

Water Wonders

BACKYARD PONDS ADD LIQUID ASSETS TO THE LANDSCAPE

TIM KRZEMINSKI and Brian Helfrich have a couple of things in common. Both are among the leading builders of backyard water features in North America, capable of creating everything from custom koi ponds to cascading waterfalls that look as if they were transplanted straight from Yosemite or Yellowstone. And both began pursuing their particular passions when they were very young men, not even out of high school.

"I've always been interested in nature and the outdoors, from the time I was just a little kid," says Krzmen-

ski, who grew up in Illinois but spent plenty of quality time on family vacations fishing in Colorado or hiking in Kauai. "It's always been a big part of who I am"

Krzeminski would occasionally visit homes that had man-made backyard ponds and, more often than not, be disappointed by what he saw.

"They always looked too forced, like nothing I had ever seen in nature," he says.

Krzeminski began building fish ponds as a hobby and, when he was just a freshman in high school, landed his first

paying client. Now his Chicago-based company, Laughing Waters (www.laughingwatersinc.com), founded in 2002, creates and builds backyard water features for clients all over the country. Just as every setting in nature is unique, there is no cookie-cutter approach to what Krzeminski does.

"It's just matter of helping the client's vision work in the space available, then trying to replicate nature as well as we possibly can," says Krzeminski. "The end result is creating a space that makes the homeowner want to get outside and engage with their surroundings on a





An Aquascape koi pond (above) and waterfall (below). Opposite page: A backyard stream by Laughing Waters.

daily basis. We help them make everlasting connections with their homes.”

One recent client of Laughing Waters wanted his expansive backyard to feature a one-acre pond, stocked with trout and complete with waterfalls.

“We had a blast building it,” says Krzmenski. “We created stepping stones so people can actually walk across the pond to a grotto under the waterfall. It’s pretty awesome.”

According to Krzmenski, advances in technology have helped make his job easier. New ozone systems for water purification and filtration have eliminated much of the reliance on chemicals and algacides when it comes to helping water maintain its crystal-clear qualities. And, Krzmenski says, he is now creating fountains and waterfalls that can be controlled by easy-to-use apps on smart phones and iPads.

In St. Charles, Illinois, which is by official proclamation of the city council the “Water Garden Capital of the World,” Brian Helfrich is construction manager for Aquascape (www.

aquascapeinc.com). The company was founded in 1992 by Greg Wittstock, aka “The Pond Guy,” who began building ponds when he was just 12.

Helfrich, who loved fishing as a boy, dreamed of catching trout in his backyard and built a pond when he was 16. It was only “semi-successful,” he says



now, but he has gone on to master the craft in his creations for Aquascape. Now married with small children, Helfrich’s backyard is a showcase for his work with a 4-foot-deep koi pond with an infinity edge that cascades water onto the patio, creating a shallow wading pool for the kids.

“With a flip of a switch the water recedes and we can use the patio to entertain guests for a barbecue,” says Helfrich.

One of the major trends Helfrich sees in his field these days is “rainwater harvesting systems.” Essentially, they are just a new, bigger twist on traditional cisterns that were once mounted alongside homes. But the new systems can contain 6,000-gallon underground tanks used to supply backyard ponds and irrigate the rest of the property.

“There is real sense of satisfaction knowing that you are using a sustainable source to supply your pond,” says Helfrich. “It makes sitting by the pond and watching the fish all that more relaxing.” 