

Water WONDERLAND

AESTHETICS MIXED WITH ESSENTIALS CREATES A CALIFORNIA OASIS

WRITTEN BY KAREN BUSCEMI | PHOTOGRAPHY BY THE GREEN SCENE

IF A COMPLETED LANDSCAPE DESIGN PROJECT MAKES THE HOMEOWNERS FEEL LIKE THEY CAN VACATION IN THEIR OWN BACKYARD, THEN SCOTT COHEN HAS DONE HIS JOB.

The primary designer of The Green Scene in Canoga Park, California, Cohen hit the mark with a Northridge, California, project that started as a 2,500-square-foot bare soil yard with a recently removed in-ground pool overlooking a golf course. "The family needed a backyard that worked for entertaining," says Cohen. "They wanted a look that was clean and contemporary."

Cohen's first step for all of his design projects is the company's questionnaire. "I want to get into their heads. I want to know these people," he says. "Anybody can design for the land, but I want to find out what's fun or different about the people. I'm looking for clues to their personal lives."

The homeowners desired a combination of water and fire, some greenery, and clean lines. They knew what they didn't want as well, including a significant amount of rock or stone work or a crashing, tropical waterfall. Working from that list plus examples from magazine clippings, Cohen and his

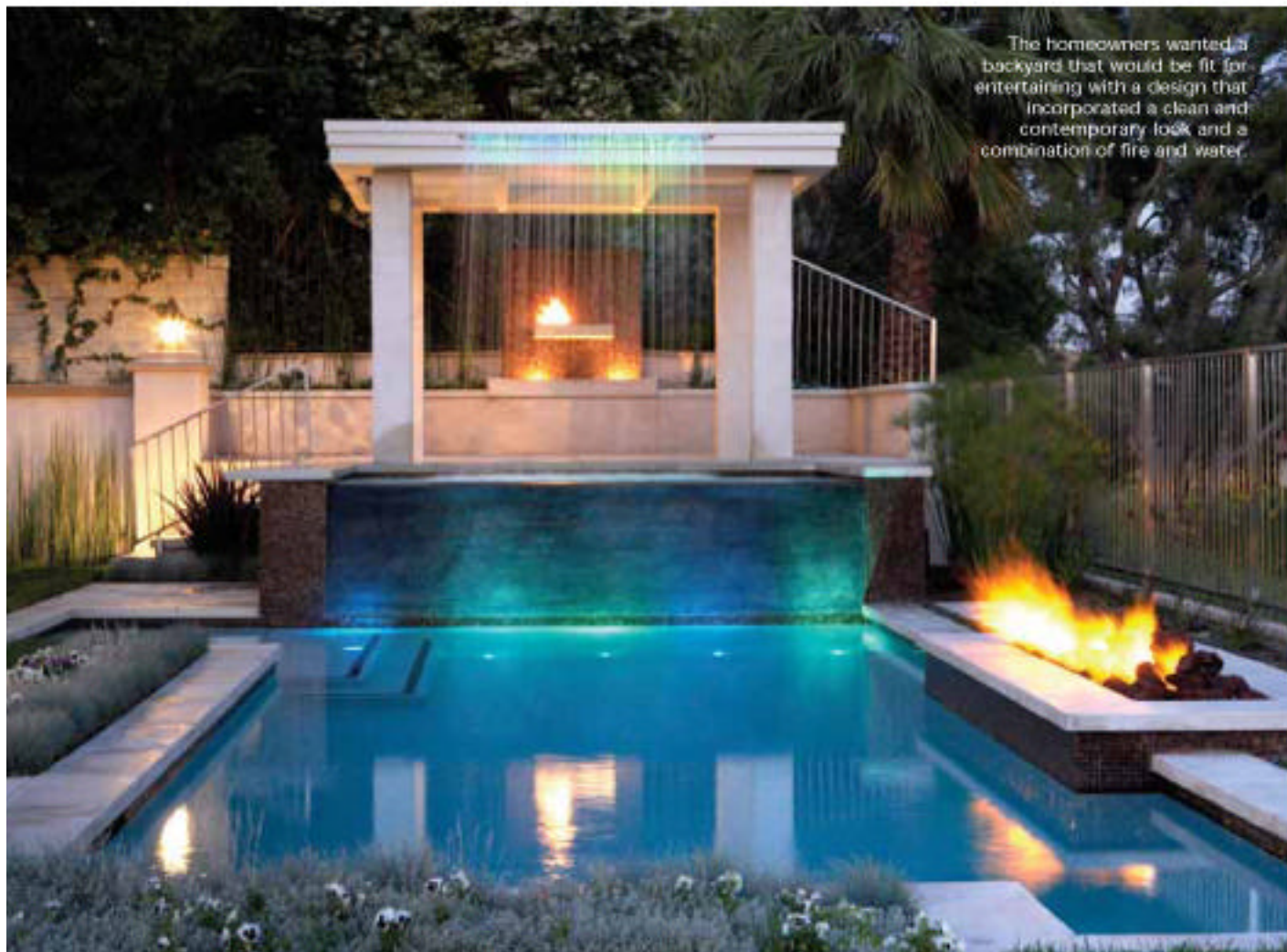
design team of David Bender and Mary Barnhill got to work sketching concepts.

The project, started in May 2006, took six months to complete. The result is an ethereal tract in muted tones that mixes lights, water, texture, and fire to create a provocative outdoor living space that's as useful as it is visual.

The focal point is the soft waterfall that spills from the patio cover into the spa. Cohen says the recirculating water used comes from the spa's hot water.

"When you sit in the spa, under the waterfall, you get this great massage across your shoulders," Cohen says.

The water from the spa spills over a rigid, concrete wall, cast with corrugated drainage product that has a lip like corrugated cardboard. As the water ripples down the wall into the pool, it yields a soothing resonance. The pool was constructed of gunite (a type of sprayed concrete) with a 3M colorquartz plaster finish. At the opposite end of the pool is a baja shelf—



The homeowners wanted a backyard that would be fit for entertaining with a design that incorporated a clean and contemporary look and a combination of fire and water.

a shallow area where lounge chairs can be placed in the ultimate location to bask and relax.

When constructing the pool and spa, Cohen decided to maximize the yard by raising the spa 3 feet, which allowed him to cut into the hillside and pick up another 6 feet of yard space. In doing that, he was able to craft a swim-up bar to the left of the spa. With a 36-inch height from the patio, the space serves as an ideal counter space.

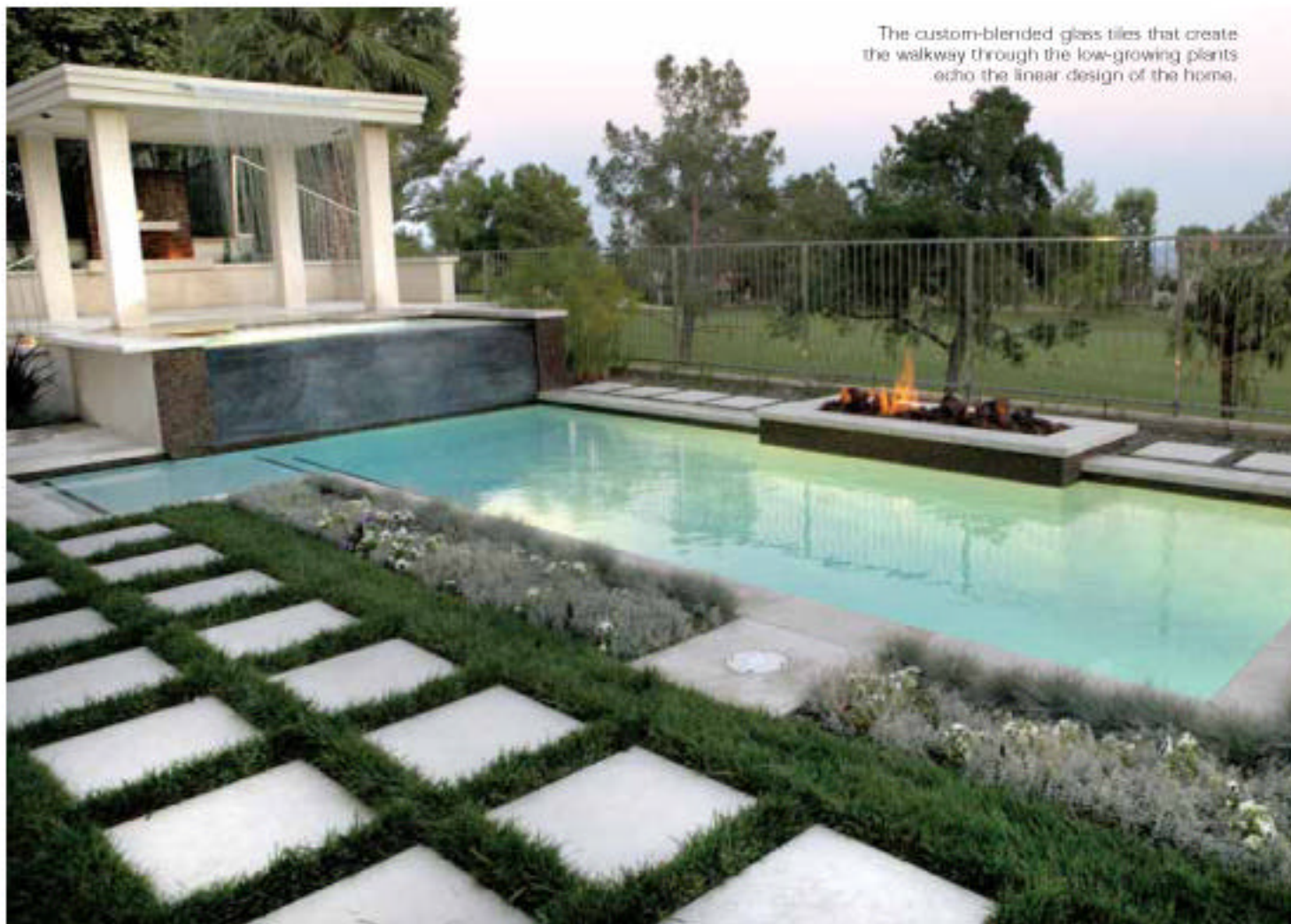
Behind the spa is one of two fire troughs. Placed forward from a veneered glass mosaic tile wall with fountain, the 24-inch-wide fire dances and reflects across the water that weaves down the wall.

The other fire feature is situated along the side of the pool and serves as the vista from the front door of the house. Cohen specified 8-foot-long gas lighter logs that link together for ample flames.

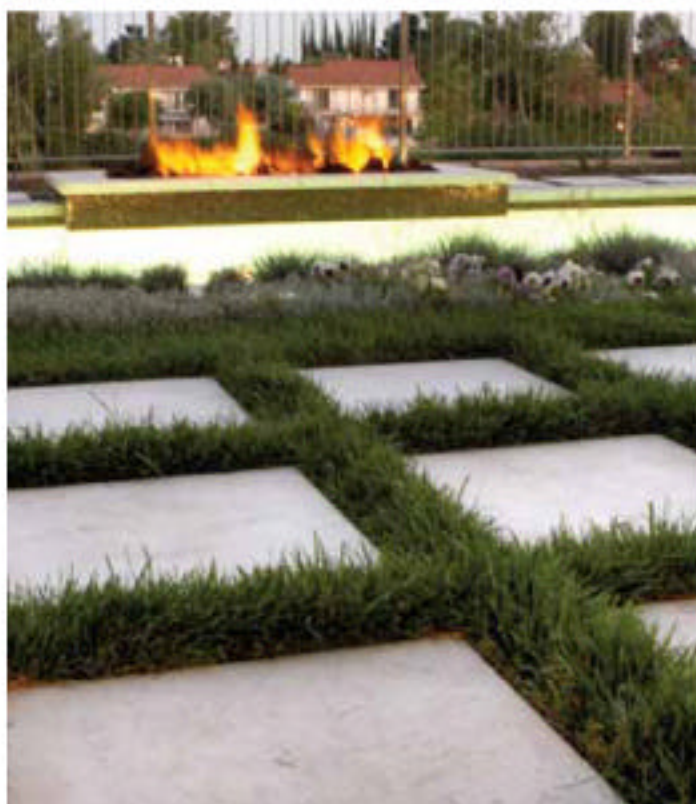
"It's a really pretty feature, the way the fire reflects across the water," he says. "You can't be in a hurry and look at fire. Watching a fire dance, you just have to feel relaxed."

On a practical note, Cohen was sure to position the flames back from the pool so swimmers don't run the risk of getting burned.



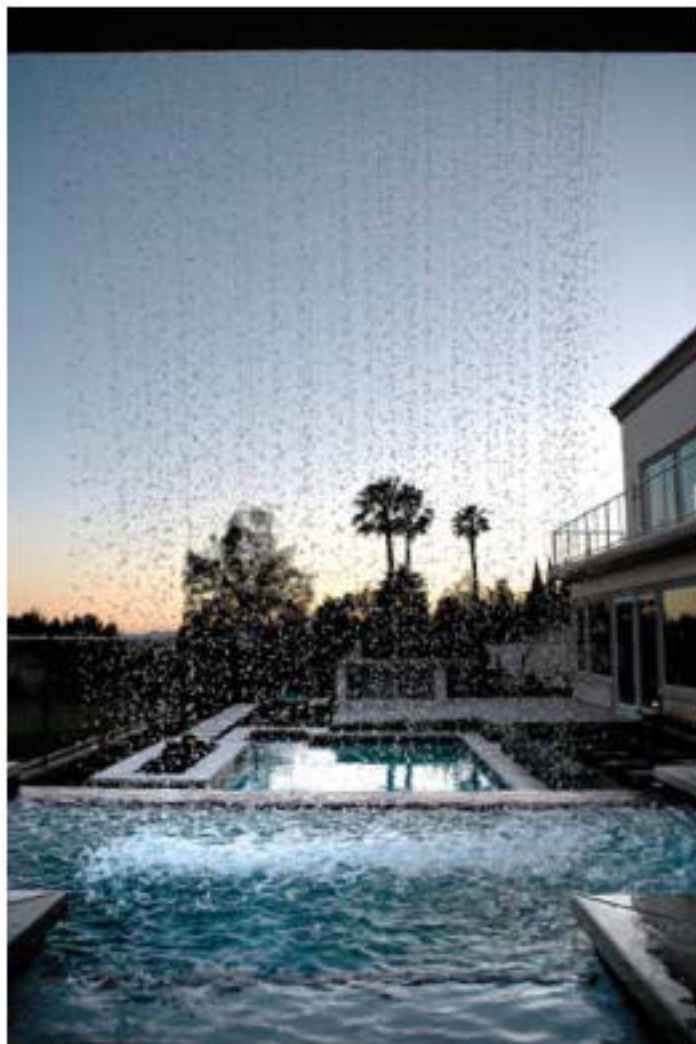


The custom-blended glass tiles that create the walkway through the low-growing plants echo the linear design of the home.



INSPIRING DESIGN

The Green Scene's designs are now available to the public at fetch-a-sketch.com, a new Web site offering ready-to-use landscape design perspective drawings. The site currently has about 1,000 designs, with more being added each week. Plan prices are based on design complexity and range from about \$10 to \$30. Homeowners can print the designs for their contractors, who will select suitable plants for the locality that mesh with the renderings.



Practicality is a necessity in Cohen's designs, but he knows how to make it extraordinary. The outdoor kitchen with an L-shaped counter serves its purpose with barbecue, side burner, smoker tray, rotisserie burner, and ample storage. But this kitchen also was designed to fit the feel of the yard, with glass blocks and a counter built with recycled crushed glass, cast into place with concrete and polished smooth. A split-level construction, the cooking side is a standard 36 inches while the custom side is a 44-inch standard bar counter, perfect for serving food.

"We underlit the counter with hundreds of fiber-optic cables, so the light comes up into the countertop at night. The homeowner can freeze on any color to set the mood," Cohen says.

The designer notes that lighting is one of the most important aspects of landscape design.

"The correct placement of fixtures paints the landscape with the light," he says. "You can highlight and change what you see. The project can take on a completely different life at night than it does during the day."



For this project, Cohen first looked at safety lighting, such as steps and areas where guests could trip. Then he added the aesthetic lighting, including the fiber optics in the outdoor kitchen and fiber-optic cables that uplight the water wall connecting pool to spa. Five fiber-optic lights on a color wheel sit flush at the bottom of the pool, changing color from blue to green to red to white.

The last step of the process was introducing greenery, and, with various views from the house down into the yard, it was important to the design team to use primarily low-growing plants to set off the pool and spa. Dwarf lavender, equisetum, papyrus, and native grasses are dotted throughout the custom-blended glass tiles that create the space's walkways, and Costa Rican butterfly vine, its paper flower reminiscent of origami, adds a burst of purple color.

"A well-designed yard doesn't mean that it costs twice as much as a standard yard," Cohen says. "It requires more planning, more design talent behind the scenes, and it's going to take longer to build something that's a little more unique. I like to push the envelope with everything I design." ■