

Anything But Typical

Story by Chris Olsen



P

lease....the next time you decide to redesign or fluff up a flowerbed at your home, don't do something typical and expected but instead expand your horizons and do something tasteful, but different. This is the rule of design I use at my home and at my store and landscape firm, Botanica Gardens.

My work philosophy forces me to outdo myself with every landscape or interior design I create. That's why I love what I do! It's never the same thing and I am always trying to create a new and fresh look for my clients. Jared and Natalie Hankins' home in West Little Rock is no exception.

I love the Hankins' style, which is mainly contemporary with slightly traditional elements. Everything about their home and landscape is different from the typical but beautiful homes in their surrounding neighborhood. Notice the dark charcoal stone used on the façade. The brick was painted to complement the stone and even the windowsills were custom painted a dark gray. Since the exterior of their house is so unique, there was no need to disguise the house but only expand its personality into the landscape.

At the front of the house is a courtyard created by towering 6-foot

'Emerald Green' arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis*) with open vistas created by my favorite shrub, the 'Wintergreen' boxwood (*B. microphylla koreana*). Of course, you have to have a focal point, so the pondless water feature overflows with the gentle sound of falling water. The water basin to catch the flow of water is under a powder-coated metal grate that is disguised with river rock. The black river rock mimics the gray undertones of the façade of the house and the smoothness of the river rock adds a contemporary flair. Pondless water features are very low maintenance and generally are safer



if you have children and Mr. and Mrs. Hankins have three active children.

Within the living walls of the courtyard is a wooden bench. The wood softens the heaviness of the stone façade. The bench is placed at a slight angle so Mrs. Hankins can keep watch on her kids when they are playing in the front yard.

The other front flowerbeds are designed with straight lines for a different look, other than the usual curved bed lines of the neighbors. A 2-foot wide strip of dwarf mondo grass (*Ophiopogon japonicus*) becomes the border. Then a stripe of lime sweet

flag (*Acorus gramineus* ‘Oborozuki’) totally contrasts the richness of the dark foliage of the dwarf mondo grass. Columnar hornbeams (*Carpinus betulus* ‘Columnaris’) reach skyward to add that dramatic touch against the house. Blue Endless Summer hydrangeas (*Hydrangea macrophylla*) add softness and vibrancy against the stone. Blue is a great cooling color in the summer.

Pink and white impatiens and an assortment of Bubblegum Supertunia petunias bloom with a pop of sunshine. The cool pinks and lavenders of the petunias are soft colors that make the



Photos by Janet Warlick Camera Work Photography



↑ Pondless water features are low maintenance but provide the sound of gentle water in the garden. This dwarf mondo grass will soon be a lush green carpet. The smooth black river rock mimics the gray earth tones of the stone used on the facade of the Hankins' home.

↖ It's all about curb appeal. Be unique but tasteful. Color, texture and contrast complement this traditional yet contemporary home.

Top: Create your own front yard courtyard with ‘Emerald Green’ arborvitae and ‘Wintergreen’ boxwood. The wood bench is warm and inviting.

Landscape Design



Concrete poured in stepping-stone fashion with turf in between is one way to break up that boring concrete walkway to the front door.



A fire pit with a sitting wall built around it is actually more functional than an outdoor fireplace. Now everyone can stay warm and toasty.



flowerbeds appear larger than they actually are. An easy simple trick!

The two large columns on both sides of the entrance into the courtyard are adorned with contemporary containers just bursting with the blue agave (*Agave americana*) and an assortment of winter-hardy sedums. Low maintenance and yet so beautiful and different, these potted containers say "Welcome."

The backyard is designed for the children. The beds are curvy with no sharp edges and comfortably simple. It's the lawn that takes precedence. The more grass the better for the happy kids. I love big flowerbeds, but I do like a large expanse of turf as well. Since the grass is king of the backyard, more detail was given to the fire-pit area and the covered back patio. Colorful oversized

containers full of tropicals and annuals stand like big sculptures of living art. Even the furniture, made of warm teak with modern metal frames, speaks of individuality.

When you first see this home, you just have to stop and take it all in. Simplicity is the key in this landscape design but the details are vast. Remember...it's all about the details. Also remember to always outdo yourself and the end result will be a more beautiful world for you as well as others that visit your pretty home and garden.

Happy Gardening!

← Add drama and life to your patio with teak and contemporary metal chairs. The bright cushions are fun and exciting. Colorful and lush containers speak volumes.

Chris Olsen is the owner and landscape designer of Botanica Gardens in Little Rock. For more information on Chris go to chrisholzen.com.