

Valadares gets creative building water gardens

BY SUSAN CHAVES
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When Candide Valadares bought his first house more than a decade ago, the unruly parcel on which it sat desperately needed to be tamed. A self-employed landscaper, Valadares easily got the situation under control and even built his own water garden, or pond.

Valadares got so many compliments, he decided to add water garden installation to his landscaping business. It quickly caught on and 12 years later, he finds himself installing about three to five ponds a year.

"They bring the backyard to life," said Valadares of the South Norwalk-based Candide Landscaping & Water Gardens. "You can have the best, most beautiful gardens in the world, but until you have a water garden, it's won't be a true garden."

Designed using the natural landscape, Valadares' water gardens vary in size and incorporate plants, fish, streams and waterfalls. Due to safety concerns, including drowning, pondless waterfalls are gaining popularity. In fact, Valadares recently constructed a pondless waterfall on Dogwood Lane.

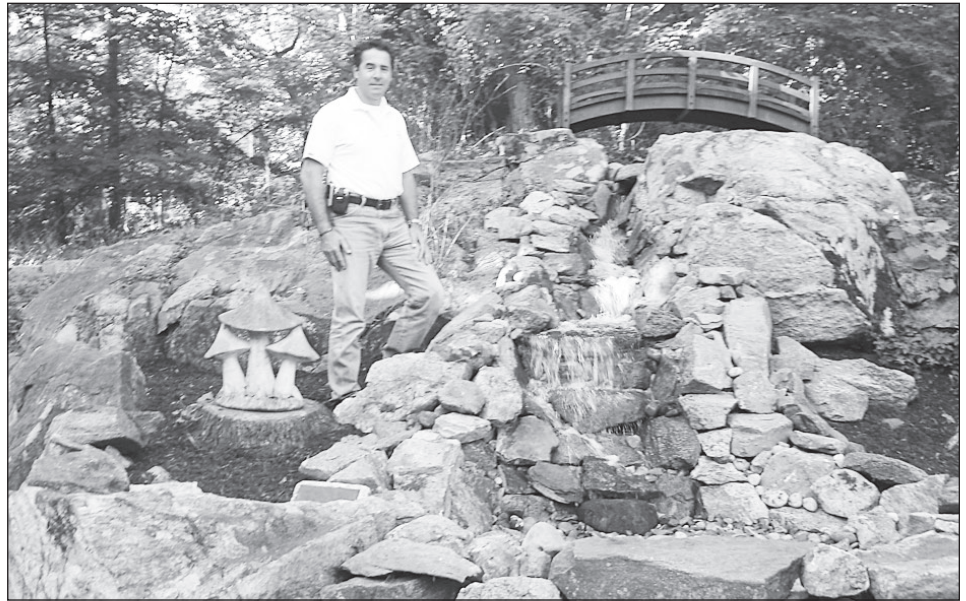
Thinking she may rent the property, the homeowner, Lee Buchanan, wanted to keep things as maintenance-free as possible. Plus, she was hesitant to have a pond in an area where there is a lot of wildlife. However, Buchanan did not want those reasons to keep her from having something she and her late husband always wanted but never got around to doing.

"The terrain just simply lent itself to a waterfall," she said. "It's wonderful. Candide did beautiful work."

And he works fast. Valadares said it takes two days to install a water garden. That step only comes after he has consulted with the property owner and designed the pond and filter system.

"You've got to have a creative mind to do this and I love to be creative," Valadares said. "Making the water gardens look as natural as possible is key. That's what distinguishes my business from the others."

To achieve the natural look, he must work



Candide Valadares stands in the water garden he recently built for a Darien homeowner on Dogwood Lane.

with the existing landscape. Such a practice means that no two gardens will ever be the same.

"You can't reproduce it," Valadares said. "Even if you have the same style or viewing, you'll never have the same placement, background or rocks. Every pond has its own character to it."

Because he wants to be able to guarantee his work, Valadares will only build a pond if he is allowed to put his name on it. Since he uses a rubber liner and maintains the water gardens, Valadares said they can last up to 35 years.

If there is a problem, he offers free, no-hassle repairs for the first five years. So far, he has not had any complaints.

"I've never had to replace a liner or re-do a pond," Valadares said. "I've had to re-do a pond done the first time by other people, but not my own."

The quality of his work is equally evident in the landscaping portion of his business, which he started 19 years ago after buying it from the previous owner, for whom he had worked part-time for three months.

The then-newly married Valadares began

landscaping to supplement the income he was getting as a manager for a friend's deli on Dixwell Avenue in Norwalk.

Before that, he worked as an electrician at his uncle's Bridgeport company for several months upon immigrating to the United States 25 years ago from France, where he was raised.

"I took a chance buying the company," said Valadares, who was born in Portugal and became an American citizen two years ago. "I knew zero about wheeling and dealing in the States."

He also had no money. But his aunt co-signed on a \$20,000 loan — the amount for which he bought the business that was originally being offered for \$40,000. When he took over the company, Valadares had 27 accounts, including two in Darien. Today, Darien customers make up more than 100 of his roughly 200 accounts.

"I like where I am," he said. "Looking back, I'm an example of the American dream come true in many ways."

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