

Ranch-Style Landscaping

The owners of a 17-acre ranch witness a transformation—their large plot of land into an oasis of relaxation and entertainment

BY BARBARA A. NADEL, AIA

In Hollywood, you can never be too rich or too thin, but out West you can never have too big a spread. Large tracts of land benefit greatly from careful landscape planning and design. Climate, sunlight, natural features, existing vegetation, available ground water sources; and scale and location of new and existing living areas are just some of the planning criteria designers consider when approaching wide open spaces.

It didn't take long for the owners of this 17-acre Reno, Nevada ranch to realize the potential benefits of land planning early on in the design process (before they began the design for their new home). The owners, a couple with two young children wanted a simple, classically proportioned home with a variety of outdoor spaces for relaxation and entertaining. They turned to landscape architect John L. Wong, managing principal of the Sausalito, California-based SWA Group; together they worked closely to create the master site and land planning site.

Reno's harsh climate—hot and dry in the summer, and rain, snow, and sleet in the winter—was a design challenge. The site's micro-climate is very windy and within an open, exposed area at the base of the foothills. Like a freshly prepared canvas, the site has no organizing elements except for a grove of mature cottonwood trees and an original farm complex now used as a guest house.

"Although it appears flat, the natural terrain actually slopes from west to east with a 34-foot drop," says Wong. "We addressed this with a contour

■ *Right* An elevated deep porch is designed to provide outdoor covered seating areas, spaces for entertaining, and sun protection. The base of the house is clad with stone and bordered with native perennials, rose vine, fine crushed gravel, and a carpet of lawn.





grading transition and a low stone wall, which also relates to the stone base of the house. The plant palette is limited, with only a small variety of trees as organizing features.”

Wong's goals were to maintain the site's simple, open, rural quality and plan the property efficiently without imposing on the natural environment. “To maintain the spirit of a working farm ranch, we used simple, basic materials: a white painted fence, pond with islands, an allee of trees, simple expanse of lawn, various structures within a complex orchard, a pasture, a paddock, vegetable and flower gardens,” Wong notes.

Wong and architect Bob Arrigoni, principal of Backen Arrigoni & Ross, Inc. in San Francisco, together determined the center line of the house and developed the surrounding grounds. “Mutual respect and my 20-year working relationship with the architect were essential to successfully integrating two design disciplines into a single project,” Wong says. “No boundary was drawn between building and landscape.”

The house and landscape design evolved seamlessly into a unified design concept. As a

result of this collaboration, interior views relate to outdoor gardens. The house facade reflects the distinctive features of a rural farm ranch.

“Design considerations need to address site planning and design of the residence, its surrounding gardens and functions for the remaining acreage of the property. Setting and place making are the key to landscaping these wide open spaces,” Wong concludes.

Project: *Dermody Ranch in Reno, Nevada*

Size of Landscaped Area: *Approximately 17 acres*

Hardscape: *Stone, fine crushed gravel, asphalt paving*

Softscape: *Pin oak, scarlet oak, sweetgum, red maple, norway maple, ash, horse chestnut, beechtree, rhododendron, quince, eunonymus, azalea, boxwood, mixed perennials, and lawn*

Approximate Cost: *N/A*

Landscape Architect: *John Wong, Maureen Simmons, John Loomis of Sausalito, California-based SWA Group*

Project Architect: *Backen Arrigoni and Ross, Inc., San Francisco, CA*

Project Contractor: *Michael Doherty Construction*

■ **Above** A pond, sited on the south access of the house, reflects the most dramatic views of the distant hills; and a lawn terrace extends from the sunroom to engage the water. **Right** A double allee of pin oaks on both sides of the house frame a gravel path leading to the distant hills.

