

'Little pieces of Paradise'

Brother, sister make successful splash in water garden business

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STAFF PHOTOS BY BRYAN MITCHELL

When Casey and Martha Wright were youngsters, their father, Ken, was into Japanese gardening. The family's yard was filled with Oriental plant material and statues, and featured a water garden built by Ken in which water moved through bamboo into a small pond. He told the children it was magic bamboo; they later learned he had a pump recirculating the water.

The pond was Casey and Martha's first experience with water gardening. As adults, they are working their own water magic in their business, Splashy Designs.

Based in Novi, Splashy Designs builds ponds, waterfalls and streams. The brother and sister team started the business part time last year, and found they enjoyed the work so much they now do it full time.

"It's a lot of fun," said Martha, who graduated from Michigan State University with a degree in horticulture and was assistant groundskeeper at Birmingham Country Club.

"You can be real creative," said Casey, who has a business degree from Central Michigan University.

To the Wrights, building water features is more than landscaping, it's an art form, Casey said. He calls water gardens "little pieces of paradise."

Clients have different reasons for wanting water gardens. For one customer who had a stroke, it's a way to enjoy nature; she loves to sit by the pond and watch the fish and birds. For others, having a pond is a way of living on the water.

A water garden can be placed out in a yard or run under a deck.

"Sometimes all somebody needs is to drown out the sound of the roads," Casey said. "Some people love koi, keep them as pets ... Other people get it for curb appeal."

Alex and Toni Aloe of Livonia hired

Splashy Designs to design a pond for their yard after seeing its exhibit at a home and garden show in Novi.

"We love it, it's just beautiful," Toni said.

"It's very soothing, very relaxing."

"We really like it," Alex said.

The Aloes' water garden features koi and a colorful assortment of plants, including hostas, water lilies, water hyacinths, iris and a Japanese maple.

Its bottom measures 11 by 16 feet. Water glides from waterfalls and flows at a rate of 2,000 gallons an hour.

The pond, which is lit at night, was built with 13 to 15 tons of rock and completed in three days. The Aloes said they were impressed that the Splashy Designs crew came on the days scheduled.

On average, a pond measuring 11 by 16 feet costs \$5,000 and takes 50 man hours or two to three days to complete, the Wrights said. Splashy Designs will send out an information packet and meet for consultation.

"We're there for maintenance and everything," Martha said. "We're there for the whole pond experience."

Call Splashy Designs at (248)477-7482.

Water garden clubs are a way of sharing water feature experiences and suggestions. The Southeast Chapter of Michigan Koi & Pond Clubs has regular events, such as its Member Mini Tour Saturday, Aug. 18. Call (248)646-7675 for information on the club or the tour.



Paradise found: The water garden designed by Splashy Designs for the Aloe yard in Livonia features waterfalls. Customers have different reasons for getting a water garden, from love of nature to the desire to cover traffic sounds.



Going natural: A bee moves about one of the plants at the Aloe water garden.



Making a splash: Toni Aloe (left) and Casey and Martha Wright are pleased with the water feature at the Aloe residence. The Wrights, brother and sister, started their water garden design business last year. To them, building water gardens and ponds is an art form.

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