

Building on the Past

By Michael Miyamoto, LC/DBM

Even though the owner of a Southern California home was an avid vegetable gardener, his backyard was neglected and in a state of disrepair. So he decided to do a major makeover, and hired Debbie Glikzman, owner of Urban Oasis Landscape, Los Angeles, to do the job.

Glikzman is a general member and on the board of the Los Angeles chapter of the Association of Professional Landscape Designers. She is the sole proprietor of Urban Oasis and has been in business since 2000.

Some of the obstacles included a layer of blacktop that was left over from the client's children's basketball-playing days. The existing concrete retaining walls were also "forlorn."

After assessing the place, Glikzman said she wanted to take advantage of the topography and create a "dining room" effect for her client.

"An attractive fence and stone walls make you feel like you are in the south of France," Glikzman

said. That is exactly the sort of atmosphere she wanted to replicate.

Although the existing retaining walls were sturdy, they were cracked and unsightly. Glikzman had her work crew fortify the walls with rebar and concrete, and then laid individual stone slabs by hand over the existing block. This gives the appearance of a dry-stacked stonewall.

Asked whether she encountered any challenges on this job, she said: "The existing retaining walls were crooked and needed to be stabilized. We reinforced them with rebar and filled the hollow spaces with concrete. Getting the stone facing to look like a natural stone wall instead of a veneer took a lot of finessing."

Francisco Sierra was the contractor for the job, and one of his friends, Victor Vasquez, was the carpenter who put together the wooden fence. The fence was built with redwood, and the screens for it are custom trellises that Vasquez also made

Above: The backyard of this Los Angeles home was redesigned and given a major facelift. Debbie Glikzman, owner of Urban Oasis Landscape, also of Los Angeles, used the existing retaining walls, but had them straightened, repaired and reinforced. Then her workers laid stone blocks along the face and on top of each wall by hand. A new redwood fence was installed along the top of the new stonewall. The project also included a natural water feature on one level, flowing to a tiny pond on a lower level. Giant boulders frame a fire pit, and small and large logs were added to this feature for seating. There are also raised planter beds, flagstone and brick pavers, and lighting and irrigation systems.

Top, Right: Pacific Outdoor Living installed the water feature and submersible LEDs. Water starts flowing from the water feature on an upper level and cascades down to a tiny pond on a lower level. FX Luminarie manufactured the landscape lights, and Del Rey Electrical installed the lighting system. A total of 41 landscape and submersible lights are in this project.

Middle, Right: The fence was custom built by one of Glikzman's subcontractors. It is made entirely of redwood, and the screens are basically trellises. The posts are 6" x 6" and the trellises are 1" x 1/2". The railings are 2" x 4". The fence was placed atop the existing retaining wall. "Getting the stone facing to look like a natural stonewall instead of a veneer took a lot of finessing," Glikzman said.

Right: David Lightfoot installed the irrigation system, and Israel Iniguez put in all the plants. The plants in this photo and elsewhere in the project include: Oakleaf hydrangeas; hydrangea quercifolia; Ravers African daisies; purple coneflowers; Japanese anemones; Peruvian Lily Alstromeria Third Harmonics; Bountiful Blue Blueberries; Purple Pixie Fringe Flower hydrangeas; and Bush anemones.





Top, Left: Although the existing retaining walls were sturdy, they were cracked and unsightly. Glikzman had her work crew fortify the walls with rebar and concrete, and then laid stone by hand on the facing side of the existing wall, as well as its top. This gave the appearance that this feature is dry-stacked. Each piece was mortared in place, but not grouted. No footing was required for this fence job, because the existing retaining wall has one already in place. The stone used for the walls was a combination of Monterey Cream, Deer Creek and McGregor Lake ledgestone and Yosemite Quartzite — all from a local supplier, Bourget Brothers. The company also sized each stone piece to Glikzman's specifications.

Top, Right: The 6" x 6" posts are buried in the ground and bolted to the existing wall, which already has a footing. So the fence is well supported by the wall, Glikzman said.



Bottom, Left: Generic boulders, river rocks, gravel and pebbles were used for the bed of the manmade stream.

Bottom, Right: Sheets of COR-TEN steel, fabricated by Jaime Gracia of Gracia Designs, were used to create raised planter beds. Francisco Sierra, a subcontractor, installed flagstone and brick paving materials, repaired and reinforced the existing retaining wall and handcrafted the new stonewall.

out of redwood. The posts are 6" x 6" and the trellises are 1" x 1/2".

Sierra installed the flagstone and brick pavers, the stone facings on the existing retaining walls, the fire pit with tree stump stools, and fortified and straightened all of the existing retaining walls. He also installed the footings for a pergola, while Vasquez himself built the pergola.


"I created the design and had the overall vision and was on site doing observation and coordinating the different trades," Glikzman said. "I worked very closely with them (the workers) especially with the stone work, where I laid out the pattern of all the stones before they were laid."

The stone used for the walls was a combination of Monterey Cream, Deer Creek and McGregor Lake ledgestone and Yosemite Quartzite — all from a local supplier, Bourget Brothers. The company also sized each stone piece to the builders' specifications. Sweetwater flagstone and brick were used as paving materials.

Glikzman also included five enormous raised planter beds enclosed with COR-TEN steel in the project, all of them to grow vegetables because her client is an avid vegetable gardener. The client's backyard also has many fruit trees, berry plants and grape vines, so it's a virtual "food grower's heaven," Glikzman said. Jaime Gracia, of Gracia Designs, fabricated the COR-TEN material for the raised planter boxes.

"A natural water feature starts at the top level and meanders down to a pond below," she adds. "Giant boulders frame a fire pit and small and large logs are used for seating."

Pacific Outdoor Living built the water feature; David Lightfoot installed the irrigation system; Del Rey Electric put in the lighting; and Israel Inequz installed all the plants.

The lights came from FX Luminaire. The plants, the boulders, rocks and pebbles in the water feature and fire pit, and the used brick on the landing between the upper and lower levels are all generic. 



Hiding a Slope, Pinpointing a House

Debbie Gliksman of Urban Oasis Landscape, designed and supervised the installation of a fence, drought tolerant garden, deck, steps and more at this home in Tarzana, Calif. The job also included a decorative screen that was installed against an empty slope too steep to plant. The screen is made of COR-TEN, or weathered steel, which has a naturally oxidized finish that forms a stable rust-like appearance. Jamie Gracia, of Gracia Design, fabricated the screen, and also cut out the house address numbers, creating a graphic visual statement.

The numbers that were cut out were then applied to this COR-TEN raised planter bed at the entrance of the same home: another good example of how imagination and innovation can come from fencing projects.

David O. Lightfoot of David Lightfoot Landscapes, designed and built the fence behind the planter box. It was designed as a swimming pool security fence that would be pleasing to the eye and not block the view from the property. The redwood frame was made with 4" x 6" posts and 2" x 6" caps. The fence has 5' x 5' panels with 1-1/2" square steel mesh fastened to the back of mitered 2' x 4' redwood frames. The wood has a semi-transparent finish, while the metal mesh was left unfinished.

A concrete continuous grade beam was poured with steel (Simpson PB) post bases set in. The 4' x 6' posts were mounted and the 2" x 6" caps were fastened to run continuously. The 5' x 5' panels were fabricated on site and suspended in each frame with uniform spacing (long construction screws and cylindrical spacers). The finish was applied after construction. 