



Above:

The owners of this home in Prescott, Wis., wanted an outdoor living space that would be easy to maintain and would enhance their view of the Mississippi River Valley. As an addition to their existing screened-in patio deck, Pro's Touch Landscaping created a patio with pergola for an outdoor dining space and a second, sunken patio with fire pit.

Left: Before the patio spaces could be built, a 1,800 square foot retaining wall was designed to define the patio spaces. The 10' high VERSA-LOK system that uses multiple layers of soil reinforcement was chosen to match an existing, smaller wall. Running parallel to the 22' curve of the retaining wall, two seat walls provide a safety measure as the boundary of the livable spaces in the patio. The charcoal colored blocks on both the retaining and seat walls are from the same manufacturer, tying the space together.

A Maximum View of the Mississippi River

By Brenda Bredahl, VERSA-LOK

Owners of a bluff-top property in Prescott, Wis., were ready for a low-maintenance outdoor living space that would maximize their views of the Mississippi River Valley. The home has a second-level screened-in deck, but the homeowners wanted a patio with a pergola for an outdoor dining space.

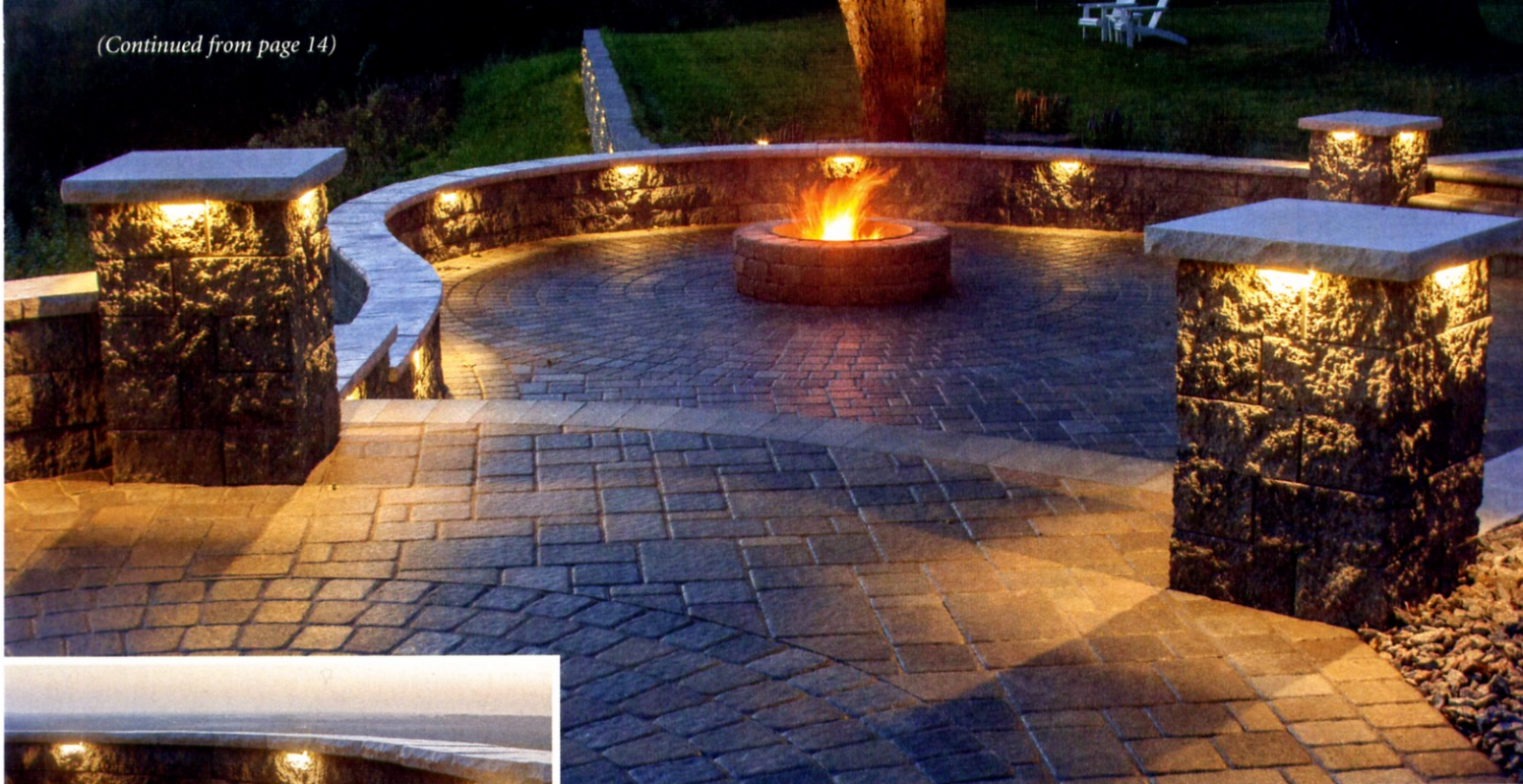
The homeowners worked with Pro's Touch Landscaping in Prescott, a firm that specializes in landscape, hardscape, lighting and water feature design and installation, as well as snow and ice management. "Much of our work is along the Mississippi River," says John McNamara, who owns the landscaping firm with his wife Abby. "It makes sense to maximize your outdoor living area when you have such great views."

As the homeowner explored options with Pro's Touch, the landscaping firm suggested adding a second sunken patio with a fire pit and low freestanding walls that would preserve the stunning views of the valley from the ground level patio.

"Creating a sunken patio is a great solution for preserving the view, and it works very well when you have grade changes," said McNamara.

Retaining Walls

Pro's Touch first designed 1,800 square feet of segmental retaining wall using custom-made VERSA-LOK wall units to define the patio spaces. The wall is 10' tall at the highest point and uses multiple layers of grid soil reinforcement.



Above: The patios and paver walkways encompass a total of 2,300 square feet. A mix of cobblestones and “circlestones” from a regional manufacturer covers the space. A “ledgestone” style fire pit kit, measuring 46” diameter and 12” tall, sits in the center of the lower circular patio. Both the pavers and the fire pit use the company’s “lakeshore blend” color.

Left: Around the patios, low voltage LED landscape lighting was placed on the undercaps of the retaining wall, seat walls, columns and even under the stairs. The 1.4-watt, 3250K lights automatically turn on at dusk and off at dawn, or can be set on a timer.

The manufacturer offers the option of a solid, top-pinning retaining wall unit. “It was chosen to match an existing small retaining wall, and uses the company’s signature hole-to-slot pinning system,” said McNamara.

A little rain can be lucky. “During the installation phase, we had some rain, and since we had used geogrid on the entire wall, the rain helped settle it down before we started on the patios,” said Jake Kukacka, Pro’s Touch project manager.

Freestanding Seat Walls

Two curves in the bluff wall define both the ground-level patio and the sunken firepit area. The wall steps down with the grade on the bluff.

The seat walls were created with standard units from the same manufacturer as the retaining wall. The wall units are a charcoal blend with a split-back for texture on the back. Low seat walls with end columns added a distinctive design element that preserved the view.

“One challenge was to match the 22-foot curve of the retaining wall with the seat walls, and there were no special pieces needed,” said Kukacka. “Typically, we design by the ‘straight or eight’ rule of thumb, where you either build a straight wall or on an eight-foot radius, which is the natural taper of the block. The standard units can be used for any radius desired, as done in this project. The seat walls also provide a safety measure, and from a design standpoint the columns and walls really tie the project together.”

Pro’s Touch added a paver walkway that connects two sets of wide, sweeping stairs from the ground-level patio, so that there are two access points to the sunken firepit patio. The staircases were created with charcoal units with matching bullnose stair treads.

Patios

The patios and paver walkways totaled 2,300 square feet. “It starts off at the front of the garage and leads around to the side of the garage,” said Kukacka. “We used a cobblestone in ‘lakeshore blend’ from a regional manufacturer in a four-unit pattern plus matching ‘circlestone’ paving stones.”

A ledgestone fire pit kit was installed on top of the circlestone patio base for this project. The kit can also be installed as an inset by using it to replace the circlestone center pack.

A second inset of circlestone creates a focal point for seating and relaxing off of the main-level patio and dining area. “We simply cut the cobblestone to fit around the circlestone,” Kukacka adds.

Lighting

Pro’s Touch selected low-voltage LED landscape lighting for undercaps on the bluff retaining wall, plus stairs, seat walls and columns, adding a dramatic glow and a measure of safety to the outdoor space.

A light-sensing photocell turns the lights on at dusk and off at dawn, or the adjustable timer can be set for 4-, 6- or 8- hour durations. Each light consumes 1.4 watts and emits a warm 3250K glow with a wide dispersion angle so that light is distributed evenly over a broad area.

The project started out smaller but grew based on discussions about the stunning valley views. “Originally we were going to add a much smaller portion of retaining wall and one patio,” said Kukacka. “We started talking about the beautiful views and how the homeowner wished that the outdoor living space could extend out a little further. The final design grew out from our discussions, and it turned out beautifully.” 