so formal landscaping appeals to them.

"They tell me they don't want to look like the guy next door — they don't know exactly what they want, but they know the guy next door is boring."

That's where the landscape architect comes in, he said. "Part of my

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