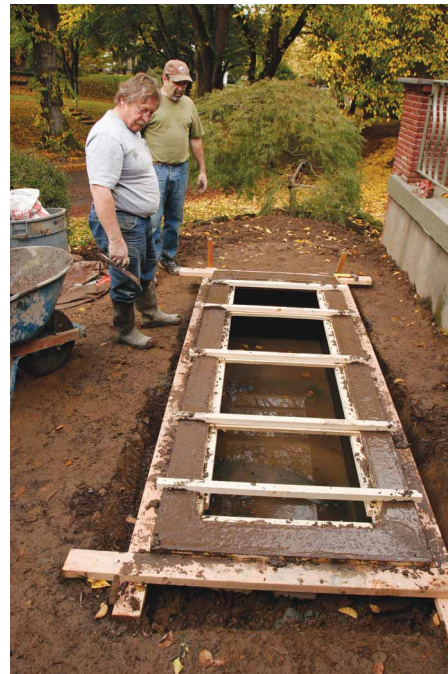


rocky road: down & dirty

text Michelle Gringeri-Brown

photography Jim Brown

In our print feature, we covered the year-and-a-half process of landscaping our 1952 Portland ranch house—both the successes and frustrations. Like to dig into the details? Here's more.



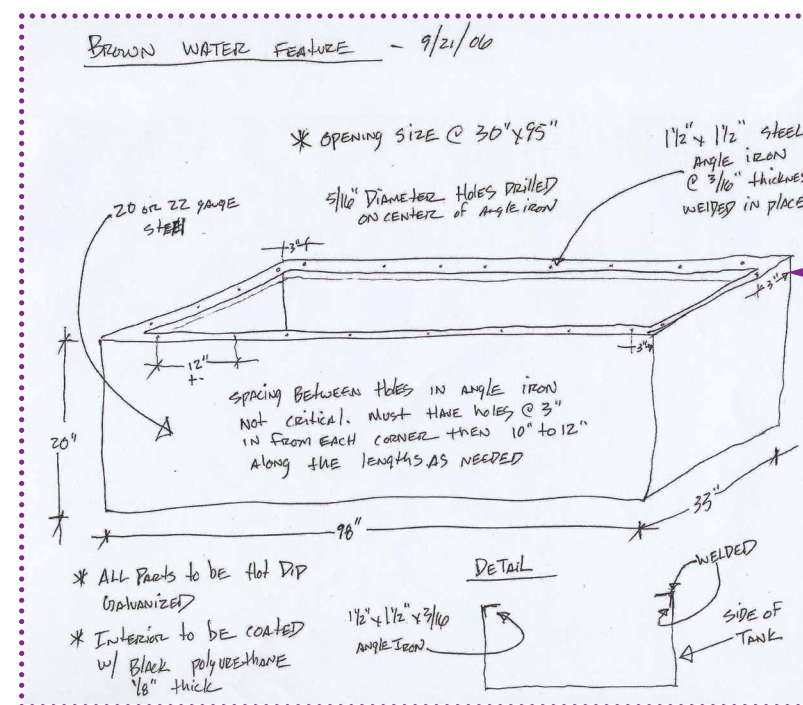
Reflecting Pool

Our landscapers, Portland Yardbirds, suggested a freeform pond with rock edging, but a rectangular slice of water playing off the boxy brick architecture felt like a better way to go. The guys at Bamboo Craftsman designed a 30" wide by 8' long galvanized steel vessel with a black polyurethane interior. A minority of one, I would have preferred a narrower rill, say 20" or so, but was told it was not a good idea.

The hole was excavated, the steel container wrestled into place and a form for the concrete coping installed. A retired mason was called in to match the existing unpainted concrete foundation; the chocolate mix-in pigment was an attractive color, though not really a match for the 50-year-old nearby concrete. We were instructed to seal the surface when it reached the color we wanted—something we've yet to do.

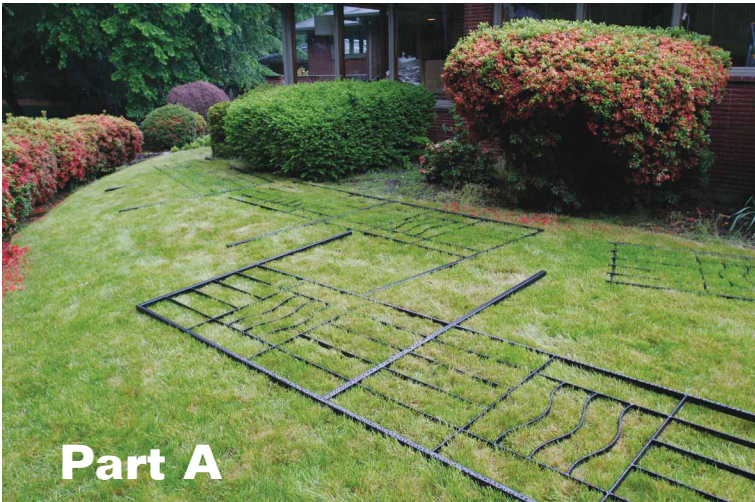
With black dye in the water that curbs mosquito larva and obscures the decaying plant matter that invariably falls to the bottom, the pool, now edged with billowing *Carex testacea*, both reflects the passing clouds above and bounces shimmering light onto the walls of the living room. Since there's no fountain element, the addition of five floating stainless steel globes lends motion at minimal cost.

Satisfaction rating: B+



start
to
finish





Fence, Parts A & B

Although we thought we wanted a super simple, horizontal rails-only design, a variation suggested by Rob McQueen of Argo Safety Railing riffed on the original porch balustrade. Adhering to local height restrictions for front yard fences—42”—Argo constructed the steel fence in sections, powder-coated it and welded the sections together on site. Although we carefully—some would say anally—measured our dog Bonnie’s chest to ensure the rails would contain her, we all neglected to note that one portion of the S-shaped design was wider than the specified dimension. Because she was fiercely bonded to us, Bonnie came to the front door and barked to be let in after literally walking through the shortest gate.

When it became evident our next two dogs needed a taller fence—and we’d since realized that all of our fenced area was considered the back yard (corner lot, who knew?)—Argo built two more horizontal levels and welded them to the existing sections. Being larger animals, we figured the dogs would soon become too big to slip through the S curves, but as months went by and we grew tired of the orange construction netting keeping them in, we decided that semi-permanent black mesh trumped the possibility of there being a dog vs. bus incident.

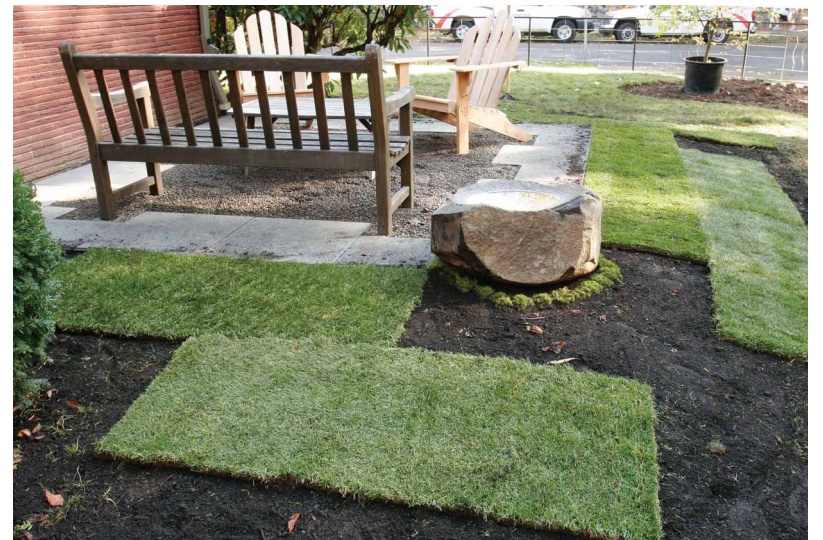
Although we like the fence design and have heard positive comments from many passersby, there are some issues with busyness. What looked interesting when viewed with a plain expanse of lawn behind became a bit frenetic when layered with a variety of plants, prompting us to move five sculptural steel columns to unfenced areas. I’m guessing this will remain a challenge to solve in the coming years as plantings grow in.

Satisfaction rating: A-



finish➡





Hardscape

In Portland's rainy climate, hardscape is particularly important in the garden. Portland Yardbirds designed and installed a front yard walkway using 8" and 24" concrete pavers laid on the diagonal. A gravel patio on the south side of the house was to be bordered with the same 24" Vancouver Bay pavers, but mid project, due to the dimensions of the area, 14" ones were suggested instead. A little too Home Depot ubiquitous for me, I suggested a more complex pattern that included both sizes, which didn't thrill our landscapers but did give us an interesting margin that the crew ultimately warmed to—I think. Landscaper Shiloh Halsey further voted to break the rectangle by introducing a natural-shaped basin rock surrounded with Scotch moss in one corner.

Pouring a new concrete back porch and adding two large planters significantly increased our project budget. After removing the cracked existing pad and being careful not to damage the irreplaceable brick siding, significant dry rot under the back door sill was an unwelcome surprise. No sooner was that fixed than an irrigation company was called in to move the yet-to-be-used sprinkler control boxes. Because the trench containing the bundled PVC pipes would run under the corner of one planter box, the area wasn't stable enough to support the weight. To use the rerouted valve boxes, once accessible from the porch, you now get to run through the sprinklers to turn them off.

Meanwhile, concrete contractor Nick Jacobsen lobbied successfully to pick up the same S-curves as in the fence—Jim said, "Yes!" I said, "Hmmm, maybe too

finish →





much?”—and he built meticulous forms with narrow plastic and wood molding forming the negative spaces. The finished aggregate and acid-washed surfaces tie-in seamlessly with the original walkway, and with the right plantings should give us enough privacy to grill and dine en plein air. The euphorbia, black Mondo and variegated purple Moor grasses in place now are low-care, but not quite right, so they’ll be moving elsewhere.

Satisfaction rating: A-

Resources:

- ✦ **Landscape design:** The Portland Yardbirds, Portland, 503.984.0333
- ✦ **Reflecting pool:** Bamboo Craftsman Co., Portland, 503.285.5339
- ✦ **Cement contractor:** NL Jacobsen Concrete, Tualatin, Ore., 503.638.5757
- ✦ **Fence:** Argo Safety Railings, 503.285.4950, argorailings.com

finish →

