

SHAPING the HARDSCAPE

Farmer and quarry owner Johanna Andersen-Pratt tells a funny story about a long-ago dairy farmer who wanted some of the natural flat stone he'd seen on a neighbor's property. So the farmer paid the owner \$16 to harvest a load of stone and deliver it to his barn, where he laid it on the floor. • Apparently he'd gotten tired of standing in knee-deep mud to milk his cows. • Whether you have in mind raised stone beds for plantings, walls for water conservation or erosion control, a fountain to create a cooling breeze in summer, or you simply want to cross the yard from the driveway to the house without getting your feet wet, hardscape materials are the way to go. • Stone, brick, and other durable landscaping materials can transform a plain patch of yard into a place you'll want to spend time in, whether it's high summer or a clear winter day. For the most authentic look, use time-tested materials relevant to the age of your house: brick or locally quarried stone for paths, steps, or walls around a home built in 1820, for example—or concrete or brick used in an imaginative zigzag walk for a 1950s Ranch house. **BY MARY ELLEN POLSON**





A brick path winds through a garden secured by raised stone planting beds and a welcoming, slat-backed wood bench.



➔ BUILDING A FLAGSTONE PATH



UNDERSTANDING MATERIALS

Like the farmer who bought flat stones from his neighbor, locally available materials, from natural stone to brick pavers and railroad ties, are often the best and most cost-effective resources for a hardscape project. Be sure to get detailed installation instructions from the supplier

LEFT Dry-laying a stone wall requires an ability to see and work in three dimensions.

before beginning any project, or hire an experienced professional to do the work. No matter how beautiful the installation, it won't look good for long without a proper foundation.

NATURAL STONE Varying from slate and bluestone in the Northeast to sandstone and limestone in the West, natural stone often makes the best selection for a hardscape project. The most authentic looking stones are likely to come from your immediate area, especially large features like boulders as well as flagging and other stones [cont. on bottom of page 45]

THE PRO TIP

A flagstone path should be laid along natural contour lines to give it an organic appearance—as though it flows alongside the house.



Step 4

Creating a flagstone path is relatively simple. Plan on devoting at least a weekend to the project.

1. Lay out the path by placing wood stakes from the beginning to its natural terminus (from the driveway to a porch or deck, for instance). The approach should be wider from its source and narrow to a consistent width as it curves to its destination.

2. Dig the path to a consistent depth of about 6". Using a tamper, screed, or vibrating compactor, compact and level the dirt. Once the surface is level, lay a commercial grade of weed cloth along the path, tipping up at the edges of the path. The weed cloth isn't essential, but it does help prevent the propagation of weeds.

3. Install plastic landscape edging into the weed cloth. Then spread a 2" level of moist (not wet) crushed gravel on the bed. Gravel is sold by weight and size. (Stones averaging under 1/2" in size are often recommended, but we used 3/4".)

Compact the gravel. Spread a second, 2" layer of moist gravel and compact this. The path is now ready for the stone.

4. Spread stones around the area for easy selection. Save some of your better stones for placement at strategic spots such as near steps or the beginning of the path. Lay stones so each is fully supported: this often requires lifting the stone and either adding more crushed stone or removing some material, then resetting the stone using a hand trowel, sometimes many times. Test the stones by jumping on top of each—no stone should wiggle. Use a level to keep the tops of the stones on an even plane, then continue laying stone down the path, keeping the outer edges of stone fairly even.

5. Lay the decorative edging stones and embed them using a wooden or rubber hammer so you don't mar the stones. We

used a different decorative rock and embedded it into the gaps between the flagstones. This binds the path together and should hold up with no maintenance for many years.

—JERRY PAVIA & ALLEN ROSE

Step 5





A Grand Path to Water

When the backyard slopes down to water, it's a given that a path always led that way. When Jill Chase and Bill Ticineto eliminated an existing driveway in the backyard of their 1920s Connecticut home, they also developed a garden plan that created an intuitive progression from house to natural pond.

Not content with one water feature, they began by designing a small rectangular pond with a fountain, placing it just below the house, where it could be seen to best advantage from the second-floor windows. Accented with a vintage frog fountain, the pond is classically sited on an axis, linking it with the lower yard in a subtle progression that moves from formality to relaxed naturalism. Just below the new pond, bordered by a grassy lawn, is a small flagstone patio with facing benches. Below that, the lawn gives way to a footpath that wends its way through an increasingly wild landscape to the old pond.

While there was no evidence that there had ever been a fountain in the backyard, the couple discovered some railroad ties that were perfect for the framework of their planned 6' x 9' excavation. After marking off the rectangular outline with spray paint, they began to dig, in some cases through rock.

The fountain was outfitted with a small pump; a larger pump connected to the filter is sunk in the bottom of the pool. Clean water re-enters the pond at the far end. Each pump is on a separate switch so they can be controlled separately.

Just behind the fountain—dubbed the “Frog King”—there is a bog area where overflow from the pond goes when it rains, helping keep the water level constant. The area is outlined in bluestone, laid in the same arched pattern used in design of one pergola. The couple planted the pool area with the shade-loving, large-leaf ligularia as well as grasses that conceal the electrical lines and filter unit.

Within sight of the bronze “Frog King” fountain (below), a real frog rests on a closed lily bud in the pond hand-built by Jill Chase and Bill Ticineto.



← THE COMPLETED HARDSCAPE

From an upstairs window, the owners can look over the frog pond, pergola-shaded patios, and a path leading to the natural pond below the house.



ADDING CLASSICAL ELEMENTS

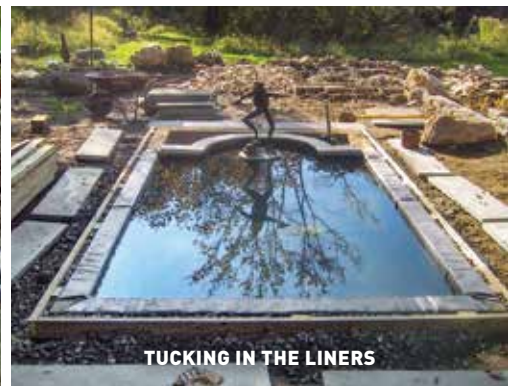
Building the pond ■ **FRAMING THE SHAPE** The 6' x 9' rectangular pond is framed with a mix of found railroad ties, pressure-treated lumber, and cedar timbers. The designers included a deep well near the center for the koi, who like a deep place to get away from such predators as raccoons and herons. In the winter, frogs hibernate there. The depression also hides the underwater circulating pump. ■ **LINING THE POND** After filling the bottom with about 4" of sand, Bill and Jill put down a heavy felt liner, followed by a heavy rubber pond liner. The sand and felt protect the liner from punctures, prolonging its life. ■ **TUCKING IN THE LINERS** Both the felt and waterproof rubber liners were carefully laid in, then tucked and folded around corners and contours, like folding hospital corners on a bed. Bill and Jill allowed for overage so that the liners completely covered the framework, then trimmed off excess material. Bluestone coping was laid on top, anchoring everything in place. Filling the pond with water further flattened out the liner. ■ **ADDING CLASSICAL ELEMENTS** To complete the formal framework, Jill Chase and Bill Ticineto collaborated on the design for a grand pergola with an arched center and a second one on the other side of the pond. The arch shape also appears at one end of the pond.



FRAMING THE SHAPE



LINING THE POND



TUCKING IN THE LINERS



*There are two basic types of brick landscape pavers. **Bonded pavers** measure about 4" x 8" and pack together almost seamlessly over a sand base. **Modular pavers** are slightly smaller and are installed with mortar.*

LEFT Paving bricks from Pine Hall Brick come in a wide variety of colors.

for paths, walks, and walls.

Flagstones have been used to create stepping stones and paths for centuries. The term flagstone can be applied to almost any natural landscaping stone that's flat and hard. The best are split from dense metamorphic rock with uniform internal layers and a surface texture that provides traction. Schist, bluestone, slate, and metamorphosed sandstone and limestone all make excellent flagging materials. The thicker the slab, the longer it will

last—in some cases, more than a century, even under constant use.

Flagstones are usually 1" to 3" thick and are either cut to size in various rectangular shapes (dimensional flagging) or cut, chipped, or broken into irregular shapes (natural flagging). Depending on where the stone is quarried, flagstone can range in color from pale buff to rich blue to greenish-blue or even lilac. There are also variegated flagstones, and flagstone mixes of subtle or strikingly complementary color combinations.

Dimensional flagstones can vary in size from as small as 6" x 6" to 3' x 4' or larger. Varying the sizes in the pattern (using multiples of each size, both squares and

rectangles) creates interesting rhythmic patterns, especially for large expanses of flagging, such as a terrace.

For a more formal look in wall construction, consider snapped ashlar. These brick-shaped stones stack with tight joints that can either be dry-laid or mortared in place.

brick Because brick is made from naturally available clays, it's been a historical material for landscaping since Colonial days. While you can use vintage brick in landscaping projects, be aware that brick is fired for different degrees of hardness, depending [cont. on page 47]



Large slabs of naturally occurring schist at the Ashfield Stone quarry.

ABOVE RIGHT Large slabs are quarried in large chunks, then split into flat, nearly level flagstone using pneumatic power tools.



LEFT Good flagstone has a foliated texture, as seen in this installation. The bronze color comes from iron-saturated water seepage over millions of years.

SHOP TOUR:

On a recent visit to Ashfield Stone, I got a geology lesson as well a chance to see how the versatile stone harvested here is split, shaped, and finished into a surprisingly broad array of products.



Johanna Andersen-Pratt with the team at Ashfield Stone.

When Jerry Pratt and Johanna Andersen-Pratt bought land in in the Massachusetts Berkshires in the 1980s, they were surprised to learn that the property was loaded with a particularly dense form of 400-million-year-old schist. Schist is a layered metamorphic stone that splits along seams between darker and lighter deposits, making it ideal for landscaping.

Johanna was initially skeptical that anything could be done with the stone until a mason came by and admired a pile of stone she and Jerry had recently dug up. "He said, 'this is really nice rock', Johanna explains. "You should sell it. As a matter of fact, if you'll load that pile of rocks on my truck. I'll give you 20 bucks for it.' So we did and he gave me the 20 bucks and I thought, maybe we can do this."

For years, Ashfield sold only landscaping stone. Then Jerry took a sample to a fabricator and had it polished. The results were jaw-dropping. Ashfield now quarries and markets three lines of polished stone for countertops, sinks, and cladding: Quicksilver, Galaxy, and Crowsfoot, an unusual stone with ice-like patterns and ruby-like bursts of color. Ranging from light to dark grey, the first two

stones "have the same aesthetic as soapstone, but are denser and harder," Johanna says.

Everything is quarried locally and, with the exception of landscape stone, fabricated in Ashfield's state-of-the-art shop. All landscaping stone is fabricated in the quarry, which is open only in the summer months. To demonstrate the basic splitting technique, operations manager Bryce Ribken picked up a pneumatic splitting hammer and began to cut small slots in a large chunk of stone in the muddy yard outside the shop.

Imperceptibly at first, the stone began to open between the dark and light seams. The hammer makes a percussive noise that starts to sound hollow as the seams open. After some deeper tapping with the hammer, the layers of stone literally split away from each other, creating a clean, even surface with what's known as "glacier scoured edges."

Landscape stone also



Step 1



Step 2



Step 3

⬇️ *When working with stone for walls and paths, always work dry, especially in regions with extensive freeze-thaw patterns. Use an experienced dry-stone mason, and buy directly from the quarry. “They have an affinity for the stone,” says Johanna Andersen-Pratt.*

includes what Andersen-Pratt calls “snapped stone” or snapped ashlar, ideal for producing brick-shaped stone for stacked walls, or for cladding columns or fireplaces. It’s made using a guillotine saw at the quarry; workers slide large 3’ x 4’ pieces of flagstone along rollers. “Then this big press comes down and pushes, pushes, pushes, and snaps it. Then we move the stone over 4”, and repeat the pushing process until the stone snaps.”

It probably won’t come as a surprise that Johanna Andersen-Pratt is an advocate of using natural stone in the landscape. “It settles in with an old house,” she says. “It looks like it’s been there forever—right after it’s been installed.”



Step 1 Bryce Ribken uses a pneumatic splitting hammer to cut small depressions at intervals along seam lines in the stone.

Step 2 As he applies pressure and listens, the stone starts to split along sedimentary seams.

Step 3 The stone splits in clean, level layers: perfect for landscape stone.



Brick pavers are still hand moulded at Old Carolina Brick.

on the intended purpose. Better choices include hard-fired vintage brick (see Resources, p. 103) and brick pavers.

The best are still handmade in moulds. Handmade paving brick is less compressed than regular construction brick and contains small air pockets. The air pockets allow moisture to pass through the brick—or even freeze and thaw repeatedly—without cracking the paver.

Bricks vary in color, depending on the kind of sand and clay used to make them. Coal-fired brick, the technique that resulted in the delightful clinker bricks of the Arts & Crafts era, often gives unusual color variations not found in commercial brick. Available through specialty retailers, these “accidents of the kiln” are irregular and lumpy and often luridly colored in shades of purple, terra cotta, and black.

Garden Structures

Latticework, arbors, and even pergolas and porch rooms are widely available pre-built, built-to-order, or as do-it-yourself kits. For best longevity, choose garden structures made of clear Western red cedar, redwood, or tropical woods like ipe. Using rust-resistant fasteners is critical, too—look for galvanized or stainless-steel fasteners, even for a trellis. Insist on high-quality joinery and construction details for arbors and pergolas.