



**NOVEMBER 2008**

**Welcome** back to another issue of the *Contractor Connection*. The season is winding down and I hope you are going strong until the end of the year. This has been a tough year for many, and the competition gets tight when there are fewer jobs to bid on. While talking with contractors around the country, I have noticed that the businesses succeeding in these tough times have something in common: They work hard to set themselves apart from the competition. In tough economic times, it's sometimes hard to think about spending money on seminars and education. But that may be one of the things that can help you stand out. The industry's premier educational event of 2009 is in Atlanta. The third annual Hardscape North America (HNA) show is happening January 14 - 17. This show has something for contractors of all types, with great opportunities to learn something to help distinguish your company. There are hands-on seminars for retaining walls and pavers, as well as eyes-on demonstrations of different hardscape elements designed to provide you with time-saving tips and tricks. I will teach the NCMA hands-on wall class again this year. It was sold out all three days last year and we are expecting the same this year. So visit [www.hardscapena.com](http://www.hardscapena.com) for more complete information and when you get to HNA in January, keep an eye out for me and say hi. I'd love to meet you!



TIM HUINKER

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The hands-on session at HNA 2008.

### **Project Profile: Using Details to Update a Backyard Patio**

This month, we're profiling a project that was built in stages. Many times, homeowners will complete a project, and then decide to add more to improve its look or functionality. Such a project can be a great opportunity to add value to an existing landscape without having to spend lots of time from scratch.

In the case of this project, the homeowners had already installed a paver patio with a Highland Stone® free standing wall and a grill surround. While the original design was functional and helped provide some privacy in their wide-open backyard, they still felt they could add to the project to give it a more enclosed, contained feel.

We began by including a pergola connecting the two Highland Stone columns. The pergola helped enclose the project and give it more of an outdoor great room feel, which was important to the homeowners. Because the backyard opens up to all the neighboring houses, the pergola was a great way to provide a feeling of privacy, while still maintaining a nice back view.

One element of this project that was particularly fun was the grill surround. The original design featured a Highland Stone wall surrounding a basic free-standing grill. After the rest of the project was updated, the homeowner decided his grill could use an update as well. So, we decided to incorporate a built-in grill into the Highland Stone wall. This

required some additional time, but the overall effect was very impressive.

Working on this landscape was a fairly easy, two-day project that ended up really improving the look of the existing design, and everyone was pleased. As you work with clients, plant a seed with them about future project phases they could consider. It could very likely lead to additional work for you!



The completed project.

## **Detail of the Month: Using columns and caps in a free standing wall**

### **COLUMNS**

When used with a free standing wall, a column increases wall stability. Placing fixtures on columns is also a great way to incorporate lighting. Columns can be located in the middle or at the end of a wall. The open space in the center of a column allows for reinforcement or electrical wiring if needed. The column leveling pad should extend 6 inches beyond each column edge and be at least 6 inches thick after compaction.

### **CAPPING A COLUMN**

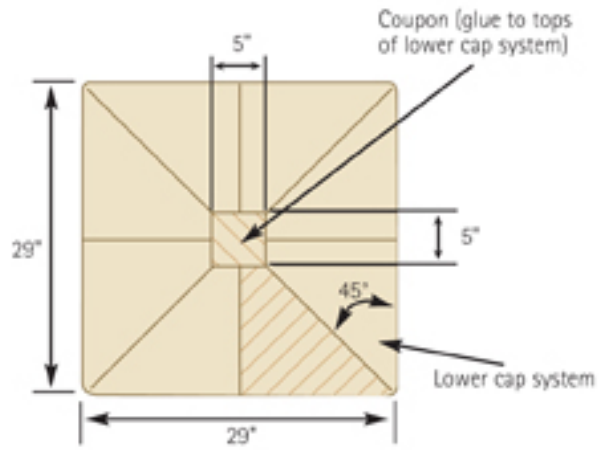
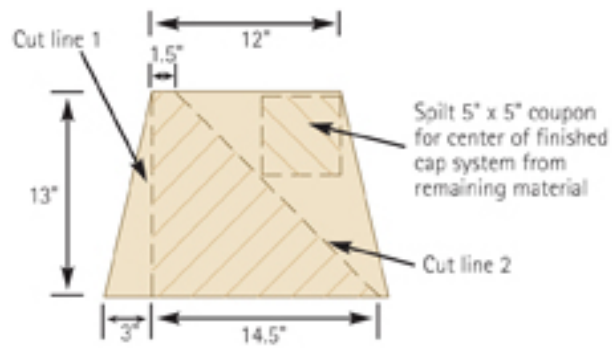
There are numerous ways to cap a column. You can use cap units, single-piece units or natural stone. Here are some options.

#### **Using an Extra Large Cap**

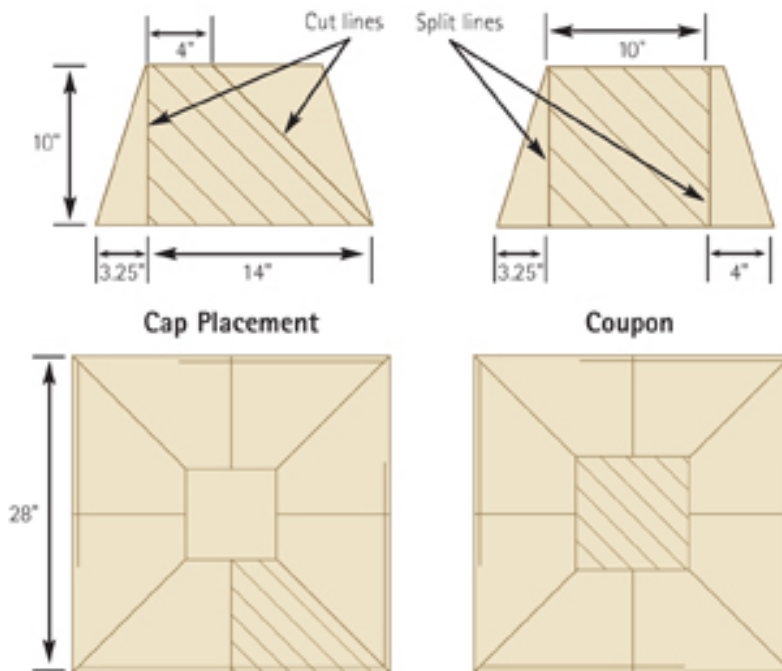
This capping treatment requires 8 extra large trapezoidal cap units. (For other cap shapes and dimensions, please contact your dealer for specific instructions.) Each unit is cut as shown. Top with the 5-inch square coupon (seen in illustration). Use concrete adhesive to glue all pieces when cap is complete.

#### **Using a Large Cap**

This capping treatment requires 9 large trapezoidal cap units. Each unit is cut as shown. Top with the 10-inch square coupon (seen in illustration). Use concrete adhesive to glue all pieces when cap is complete.



Using an extra large cap.



Using a large cap.

## Business Sense: Using Photography to Improve Your Portfolio

One sales tool that I made sure I never forgot at the office when making a sales call was my job portfolio, this being one of the most important tools you can have in your sales arsenal. Yeah, brochures are great, but having customers look at work that you completed gives you much more credibility. A portfolio shows your creativity and workmanship without your customers having to drive to different jobsites.

Your portfolio itself needs to be effective. If you use a book loaded with hundreds of 4 X 6 photos, a customer's eyes will soon start to glaze over. The way you display your portfolio matters. A photograph can be designed much the way you design a landscape. Concentrate on shooting details to give homeowners a better perspective on the quality of work you can do.

Next is presentation. Not every job is portfolio quality. You want your portfolio to represent your best work. You are selling your image, your company, and your craftsmanship. Enlarge your photos to at least 5 X 7, but preferably 8 X 10.

You may say you just don't have time to take photos. There are two ways to solve this problem. One is to block out an entire day just for photography. The other is to hire someone to shoot your photos for you. This doesn't have to be an expensive professional-see if someone you know with the talent for photography will take them for you for a small fee. An added bonus of hiring a photographer is that you'll likely get good photos!

I can't say whether or not there is a direct correlation, but my per-job sales revenue continued to grow as I showed my best work in my portfolio. Much of the selling process is about confidence. Showing your own projects and telling someone "yes we can do that and here is a photo of something we built similar to your idea" is a great sales tool.



An example of a project photography portfolio.

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