

## From Unruly Hillside to Work of Art

09/29/09

“Building a water feature and pond in a day or two can be highly profitable,” said James Hiestand, owner of Dreamscapes Custom Landscape and Water Features, “but it cannot deliver detailed and realistic water features that truly complement the property and its natural surroundings.” Hiestand said that instead he takes a personal interest in every project he designs.

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His attention to detail and passion for the beauty and complexity of nature drew Hiestand into landscaping design and water feature construction, and it retained his creative interest for the past 17 years. His innovative style and ideas inspired Mark and Marsha Novak, and they hired Dreamscapes for their water feature project.

“Initially, we simply wanted to remove trees, weeds and ivy to open up the backyard view and allow the sun to shine through,” Marsha Novak said. “It was purely coincidence that we met James Hiestand as he was delivering his card door-to-door. He envisioned a pondless water stream. We liked him and his ideas.”

Hiestand collaborated with the Novaks to create a design based on their love of hiking Cottonwood Meadows in the Sierra Mountains. “I put nearly 20 hours into consulting, designing and negotiating a budget that was affordable [for my client],” Hiestand said. The final concept would transform the Novaks’ back yard from an untamed hillside to a picturesque forest meadow with a 45-foot-long stream.

With virtually zero access for machinery or wheelbarrows, Hiestand and his team transported more than 50,000 pounds of materials up a climb of 30 feet to reach the base of the steep hill. The team accomplished this by creating ramps with plywood and 2x12 lumber and placing the ramps on the stairs that inhibited wheelbarrow entry. Working in groups of four, the crew tied strong rope to the front of the wheelbarrows and pulled.

“The greatest challenge was the steepness of the hill,” Hiestand said. “[It] forced me to dig all the stones in really deep to avoid settling or, worse, every water feature builder’s worst nightmare: a boulder rolling down the hill and into a client’s living room.”

Hiestand and the Novaks selected crystal-filled red stone with black spots to accent the water feature, and he hand-laid every stone. “I have studied streams and waterways and know how to mimic them, how to make them look like the water-flow pushed everything out of the way until it hit something it couldn’t move,” Hiestand said. “That’s when the stream turns.”

The hillside already housed several 40-year-old pine trees, indigenous to the mountains. The Dreamscapes team added Aleppo Pine to create a higher altitude forest effect.

It took two weeks to select the plants and place them on the site to further develop the lush forest appearance. Low-voltage lighting hidden within the foliage and the trees added the finishing touches to create a distinct experience at night, Hiestand said.

“James is truly creative,” Marsha Novak said. “I remember looking out of the window once while he was working, and I saw him sitting on a rock surveying his work, just like an artist looks at a painting; it was amazing.

“Everyone who comes by to see our beautiful hillside is very impressed,” she said. “It’s quite different and very beautiful.”

### Specifications

Designer/Installer: James Hiestand, DreamScapes Custom Landscape and Water Features

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Project Location: Encino, California

Construction: The 45-foot-long streambed leads into a 12-foot-wide pondless waterfall. The containment pit measures 4 feet deep and 8-feet-by-5-feet wide.

Components: Aquascape components; a 4,500 gph pump; 6,000 pounds of red granite; 3,000 pounds of Touchstone hollow boulders; 6,000 pounds of 2-inch rounded river stone; 5,000 pounds of 6-inch rounded river stone; 6,000 pounds of Topanga boulders and stone; 8,000 pounds of 3- to 5-inch stone for the water pit; and 7,000 pounds of pea gravel

Crew size: average of 4 (up to 10 for some phases of the project)

Time to complete: water feature - 5 weeks; planting - 2 weeks

Material Cost: about \$13,000

Project Cost: water feature, demolition, irrigation and low-voltage lighting - \$25,000; planting - \$10,000