



Aquatic applications

By Peter Chakerian

Adding water features to your service package can garner large profits.

Few additions to real estate offer the tranquility, formality and opulence the way water features do.

Waterfalls, pondless streams, fountains and other aquatic focal points add the element of running water to a property, anchor a successful landscaping plan and can transform residential and commercial landscapes into something truly extraordinary. But a lot goes into planning for – and successfully selling – these hardscape features, especially in the face

of economic downturn and water restrictions unlikely to reverse any time soon.

“For years, I have been telling people that we need to get back to basics with water conservation in the context of water-feature planning. No one was listening until they started getting hit in their pocketbooks,” says Mike Garcia, president-principal of Enviroscap L.A. in Redondo Beach, Calif. “My hometown of Manhattan Beach just informed residents that they will be paying triple for water

rates, which takes something beyond a concern to a full-blown crisis,” he says. “If that kind of price spike happened with gasoline, people would positively freak out.

Several Southern states are keeping a keen eye on water usage and many contractors in those states are becoming experts with pondless systems and the like – water features with waterfalls or fountains which use gravel pits of sorts to reduce water usage and cycle existing standing water and collected rainfall.

Used in conjunction with rainwater harvesting, these pondless systems are growing in popularity – and not just for the cost savings and conservation possibilities.

Brian Dahle, owner of The Fishman in Birmingham, Ala., says his company creates holistic, natural-looking water features and decorative fountains that include a pondless system.

“We’re finding people leaning more towards those designs, even though we haven’t had the kind of mandated water restrictions in Alabama that some states have had,” Dahle says. “Our water prices do seem to go up and down like gas prices, and if utility costs start to mirror costs at the pump more often, I think that people here will be even more open to thinking ahead in their ornamental designs than they already are.”

Not everyone has to contend with water restrictions. Jaak Harju of Atlantis Watergardens in Rockland, N.J. says that with nearby bodies of water and “more than enough rainfall,” residents there only have odd irrigation mandates in effect during summer months.

“Water restrictions haven’t had the kind of impact on our designs that others are dealing with, but we’re mostly OK for the moment,” Harju says. “Those technologies are becoming more prevalent, though. We’re likely to see a bigger call for them in the near future, because they’re not going away.”

For the past several years, there has been a scaling back on size and scale of projects due to economic factors. Garcia, Dahle and Harju all see