

# sundrea

VOX

Jan 2017

This recently completed landscape was a Christmas gift from husband to wife. He secretly hired us to create a landscape plan and gave it to her at Christmas. Upon receiving word that she loved the design, we got started with the install.

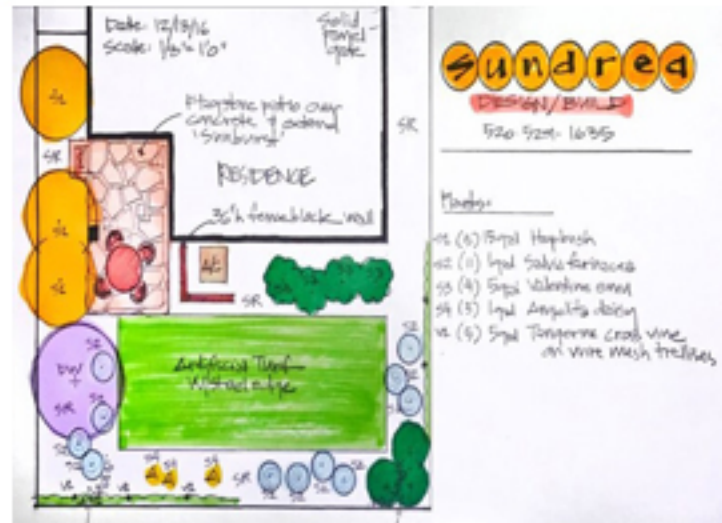
First, we paved over the existing gray concrete patio with flagstone and extended it out into the backyard, giving them more usable space. A simple low wall was built to screen the AC unit visually and also to abate the noise. Next, we installed an artificial turf lawn with steel edging.

Regarding plants: an existing desert willow and three Valentine emu bushes were incorporated into the new design; the desert willow is a native tree with purple flowers and makes for a nice focal point; several more Valentine emu bushes with dark red flowers were added; hopbushes were planted next to the patio to create privacy from the neighbor; tangerine crossvines will grow to soften the perimeter wall with, you guessed it, tangerine colored flowers; salvia farinacea is a great small shrub with pretty blue flowers that will take full sun as well as some shade underneath the desert willow; finally, angelita daisies will provide a pop of yellow throughout the year.

We were happy to be part of this couple's Christmas plans. We wish them and all of you a happy new year!

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Mar 2017

For this recent landscape renovation, the homeowners contacted us with the idea of extending their spa deck by adding pavers. The existing concrete patio was awkwardly shaped and provided inadequate space for lounging or entertaining. The spa and patio were installed very close to the house and at a higher elevation than the foundation, creating a horrible drainage problem. There were also safety concerns because of a precariously placed step and several large cracks in the concrete. The entire layout was confining and uninviting.

Paul felt that simply adding pavers would not really solve these issues and instead suggested completely removing all of the concrete decking. This solution gave us a clean slate to create a cohesive and functional outdoor space.

Careful study and understanding of the site allowed us to solve the drainage issue by creating a design that directs rainwater away from the house. We also eliminated the need for an awkward step by creating a gentle slope in the new patio. The color blend of pavers was thoughtfully selected to visually connect the small patio space with the surrounding natural environment, as well as with the architectural colors of the house. The leaf and flower stalk colors of the blue elf aloe are a nice match to the accent colors of the furniture and pots.

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VOX

April 2017

Spring is here and it's a great time to sit out on your patio and enjoy our beautiful Tucson weather. Here are several examples of patios we've recently completed.

Depending on the particular needs and goals of any project, a patio may be adjoined to the house for a seamless transition between interior and exterior; set within a small courtyard to create a welcoming approach to the house; designed away from the house to take advantage of mountain views; or tucked in the corner of your yard to create a quiet, reflective space.

Material selection is an important design consideration. Flagstone is a great choice to provide a rustic southwestern theme; brick pavers can give you a more traditional courtyard look; concrete pads laid out in modular repetition create a contemporary style; and for a fun, artsy feel, you can reuse and repurpose leftover pieces of whatever.

No matter the size or scope of the project, Sundrea Design/Build can create the perfect patio space just for you!



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May 2017

This client contacted us to design and install a rainwater-harvesting system as part of their patio renovation project. Because of the narrow space a slim-line tank was selected to fit against the house and positioned underneath a scupper to catch rainwater from the roof, which is directed into the rainwater tank and stored for landscape use.

The landscape irrigation valve is connected to the rainwater tank, so instead of using municipal water, the landscape plants are irrigated using the stored rainwater. Using a small number of cactus and low water use flowering plants, such as penstemon and salvia, this landscape should survive on the harvested rainwater. Supplemental water may be needed in periods of extended draught or for watering potted plants and running the small water feature.

Regarding the patio renovation, the old space felt confining and disconnected because there was a concrete slab underneath the patio roof, and beyond the roof line was a sliver of brick paving. We see this a lot where although the two different materials create a combined area, it typically looks like an after-thought and rarely provides a unifying and comfortable space. An easy solution is to pave over the concrete slab and extend out beyond the roof line with the same material. Seen here, the flagstone paving creates a cohesive space, inviting you out into the landscape.

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June 2017

Starting at the front entry, we designed and fabricated this custom metal gate, influenced by metalwork the homeowner had seen in their travels to South America. A nice entry gate helps to define a sense of space as well as provides an important first impression of your home. The gate was rusted to the desired patina and then sealed to create a subtle sheen.

We also added a small fence section to further provide a sense of space and connect the entry way to the house. The fence creates a subtle backdrop for the pots and furniture in the foreground, as well as enhances the view of the landscape plants beyond.

More fence sections and gates were added at the other end of the house to define a side courtyard. Here, again, the architectural element of the fence connects and enhances the space. The rainchain is functional but was added primarily as an ornate sculptural piece to provide a little vertical interest against the stucco wall.

Moving along to the back of the house, we installed a flagstone patio at the edge of the desert, allowing the homeowners to be closer to nature. Previously they were confined to a small walled-in patio space. A large hedge was removed to open up the mountain views. Minimal plants and boulders were added to transition from architecture to nature.

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VOX

July 2017

All around Tucson, Citrus trees, palm trees and other non-native plants are drooping and turning yellow. Not only exotic plants, but our native creosote, brittle bush and prickly pear cactus are looking stressed as well.

June is typically our hottest month with temps consistently over 100° and this year was no exception with multiple days of record breaking temps. Now in July, we anxiously await our summer monsoon season to cool things down and bring rain.

People have ways of dealing with the hot sun by wearing sun-screen or cranking the AC. Plants have their own ways of dealing with extreme heat such as leaf-wilt or yellowing which can often be alleviated by simply providing more water.

For the most part, our desert landscapes prefer a slow, deep watering several times a week which allows water to get down to the roots, yet also allows them to dry out between waterings, which is important. Native plants are generally better equipped to survive our extreme climate, but even they may benefit from supplemental water in times of drought.

All this being said, there is no substitute for rain. It is just hot and dry right now and our plants will need to endure a bit longer until the monsoon rains can magically rejuvenate our natural and urban landscapes ... and our spirits!

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VOX

Aug 2017

Monsoon season is upon us! Plants, animals and humans alike are all taking advantage of the annual rains while we can. One way to take advantage of rainwater in your landscape is to harvest it by creating catch basins. Rainwater contains nitrogen which is vital for plant health. Instead of just letting this precious resource run off your property, allowing it to soak into the ground provides nitrogen to plant roots.

You can see in the 'before' photo, this yard had a gentle slope. Soil was excavated from this slope to create basins and the excavated soil was reused to create raised paths between the basins. When it rains, the first basin catches rainwater flowing downhill. The basins are connected by a series of drainpipes underneath the path. As the upper basin is filled, water overflows through the drainpipes into the lower basins.

Verbena, penstemon, zinnia and blackfoot daisy were planted along the borders. These native wildflowers are short-lived but are adapted to reseed in and around the basins in the nooks and crannies of the rocks and boulders. This new landscape will evolve as it establishes a natural rhythm of reseeding which will also attract our native birds and butterflies!

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Sept 2017

As you can see in the 'before' photo, this backyard consisted of a dilapidated old wooden shade structure and small patio with a hodge-podge mix of pots, furniture and portable grill. While the space did provide shade, it was not particularly inviting. It was determined the old shade roof be removed and a new space be designed to provide a comfortable shaded area for outdoor dining and entertaining.

For the new roof, we collaborated with our friends at Continental Products who suggested eliminating the center post, as seen in the 'before' photo, which greatly opened up the space as you can see in the 'after' photo. The old wooden posts were replaced with masonry columns which tie into the existing architecture. The roof itself is 'Alumawood' which is a cost-effective alternative because it will not dry out, crack or peel like wood and comes in a variety of colors. White was chosen for this particular project to match the color of the existing fence.

The flagstone patio was extended to provide ample entertaining space, allowing for a built-in counter and bar top. We worked with our friends at Arizona Grill and Hearth in selecting the grill and cabinet doors. A ceiling fan, TV and tile were all thoughtfully incorporated to complete this beautiful outdoor space.

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Oct 2017

When a client calls here looking for a new landscape or renovation project, they typically know the general scope of what they want, but don't know how to put all the pieces together. That is where design comes in, which is the planning and organizing of individual elements into a cohesive space. Just like any other discipline, there are rules or principles of landscape design dealing with size, shape, color and texture.

Perhaps the most difficult design principle to fully understand and master, but also the most fun to explore, is 'rhythm'. More commonly associated with music, rhythm is easy to hear and comprehend as the beat or tempo of a song. What makes rhythm difficult to create and understand in landscape design is, unlike music where you basically listen to a song from start to finish, a landscape is experienced differently every time. It changes depending on where you sit or walk, time of day, time of year and involves all the senses, even sometimes including taste.

While you may be able to easily identify a simple repeating pattern of plants or pavers, a masterfully designed space will provide underlying rhythms for you to explore and orchestrate your own unique and ever-changing experiences.

Elvis once said, "You've either got rhythm or you don't, but if you've got it, you've got it all over."

Does your outdoor space got rhythm?

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Nov 2017

This client had a pool which they never used, yet were spending so much valuable time, money and water to maintain it. I've run into this situation many times and have often suggested filling in the pool, only to discover many homeowners not only find the idea daunting, they also feel it may decrease their property value.

In my experience designing landscapes, I have found many homeowners are not looking for a pool, or they do not enjoy using the pool they have. There are of course many homeowners who do enjoy having a pool and we've created many beautiful landscapes incorporating new or existing pools and spas. However, this client was ready for a change so we filled in their old pool and created a beautiful new patio space for them.

Filling in the pool was not a complicated process, although it needed to be done properly: First we obtained the required permit and arranged the necessary inspections; after the pool was drained, holes were cut into the bottom; the pool deck was broken up and used as fill, along with tons of soil which was compacted to prevent any future settling; finally a new brick patio was designed over the old pool area. Plants, lights, rock work and a sculpture by Jeannine Young complete the space.

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Dec 2017

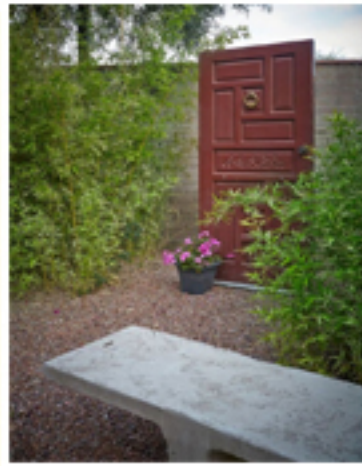
I'd like to see what is behind door number three ...

But you can't and that's the idea. This mid-town home has an alley just outside the back wall, complete with views of utility lines and poles, as well as neighboring carports. An old-growth bamboo hedge somewhat screens the unwanted views, but coverage is spotty and lacks much visual interest.

The homeowners contacted us about building a corrugated metal fence on top of the existing block wall. However, while that certainly would have screened the unsightly alley view, Paul thought it would have made the backyard feel like a prison and thought the couple might rather enjoy something fun and whimsical.

After a bit of collaborative brainstorming and some convincing on Paul's part, they settled on the idea of placing vintage doors in strategic locations to playfully solve the problem. While the doors do not form a completely solid screen, the rhythmic placement creates a series of focal points, directing the eye away from the alley views and instead leads you pleasantly through the landscape.

We found these doors 'as-is' at various sources around town and our in-house crew did a great job setting and securing them in place. And for enjoying the backyard at night, we artistically lit each door with low-voltage landscape lighting, creating interesting play between light and shadow.



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