



# Designer turns outdoors into art

By Marshall Terrill  
Staff Writer

When Marie White looks at a backyard, she doesn't see open space – she sees a blank canvas that has the potential to become a beautiful work of art.

White is the owner of Living Rooms Landscape Design in Ahwatukee Foothills, a landscape designer who transforms outdoor spaces into sanctuaries.

"When I look at someone's yard, I think more in terms of the usability of space," White said. "My goal is to enable people to use their outdoor space as an extension of their indoor living area, which works especially well in our Southwestern climate."

White said many activities can take place outdoors such as eating, reading, cooking, gardening, yoga and visiting with friends and family.

The former Intel employee has a wealth of design background, which has served her well in her latest business venture. White attended California State University at Chico for two years, majoring in graphic design and photography and later enrolled at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, where she received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in graphic design and packaging. In 2005, she graduated from the Desert Botanical Gardens Desert Landscaper Program and has maintained her own backyard, which has helped her understand which plants do well in the Valley.

"I've used my backyard as a proving ground," White said.

Most of her designs are symmetrical and multi-layered, which expand backyard views and create a feeling of calm. She likes removing the usual gray block pattern from property walls by applying a tinted plaster finish over the cement block. Her designs can include a variety of sitting areas, raised planters, wind sculptures, dining options, bench swings, task lighting, a formal pond, a bar/grill area and low-maintenance landscaping and plants.

"Having a yard that's green year-round does not mean you have to spend a lot of time maintaining your yard," White said. "There are many plants that thrive in their natural shape and with minimal watering."

Five plants White suggests that will stay green year-round, take full sun and are low water usage: Elephant's food (*Portulacaria afra*) a low succulent; Dwarf ruellia (*Ruellia*) a flowering shrub, best if contained; Cascalote (*Caesalpinia cacaloco*) a tall shrub/small tree; Twisted myrtle (*Myrtus communis 'Boetica'*) a large ornamental shrub; and Trailing rosemary (*Rosmarinus prostratus*) a spreading low groundcover.

In addition to sights, White said she focuses on sounds and scents.

"A subtle water sound or wind chimes can cover bothersome background noise and can also add to the feeling of relaxation," White said, adding that scents can be enhanced by using lavender, rosemary and myrtle, which also convey a sense of well being.

Client Bonnie Stevens, who had her front and backyard designed by White about two years ago, said her quality of life has improved tenfold.

"We get an enormous amount of compliments on our 30-year-old house," Stevens said. "People will drive by and stop to take a look at what's been done."

Stevens said passers-by aren't the only visitors her household gets. She said hummingbirds, bees, doves and quail often drop in to take in the scenery.

"My husband and I now spend a lot of time in our backyard, sipping on a glass of wine and looking at the stars," Stevens said. "We often look at each other and say, 'Wow, this is pretty cool.'"

White charges \$200 for an initial consultation, which includes an on-site visit. Her design fee usually runs 10 to 15 percent of the overall project cost.

For more information, call (480) 540-1222 or visit [www.LivingRoomsLandscapeDesign.com](http://www.LivingRoomsLandscapeDesign.com).

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