

# Street of Dreams landscaping In Harmony with nature

By TIM WATANABE  
For the Reporter

Back when the term was first used, something described as “green” or “environmentally friendly” hardly ever meant “beautiful.” Visitors that tour the 2007 Seattle Street of Dreams, however, may get the impression that it means just that.

Two of the five homes at this year’s Street, located at the new Quinn’s Crossing development in Snohomish, feature lush garden landscapes designed by Bothell-based In Harmony Landscaping. They specialize in building organic sustainable landscapes, on which a high priority is placed on designing each garden to support itself for future generations, as well as become an active habitat for wildlife.

Bryan LaComa, who has been working for In Harmony since 2002, designed the garden for the first house on the street named “Urban Lodge.”

LaComa said he used only organic products to build the landscape of the 4,591-square-foot property. Everything — from soils to mulches, even the gravel path leading to the garden and concrete foundation used to pave the house’s stone entryway — was recycled without additives or pesticides.

The design of LaComa’s property also addresses community wildlife concerns — among



Tim Watanabe / Reporter

Malissa Gatton designed this fountain in a cascading waterfall style for her “Greenleaf Retreat.”

them the fact that the Pacific Northwest is currently experiencing a 60- to 70-percent drop in the local honeybee population due to mites invading nests and dangers from genetically engineered corn.

“We have Mason bee boxes built in the front meadow, and with a safe place to nest, those bees will be able to thrive and pollinate the other native species,” said LaComa, pointing to a blueberry bush just beginning to bud. “Our goal was to have all parts of the landscape available to people and animals.”

The front lawn that LaComa built would be more accurately described as a meadow, composed of native wildflowers and grasses that will be a welcome

invite to local birds and colorful butterflies.

By far the most innovative feature of LaComa’s design is the “Living Wall” located in the lodge’s back yard. Designed in place of a fence, the wall is a visually stunning vertical garden of sorts, providing a natural barrier between the property and the outside world.

“We really enjoyed getting people excited about things that are aesthetically pleasing,” added In Harmony co-owner Ladd Smith. “We’re helping the world discover that green landscaping can be both innovative and beautiful.”

Although it was worth the toil and trouble, LaComa’s work on the “Urban Lodge” was not

without its trying moments. Demanding contractors aside, he said that most of the last-minute garden work went on during Seattle’s recent heat wave, where the 90-degree days had both the plants and people he was working with stressed out.

But even in the difficult times, LaComa saw a calming beauty in the little things he noticed while working, from the occasional bird that stopped by to take a bath in his fountain, to the “30-some-odd” butterflies that gathered on a newly planted bush in the front yard. It kept him going.

## ‘Greenleaf Retreat’ a ‘green’ paradise

Although Malissa Gatton has been in the landscaping business for 15 years, including the last four with In Harmony, she could never have been fully prepared for the most daunting task of her career. Unlike LaComa, she was given only two weeks to build, from scratch, the eco-friendly garden landscape of the 4,749-square-foot “Greenleaf Retreat” home.

Like LaComa’s “Urban Lodge,” Gatton’s landscaping features a variety of native, drought-resistant plants, bee boxes and meadow grasses replacing a more traditional lawn, which have earned both properties the designation of “Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary” by the Washington Depart-

ment of Fish and Wildlife.

Chief among Gatton’s innovations to the “Greenleaf Retreat” is a backyard waterfall fountain the visitors can walk through, situated next to a natural gas outdoor fireplace for those chilly northwest evenings.

“In designing the overall landscape, we wanted to be innovative and build show-quality stuff for our audiences, but also for the family that is going to move in,” Gatton said.

“So we didn’t want to get too crazy.”

Both Gatton and LaComa believe their work is emblematic of the future of landscaping in terms of becoming more conscious of the environment, and that seeing the end result made it worth the effort.

“The best part was having everything turn out, and to be able to bring to light what can be accomplished using ‘green’ design,” Gatton said. “I think we’ve moved past the definition of green as a ‘hippie-granola’ thing, and part of that is being able to show that (environmentally friendly) higher-end homes can be as beautiful on the outside as they are inside.”

- The 2007 Street of Dreams runs through Aug. 19. For information or tickets, visit HYPERLINK “<http://www.seattlestreetofdreams.com>” [www.seattlestreetofdreams.com](http://www.seattlestreetofdreams.com).