

Phasing 101: BUILDING CUSTOMERS FOR LIFE

by Christi Simoneaux,
contributing writer for Belgard Hardscapes



Above: This custom rendering created by the Belgard Design Studio takes a birds-eye view of the client's property, with the primary residence on the left, connected by a series of tiered patios leading to the boathouse on the right and down to the waterway below. The patio and walkway designs were created using Belgard's Urbana pavers, Mega-Bergerac pavers that connect with stair steps made of natural stone, and Weston Stone wall pavers for the seat walls and columns. Renderings were supplied to the designer with complete project dimensions and a materials spec list so that the job could be accurately quoted.

The current economic climate has had a varied effect on the outdoor living construction industry. With the housing market slump, many homeowners have opted for home improvements in lieu of relocation. In addition, we've seen the rise of the touted "staycation," termed for families that opt to upgrade the backyard and vacation at home.

However, despite the fact that outdoor kitchens and living rooms add more value to the home for less cost than under-beam construction, many homeowners shy away from their dream scenario for fear of overextending the budget. Learning how to properly design and phase a modular outdoor living project not only can help landscape contractors capitalize on industry trends, but it can create long term relationships that result in increased business over the long run.

Left: Once a 3-D design has been completed, screen shots can be created and printed from any angle. For an additional charge, an animated fly-through video can be created to allow the client to virtually walk through their future backyard. This rendering shows an alternate view of the landscape and includes the tiered walkway that descends to the base of the property. The walkway ends at a freestanding fire pit that will be built on-site.

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► Outdoor Living



Above: With proper planning, modular outdoor living projects can be seamlessly phased as needed to fit your client's budget. This living room includes 13 separate modules that can be ordered, shipped, and installed at various intervals.

Left: The design also includes an additional patio on the lower level of the property, adjacent to the waterway, which may be added at a later date. This patio includes the Bristol Outdoor Fireplace and two water features from the Belgard Elements Collection.

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Lesson One: A Picture's Worth a Thousand Words

Homeowners often have a hard time picturing how a finished project will look. Hardscapes, a national leader in concrete pavers and garden wall products, is paving the way for contractors to eliminate this obstacle with their new 3-D Design Studio.

"The purpose of this program is to help contractors save time and sell more by allowing clients to get a real vision of how they will live in the space," says Belgard V.P. of Marketing, Ken O'Neill. "Two-dimensional drawings really only show specs, they are flat and lifeless. Three-dimensional renderings and animation allow the homeowner to visually walk through the space and account for traffic flow, outdoor furnishings, landscaping, lighting, colors, and more. Homeowners can also get a better idea of how to phase out their dream scenario, which creates a long-term relationship between the contractor and the homeowner."

Contractors have four levels of service available in the Design Studio. The free service offers a number of existing design plans that already include 3-D animated fly-throughs, 2-D photorealistic screen shots, project dimensions, and product materials lists. Or, contractors can submit an existing plan and convert their designs into 3-D images with animation. The costs associated with this service start at \$99 and vary depending on the project.

A recent study found that contractors who've used the Design Studio achieved average closure rates of 85%. Jobs closed utilizing the Design Studio boasted higher margins and fewer complications than other projects.

"I was in a competitive bid situation with another contractor," says Jim McCaskey, CLP, of McCaskey Landscape & Design in Chardon, Ohio. "The homeowners chose me because of the 3-D pictures. The Design Studio scanned photos of the home and cre-

ated a scenario for the client to see exactly what they were getting, down to the trim and color of their house and the view from their kitchen window."

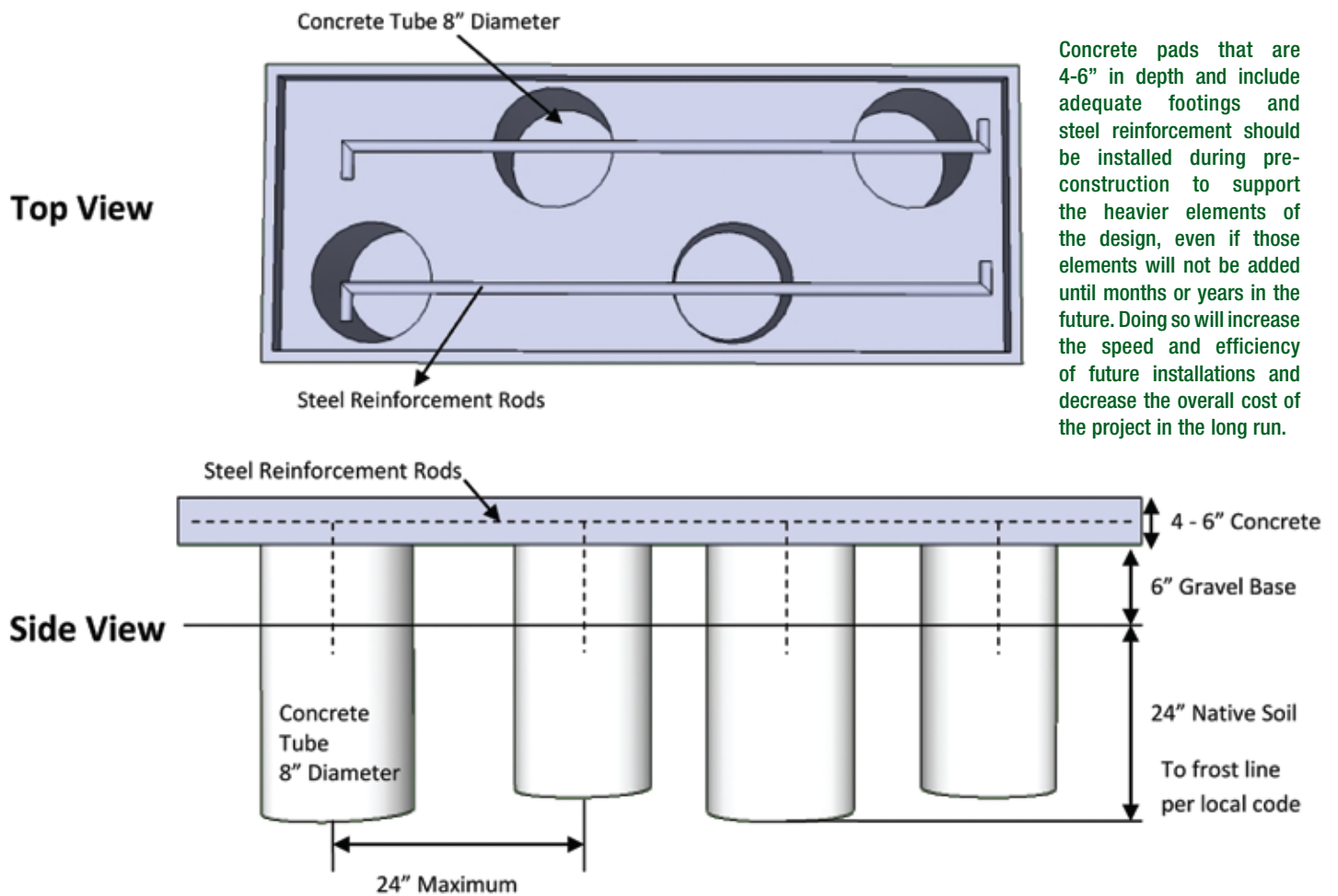
Lesson Two: Divide and Conquer

Once the design is finalized, put together a plan for phasing the project that takes into account both budget requirements and the existing landscape. A typical scenario would be to install the flat surfaces first, then build up, then embellish. For example, if a design includes a patio with an outdoor kitchen, a fireplace, and seat walls, your plan may look like this:

- Phase I: Patio
- Phase II: Kitchen
- Phase III: Fireplace
- Phase IV: Seat walls, lighting, and sound

"It's extremely important to know where each element will be placed so that you can account for pre-construction needs," Mike Miles, lead designer for Harmony Outdoor Living, said. "Also consider how the space will be used to leave adequate room for function."

The companies joined forces in recent years to create modular outdoor living units that



Concrete pads that are 4-6" in depth and include adequate footings and steel reinforcement should be installed during pre-construction to support the heavier elements of the design, even if those elements will not be added until months or years in the future. Doing so will increase the speed and efficiency of future installations and decrease the overall cost of the project in the long run.

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allow for seamless phasing of these types of scenarios. Harmony builds modular kitchen, living room, seat wall, and decorative units in their factory using Hardscapes products, offering a cohesive look to a design that can be phased out across a number of months or years. These items are shipped in sections on pallets and can be quickly and easily installed onsite using a Bobcat. These modular units are also available design elements in the Design Studio, taking the guesswork out of planning a phased project.

Lesson Three: The Best Laid Plans

Before beginning construction, Miles offers additional considerations in planning future needs of each phase of a modular construction project.


Setbacks, Permits and Clearance: Check with local municipalities on building codes regarding aboveground hardscapes. Setbacks from property lines will vary, and there may

be other issues to consider. For example, wood-burning fireplaces typically must be ten feet away and two feet above any other structure. Gas-burning fireplaces, however, can often butt directly up to other construction. In addition, you may need permits to run the electrical, gas, or plumbing, but typically will not need permits to install the modular units. For future phase installations, remember to allow for six feet of access and 4,000 lb. load capacity for the Bobcat.

Drainage: Plan pitch away from the outdoor kitchen. Pitching towards the fireplace is acceptable and often necessary, since a wood-burning fireplace may require placement further away from the house.

Foundation: Wherever a modular piece will be placed, install a 4-6" concrete pad below the finished grade. Pavers can be placed over the pad to create usable patio space. When it's time to place the kitchen or fire-

place, the pavers can be removed and the foundation will be ready. When planning a project over an existing concrete patio, keep in mind the age and thickness of the patio and account for future load issues. For example, a typical Elements fireplace consists of a base unit that weighs 3,700 lbs. and a chimney unit that weighs 2,600 lbs.

Plumbing, Gas, and Electrical: All lines can be stubbed into footings, capped, and paved over. Remember to mark utility lines. Normal-voltage and low-voltage lighting can be preplanned for installation into pillars, end caps, and the modular units themselves. Outdoor stereo speaker wires can also be run in pre-construction. Be sure to bury all of these elements 4" below grade. 

For more information on the modular Belgard Elements Collection, visit www.Belgard.biz or www.belgarddesignstudio.com.