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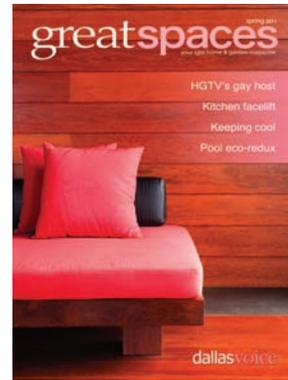
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# There grows the neighborhood

Architect/TV host John Gidding offers tips for multiple-home improvement, or just a single room

By Steven Lindsey

Anyone who owns a home can quickly name the one house on the block that ruins the whole street for everyone. It could be as simple as an unkempt yard or as drastic as broken-down cars perched on cinderblocks on the driveway. Architect and HGTV host John Gidding's new show, *Curb Appeal: The Block*, is all about tackling entire groups of homes and building a sense of pride in a community. Fortunately, you don't have to go on a reality show to benefit from his advice, from ways to improve your own home to getting everyone living around you in on the act.

## Taking on the neighborhood

In *Curb Appeal: The Block*, Gidding is challenged with designing and improving facades on more than one house. Rather than just helping one person make his or her home shine, his job is to upgrade an entire block while staying true to the aesthetics of the homes and rely on historic and contextual cues.

"It makes a big difference when multiple homeowners in a neighborhood feel the benefits of a curb appeal facelift, typically with the side effect that after we leave, those neighbors continue to find ways of beautifying their surroundings and further strengthening those neighborly bonds," he says.

The biggest culprits for bringing down curb appeal, according to Gidding, are ugly yards, shoddy or unappealing front doors, little regard for quality lighting, lack of color, faltering shutters and gutters and a crooked mailbox.

"A clean yard with well-maintained planting beds and mulched details is all you need in terms of landscaping. Some colorful plants following the path to the front door doesn't hurt."

And, he says, if you don't have a dedicated path to the front door and have people walking up your driveway, you've broken Gidding's No. 1 rule: Always have a path to the front door.

"After that it's about bringing color to the front door to attract attention to the entrance, and then decorating the entrance with a place to sit, a sconce or lighting fixture that matches the metal finishes of the door hardware, and then complementing the entrance colors with accents on the facade like repainting shutters or installing window boxes. It's really not rocket science, but it can require some color coordination and taste."

Without a TV crew in tow, people may find it difficult to get their neighbors to feel the need to improve their homes' curb appeal.

"The most effective grease for this particular wheel is from the elbow. In other words, if you are willing to put in a little work yourself, you'll be amazed how receptive neighbors can be to chipping in. The worst thing you can do is tell neighbors how to improve their lot or side of the street. You end up fracturing the very fabric that needs to be built up," he says.

"On the other hand, if you propose a weekend where whoever wants to can join in doing a few projects around the neighborhood, you'll find more and more people willing to help out. Once that kind of relationship is built up, the sky is the limit for how much improvement a block can affect as a team."

## Increasing your home's value

"Kitchens and bathrooms are the tried and tested focal points for a successful home renovation," Gidding says. "Granted, they can be expensive to redo, but invariably the investment comes back in property values. For kitchens, cabinet resurfacing, countertop upgrades, and new appliances are the big-ticket crowd pleasers."

"For bathrooms, it's retiling and new fixtures. Both these rooms are slaves to trends, so it's good to be well versed in what's new and hot in the market. One year it's all about the convection ovens and induction cooktops, and another year it can be about natural cabinet fronts and stone backsplashes. To avoid picking trends that will become dated, always look for low-detail (no multicolored inlays within the backsplash), high-quality (granite and stainless) upgrades."

When adding value to a home that isn't for sale, the only difference is the ability to infuse more personality in the renovations. This is a good time to hire a designer and really work on changes that will enhance your lifestyle. Built-ins are a great example, as are custom pieces of furniture that fit within specific nooks in your home. Try to maximize the spaces within your home that aren't being used optimally. Spaces under the stairs can be reclaimed, breakfast nooks created, offices built into bedroom corners, you get the idea. These are all upgrades that will improve your day-to-day, while still being generally appreciated down the road if you do decide to sell," he advises.

## Prepping your home for sale

Gidding's first HGTV show was *Designed to Sell*, a show that helped people transform their homes to sell faster and get a higher price. There

Continued on Next Page

are a few projects that anyone can do to make a house more appealing to prospective buyers, including some that don't cost a thing.

"The single least expensive and most effective strategy isn't even a design tip. It's a clutter tip. Get rid of it!" Gidding says. "I've found that the homes that stay the shortest amount of time on the market are the ones that have removed about 50 percent of all clothes, belongings, knick knacks and assorted items from their shelves and closets. Some choose to rent a storage unit, some are already in their new homes and smartly move everything but the staging items to it, and others simply call Mom and use an extra bedroom as temporary holding space."

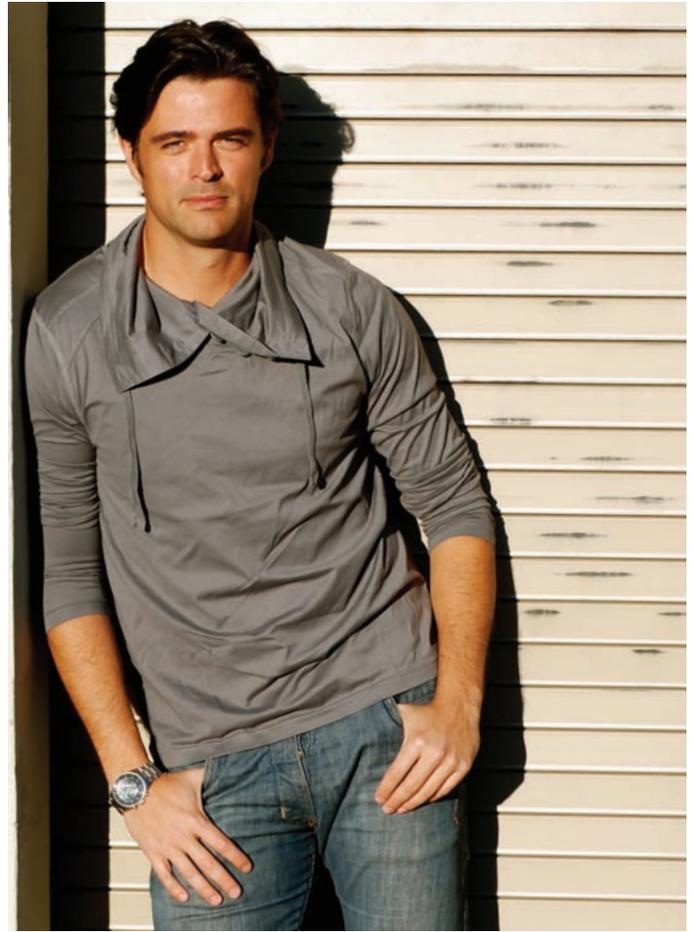
"I always tell people to make their closets look like they live a charmed life of white shirts, beige pants, and sandals. It's the lifestyle you're selling as much as the house, and a cluttered home is possibly the single biggest detractor when selling."

As far as actual design strategies, the rules are simple.

"Make sure every room is staged to have an identity," he says. In other words, no guest rooms that are "storage rooms" and no this-dining-room-could-also-be-an-office" spaces. He also advises to use neutral, low-saturation colors on all walls that complement any furniture. Add fresh flowers to the foyer and other appropriate spaces, plant annuals and perennials in the front yard for curb appeal, and make sure the house numbers are appealing and visible.

His most important tip, which goes hand-in-hand with clutter removal is to clean, clean, clean.

"That means within drawers, every bathroom and kitchen surface, under beds, and every nook you think a buyer will not look, but trust me they will. Oh, final tip. If any bathroom has carpeting, be prepared to keep that house on the market for a nice, long time."



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# Conditioner love

By David Taffet

Yes, you can have a cold house without the big bills — and that's not hot air

Perhaps the one thing we loathe the most besides triple digit temps in summer is that dreaded electric bill. The air conditioner is a must for summer in Texas, but the wallet sure takes a beating. One local expert recommends these simple tips to help you keep your cool and some green.

Todd Ylen of TNS Mechanical in Arlington said that only half the air conditioning complaints his company receives could be traced to the main unit. The first thing he checks is the overall cleanliness of what he calls "the guts." He recommends a professional cleaning with caustic chemicals.

"It should be done professionally," he says, "The chemicals won't hurt the plants but it can melt the rubber off your sneakers."

During the season, he said, don't be afraid to wash the unit with a hose, but not a pressure washer. A garden hose will not damage an outdoor air conditioning system. They're made to withstand gale-force winds.

Keep grass and weeds off outdoor condensers. They clog the system and decrease efficiency.

Next, Ylen said he checks the house.

"How efficient is the ductwork?" he says. "How efficient is your house?"

The outer lining of much of the ductwork installed in the 1980s has deteriorated. Squirrels, raccoons and other animals that get into the attic can cause a tremendous amount of damage to the ducts as well.

Cold air will blow in the attic but never reach the living areas of the house if the ducts are torn or worn. He recommends modern, high-insulated

ductwork.

Next, he suggests an energy audit company to check for leaks around doors and windows.

"Seal the house," he says. It pays off in lower energy bills quickly.

And ventilate, he said. Ylen called the old whirlybirds on most roofs worthless.

He recommends solar-powered, fan-driven ventilators. A year ago, he said, they were \$1,800. Today they sell for \$400, an amount that will pay for itself in one season. He calls it an upfront investment that continues to pay off by lowering electric bills on air conditioning and never costing a cent to operate.

Filters should be changed monthly. Dirty filters prevent the system from drawing air easily, making it work harder and use more energy.

Programmable thermostats are also useful in keeping the system from cooling the house when not needed.

Ylen calls radiant barriers ineffective with a 50-year payback, but insulation very useful.

"A preventive maintenance program is crucial," he says. He sums up his energy-saving tips to all homeowners — insulate, ventilate and stop air leaks.

TNS Mechanical services homes throughout Texas and has other tips at [AirConditioningRepairArlington.com](http://AirConditioningRepairArlington.com)

# COOL IT NOW

The unforgiving summer heat is looming over Texas and in short time, everyone will be opting to stay indoors where it's nice and cool. Now that it's bearable outside, this would be an ideal time to get that air conditioning unit tuned up. One company can help with that — only because they are hoping to help out in an entirely different way.

"I feel that this program can make some real changes for our neighborhoods," Debra Parker says.

Parker represents Comfort Exports and Hobson Air Conditioning, a company who's taking an interesting approach to cooling off Texas residents and contributing to area non-profits. With the economy taking a hit on everyone, people are doing their best to stretch a dollar but nonprofit agencies struggle a little differently.

Basically, if an agency like Bryan's House or AIDS Arms can't do their job, their clients suffer for it and CE&HAC doesn't want that.

"We want to be sure we are doing our part, to help non-profit organizations be able to raise

money to continue serve their communities," she says. "And while we've always been involved, we believe that during these times we must increase our support."

Thus they are inviting agencies to partake in Tune Up for a Cause. With summer coming, a tuned-up unit is a good thing. What this fundraising effort does is have supporters of an organization purchase an inspection with proceeds going toward the agency.

"We will come and do a complete 17-point tune-up and safety inspection of the heating and cooling systems," Parker says. "Instead of the homeowner or landlord paying us, they will make the check payable to their charity! One hundred percent of the cost goes to their non-profit."

The company provides a nice package for organizations without cost. A website for homeowners to sign on for service, promotional materials, help as needed with fundraising events and a bonus \$125 for every 25 homeowners the agency gets to sign up. To make it easier, the company reduced the price from



\$79 to \$39.

Tune Up for a Cause is available to organizations who serve Collin, Dallas, Denton, Ellis, Erath, Johnson, Palo Pinto, Parker, Somervell, Tarrant and Wise counties, because, that's where CE&HAC serve. Sounds like a win-win for lots of people.

— Rich Lopez

For more information on signing up your agency with the program, visit [ACGenius.com/TuneUpsForACause](http://ACGenius.com/TuneUpsForACause).

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Mary Kathryn Reese, top left, and her partner Jennifer Sherrill founded Snappy Kitchens which helps clients pick materials and looks for their kitchen including backsplash and countertops. (Photos courtesy Ruda Photography)

# Kitchen possible

## One local couple can take the nightmare out of revitalizing your kitchen into a dream

By Rich Lopez

When you cook that extra special dinner for your loved one or family, you want to feel inspired as you go through the recipe. But you need much more than the pretty picture in that magazine and those drab cabinets aren't helping. The kitchen is the heart of the home but if it's causing heartache, well, something must be done — and it may not be as daunting as you think.

"Before people think about remodeling their entire kitchen, they should consider a facelift," Mary Kathryn Reese says. "What we're doing is basically that, an aesthetic update, but we also try to enable the consumer to define for themselves what they like to do with their kitchen."

Reese and Jennifer Sherrill, her partner in both business and life are founders of the seven year-old Dallas-based company Kitchen Design Concepts which focuses on full-scale higher-end redos. That comes with more involvement and process. But the ladies discovered a niche market where people were interested in updating their kitchen without breaking ground or the bank. Some touch-ups here and there or maybe a new sink and they would have been happy. This became an aha moment for the team and Snappy Kitchens was born.

"What we've learned is that people are interested in doing some of it themselves," she says.

They just need that push to get them going and that's where Snappy Kitchens comes in. The couple created an online portal where people can design their new look all on the web with a wizard model and get an estimate of the cost. Once the client is happy with the results of both the selections and the prices, an appointment is set with the company to verify measurements and costs and begin the journey to a brand new kitchen.

"It's basically a do-it-yourself redesign," she says. "People can do it at their own time and pace and there's no cost for the estimate. Plus, this gives clients all the power in their own hands and they can edit the cost. Sometimes people are embarrassed to say 'I can't afford this.' This model lets them narrow down the cost."

The company has two designers on staff who then help the customer streamline their facelift.

"People want some confirmation that what they selected looks good," Reese says.

Continued on Next Page

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From Previous Page

Reese and Sherrill debuted Snappy Kitchens in March, but have been at work on it since last July. The service opened to a warm reception at the Home and Garden Show in Dallas and even in its infancy, business is buzzing.

"The response has been fabulous and we're doing about a proposal a week," she says.

She says they are working out some kinks and doing all the web tools to maximize visitors to the site. However, the site runs smooth enough and easy to follow. By clicking the "Estimate My Kitchen," button, the Snappy Kitchen Wizard appears and you're on your way to that kitchen facelift. First the kitchen shape is determined followed by cabinetry, countertop measurements and options and then sink, faucet and backsplash. Since cabinets make up a big design element of most kitchens, you'd think that would be the most popular of the selections. Wrong.

"The most common request people want for their kitchen is a new countertop and then new appliances" she confirms. "Backsplash and then

painting cabinetry and replacing hardware."

You are in good hands with this team. With their primary company, the couple has realized their dream. But Sherrill is also one of 31 women in the industry to have certified remodeler designation from the National Association of the Remodeling Industry or NARI and that's huge. Reese is also a hobby chef and Cook's Illustrated recipe tester, so her knowledge of the kitchen adds a perspective to the redesigning beyond just looks.

And although Snappy Kitchens is their new baby, as any proud parent, they got big plans for it.

"Of course, KDC is our first business there is a different approach to services, different level of intimacy," Reese says, "but even though Snappy Kitchens costs less for the customer, the quality is the same. We're going full throttle with this and because it's web-based, we even hope to franchise it."

Likely everyone else does to, so make it snappy.

For more information or to begin your kitchen's facelift, visit [SnappyKitchens.com](http://SnappyKitchens.com).

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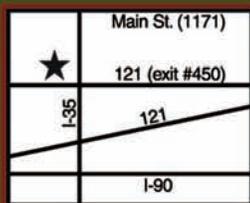
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Partners Tom Lloyd-Boyd, left, and Patrick Boyd-Lloyd are putting Dallas on the map for impressive gardens like this green masterpiece at the Oak Cliff home of Ken Row and Sergio Ramirez.



# Not-so-secret gardens

Three gay gardens make elite 5 highlighted in this year's Garden Conservancy Tour

By Jef Tingley

Some people travel the U.S. looking for historic landmarks or quirky tourist traps like “the world’s biggest ball of twine,” but for Patrick Boyd-Lloyd, along with husband Tom Lloyd-Boyd, it’s the pursuit of the perfect petunia that fuels their vacations. To be more specific: the *perfect* garden. And as a result of their love of landscape, Dallas is now on the national garden circuit radar.

“We’ve been to [garden] tours in Upstate New York (seeing a couple of gardens owned by people who worked for *Martha Stewart Living* was a huge highlight), California, and, of course several, in Texas,” says Boyd-Lloyd. “This year, we’re going to Portland, Oregon and Brentwood/Santa Monica, California for a [tour] that features the garden of Julie Newmar of *Catwoman* fame.”

Through this green-thumb obsession, the Garden Conservancy was made aware to add Dallas to its list of Open Days Program. As Boyd-Lloyd tells it, “after returning from a Sonoma, California tour [in 2008], I



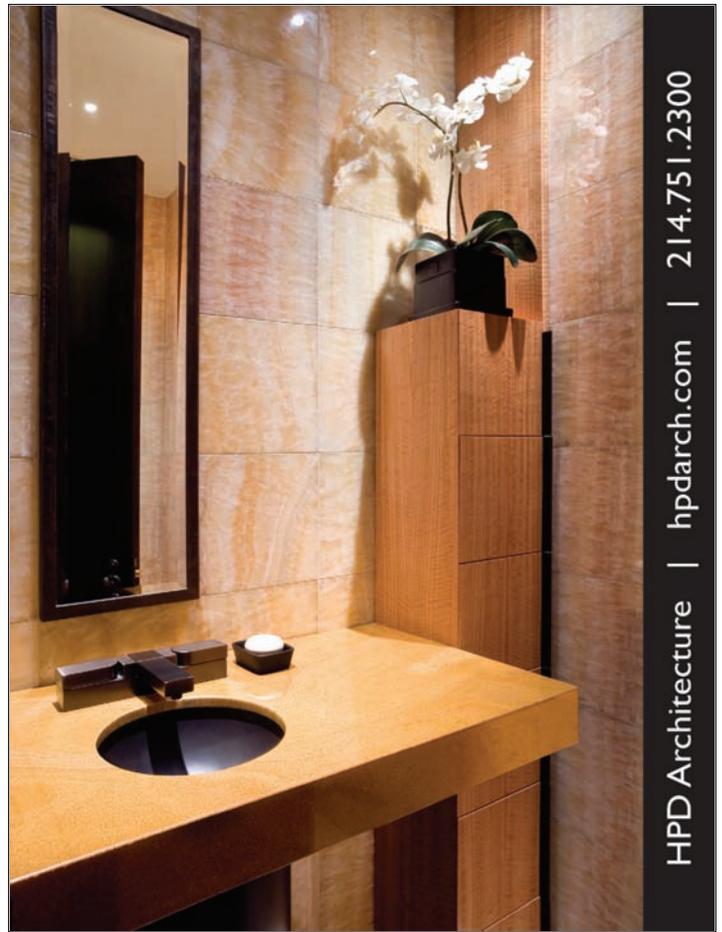
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contacted the Garden Conservancy to ask why Dallas wasn't represented and walked right into being chairperson — open mouth and insert garden boot." This year marks his third time chairing the event.

In his role, Boyd-Lloyd helps to select the gardens that will be featured on the tour which, according to the organization's website has, "unlocked the gates to hundreds of America's very best private gardens." It also raises awareness and finances to protect and maintain some of America's best-loved historic properties. Boyd-Lloyd credits his passion for gardening and his 15-year history in the landscape design industry in helping him to find some of North Texas' best-hidden treasures for Open Days.

"I look for gardens that are not ego-statements, but ones that the homeowners are actually a part of [and who] really get their own hands digging in the dirt. The point of the tour, to me, is to show the average homeowner that there are really interesting ideas and plants out there," he

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says. "With our dramatic climate changes and alkaline, rocky and gumbo soils, this part of Texas is not an easy place to garden, but with a bit of knowledge and patience one can have a really special garden for their home."

The May 21 Open Days Tour is a self-led experience through five gardens throughout DFW. This year, three of the gardens belong to members of the LGBT community.

The leadoff garden is located in Kessler Park and owned by Ken Row and Sergio Ramirez. It features terraced areas with views of the surrounding hills and trees, stone staircases, ponds and outdoor living spaces. According to Boyd-Lloyd, it's especially known for its glorious display of hydrangeas and roses. Also in Oak Cliff does horticulturist Mike Munsterman own an impressive garden. In addition to the stunning flora, the "must-see" of this stop is a custom chicken coop built by Munsterman and his partner.

The Blue Lotus Gardens in East Dallas, owned by a husband and wife team in the landscape business, is a balance of arid plants like yuccas and agaves in one space countered by a water garden filled with Lotus flowers in another. The grounds also include honeybee hives and a turtle sanctuary.

Near Knox-Henderson, Alan Rister and partner Greg Armstrong have created an English-inspired garden mixed with Texas-native and adapted plants that play a large role in the landscape. The owners do all the planting and organic maintenance themselves.

The final stop on the tour is in Preston Hollow at the garden of Sharolyn and Stan Herndon. Here, the couple has transformed an unused backyard pool into a koi pond with multiple rills and streams.

But whether attending Open Days or just browsing at your favorite nursery, Boyd-Lloyd says it's easy for anyone to get involved in gardening in North Texas. "Join a local garden club, hire a professional for a consultation, read books...[or] just start digging!"



Mike Munsterman's oasis, above, also includes a custom-built chicken coop. Row and Ramirez also included architectural details such as this fountain.





## FIRST KNOW THIS

Boyd-Lloyd offered some important tips before embarking on your tour. Or maybe consider them housekeeping rules.

### Garden Tour Dos:

Ask questions.  
Take pictures.  
Spread the word.

### Garden Tour Don'ts:

Smoke on site.  
Pick the plants (ask the homeowners for the name and they may share a cutting).  
Walk in parts of the garden that don't look like you should be there.

The Garden Conservancy Dallas Open Days is May 21 from 10 a.m.–4 p.m. \$5 per person per garden. 888-842-2442 or visit [GardenConservancy.org](http://GardenConservancy.org).

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# Pool playing

Turn an unused pool into an eco-friendly space

By Jef Tingley



This pool conversion will employ modern technologies of harvesting rainwater. (Photos provided by Jeremy Delost)

It's been said that swimming pools are like boats — they're lots of fun, but it's better to have a friend who has one than to have one yourself. Sure, the escape from Dallas' hot summer sun into a private blue lagoon can be rewarding, but the upkeep and maintenance can be overwhelming, not to mention pricey.

Historically, homeowners who called it quits with their pools had few options. They could either drain it dry, leaving both a backyard eyesore and a would-be skate park for marauding teens, or fill it in which takes a surprising amount of dirt (and cash). But now, there's a third option for saying *au revoir* to an outdated oasis: giving it a new life as an ecologically friendly rainwater tank.

"Just about any pool can be transformed into a [water storage tank]," says Jeremy Delost, owner of Rainwater Harvesting Systems, which has been transforming unwanted pools across North Texas since 2008.

As Delost explains it, there's always a cost involved with owning a pool. If it's usable, the homeowner has to continually pay for water, chemicals, resurfacing, maintenance and prepping for the season change. Demolition of an unused pool can be fiscally challenging due to the labor and materials. And while the conversion of a pool into a rainwater cistern comes with an initial expense, it actually helps to save some money in the end by

reducing water bills.

"Many of our customers just don't want to keep up with the maintenance of their pools any longer. Their kids may be grown or they just don't use it," says Delost. "Changing the pool into a rainwater tank saves time, saves money on water bills and helps the environment."

The process for changing a pool begins by sealing it water-tight. According to Delost, even if an outdated pool cannot hold water it can still be transformed by fitting it with a liner. From there, the curved bottom of the pool is leveled with rock. This prepares the space to receive a series of milk-carton-like boxes that will later support the topsoil allowing it to be nearly undetectable in the yard.

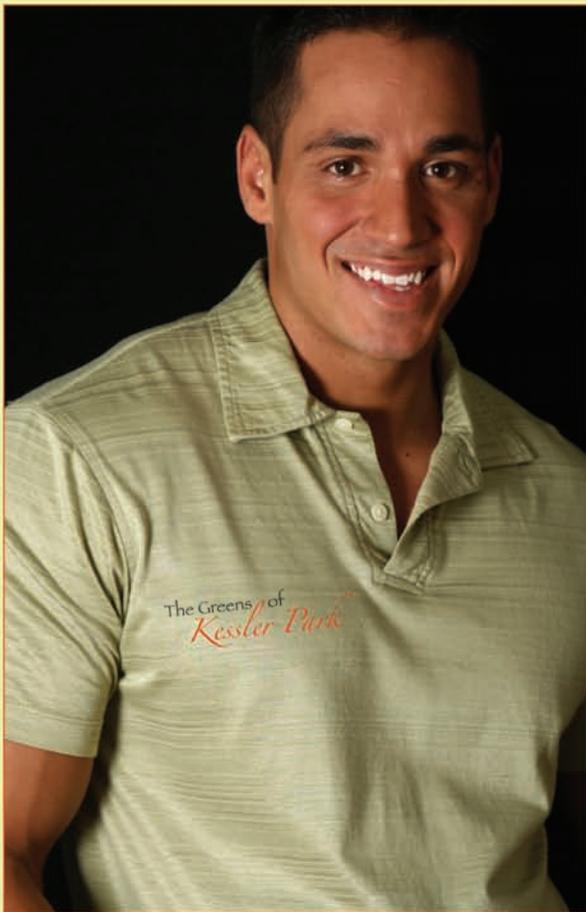
The boxes are wrapped in water-permeable cloth, put in position in the pool, filled in on the sides with aggregate and topped by a geo-grid mesh that allows rainwater to seep through. Finally, the entire structure is covered with topsoil leaving a buried "green" treasure ready to catch the rain, which can be used for lawns and gardens thanks to the assistance of a submersible pump installed during construction.

The final product isn't just functional; it's sturdy, too. "When finished, [the tank] could take the weight of a truck," says Delost.

And that's how the cycle of recycling carries on ... from swimming pool, to water tank, to potential parking space.



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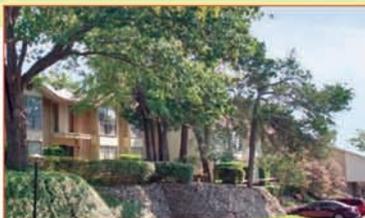


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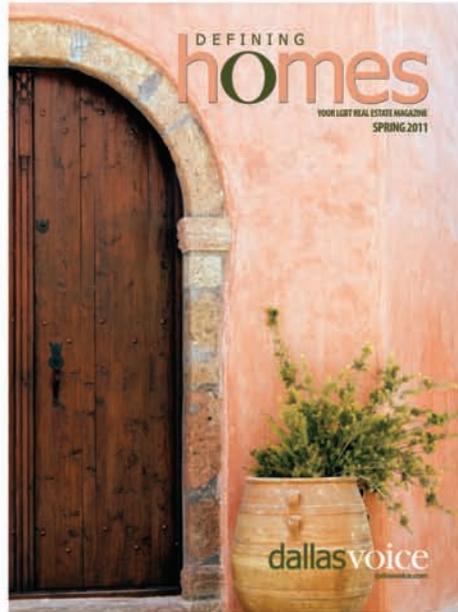
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