



NOVEMBER 2009

Welcome back to Contractor Connection! The season is wrapping up and I, for one, am glad to put this challenging year behind me. I am hearing mixed predictions about the economy for next year but I like to stay positive and focus on the things I can control. I'll be spending time over the winter preparing for next year--see my "Business Sense" section in this newsletter for one idea about how you might do the same.



TIM HUINKER

[Contact Tim>>](#)

Project Profile: Using High-Tech Engineering to Build a Suburban Paradise

When it comes to residential landscaping, giant, engineered retaining walls don't often come to mind. When a family in Hopkins, MN, wanted a new landscape, Craig Frick of Superior Lawn & Landscape in Waconia, MN, had the chance to do something that doesn't happen very often in the residential-contracting world: build a brand-new backyard supported by a massive Anchor™ Highland Stone® retaining wall. Additionally, the project would feature a raised patio, a firepit and a large, grass-filled space--all surrounded by a Highland Stone® retaining and freestanding wall system, columns and custom lighting.

Frick began by working with the homeowners to create a design for the project. The original landscape consisted of a small natural-stone pathway below a wooden elevated deck with a gazebo and water feature off to one side. The rest of the property consisted of dense woods rising out of a steep hill.

"There was virtually no 'yard' in the backyard," Frick said. "The woods came right up to the back of the deck and the slope dropped straight down below it. The homeowners really wanted a firepit and seating area. Eventually, we came up with a design that incorporated their existing gazebo and a large space in which their dog could run."

The first step was to work with an engineer to design the 2,450-square-foot retaining wall that would support the new yard. The wall would require geosynthetic reinforcement and truckloads of backfill. A flood plain that ran diagonally near the back edge of the homeowners' property presented a challenge that would require both engineering and aesthetic design.

"We wanted the yard to extend past the flood plain, but we weren't legally allowed. So we ended up designing the wall to curve around the flood plain and go back toward the house. We planted a sugar maple in the curved space. Now it looks like the wall was built to curve around the tree."

In addition to the large wall, Frick also designed a raised patio and retaining wall to surround the open space. The Highland Stone product was the perfect choice for the homeowners, who filled in the planting space between the retaining walls with flowers, grasses and greenery.

After almost three months of construction, the new backyard was ready for the homeowners to entertain and enjoy warm summer nights outdoors.

"This is one of the best projects I've worked on," Frick said. "The homeowners couldn't be happier--they liked the job so much, that they asked me to do Highland Stone retaining wall in their front yard too!"



The new backyard is supported by a Highland Stone® retaining wall.



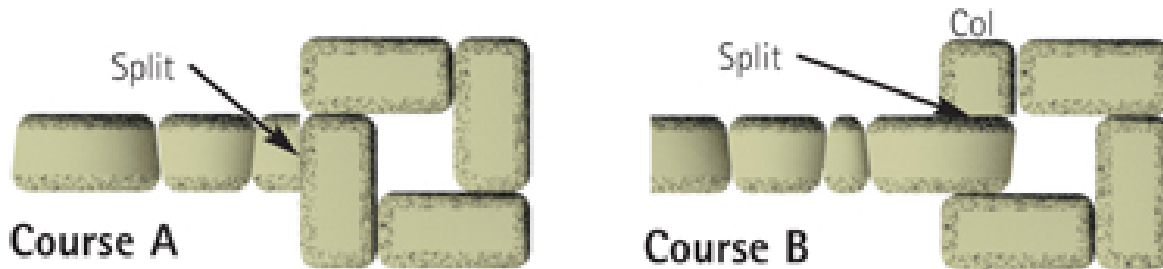
The grass-filled lawn is surrounded by a Highland Stone® retaining wall and features a raised patio and firepit.

[Submit your project>>](#)

Detail of the Month: Building a Column at the End of a Wall

To build columns at the end of a wall, cut one column unit in half for the second, fourth and additional even-numbered courses. Stack column units in a rotating pattern for each course so that the bond is staggered. One column unit half is used every two courses. Glue each course of column units with a concrete adhesive. Integrate wall into column as shown to increase stability.

[Contact Tim with Installation Questions >>](#)



Business Sense: The Importance of Proper Estimating

One question I often get is "What is the going rate for walls or pavers?" I can't tell you, because every project is unique. If there is one thing I would recommend you do over the winter, it is to invest in taking an estimating class. As gratifying as it is to build things and work with your hands, paperwork and bookkeeping are part of owning a business, too. If you don't estimate correctly, you won't survive. If you continue to focus on being the lowest bidder, you will lose. There will always be somebody lower. If you can learn to estimate correctly and sell the customer on value, you will win the jobs that actually make you money.

Don't stop learning!

[Go to the Anchor™ Estimating Tool](#)