

Story Of A Landscape: Enormous, Detailed Paver Driveway In Houston



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People know everything is always bigger in Texas – even the paver jobs. Just ask Michael Shawn Kelly, owner of Mirror Lake Designs in Spring, Texas.

His 10,000-plus square-foot paver project in Houston is considerably larger than the average family driveway, but then it serves as the entry to a five-family compound. It also offered up six decision-makers, making product selection his greatest challenge with the job.

However, the rewards for his considerable skills include recognition by Hardscape North America for a residential paver project of more than 3,000 square feet.



Photo: Mirror Lake Designs

Kelly didn't even have to really sell the job. His company has a display in a kiosk area of a Houston mall that includes a fountain, and seating wall, as well as company brochures and a screen on which people can see work Mirror Lake Designs has done, and one of the people involved in the building project saw the display.

"Someone who was going to work on the house suggested they contact us, based on the work they had seen," Kelly says.

He stresses that this is not your average residential driveway and off-street parking area.

"This is in front of the main house on the property," Kelly explains. "With five families there, they entertain quite a bit. People coming over would need a place to be able to park or drop people off. The real key was putting together something that did not look like a driveway. It's really more of how

you build a courtyard that people can drive across or park seven, eight or nine cars on without it looking like a parking lot.”



Photo: Mirror Lake Designs

To answer that question, Kelly decided to maintain a basic circular pattern, but broke down what could have been a vast expanse of pavers by using different paver products, or, as he describes it “keeping it on a personal scale.”

Ultimately, he came up with the idea of having three different rings of products. The outer ring includes notches along the exterior edge large enough to park a vehicle. The middle ring provides a line around the whole area that, he says, if followed, provides plenty of driving space away from those parked, even for very large vehicles.

The innermost circle was chosen partly to go along with the house.



Photo: Mirror Lake Designs

“It complements the geometry of the house, the flavor of the house, and is something that fits the almost Spanish-colonial look of the home,” Kelly says. “They’re a type of Old-World pavers that also has a texture you feel when you drive across the area.”

Other goals with the product selection included picking up the geometry of two stone areas of the large home’s front, as well some very strong archways through the façade. And, the design needed something strong to lead up to the home’s entrances.

“It’s a formal house, so we didn’t want an amoeba out there,” says Kelly. “We wanted to hold the structure, but we didn’t want it to be so formal and rigid that it wasn’t comfortable.”



Photo: Mirror Lake Designs

To further break up the expanse of pavers, Kelly included a green landscape island in the middle of the entryway.

“We had actually designed something much larger than what’s there,” he says. “We had planned to put in a large, multi-trunk oak out there with a little fountain feature, but they didn’t want to hide the house from the street.”

Instead, the island is boulders and grass, along with a mix of Gulf Coast and tropical ornamentals and some blooming Texas Hill Country natives. The area is irrigated, and Kelly says he brought in an irrigation sub for the job.



Photo: Mirror Lake Designs

Ultimately, the project ended up being constructed with two Belgard pavers

and one Pavestone product.

"The big field in the center is Belgard's Old World Pavers, while the outer perimeter is a Mega Lafitt," says Kelly. "The big ribbon and the expanded entryway is a Pavestone Granette Setts paver."

He estimates he had 12-15 men working on this portion of the project for the better part of two weeks. And, yes, there was some craftsmanship involved.

"They weren't working with just one depth," he explains. "The Granette Setts are a different thickness than the Belgard products, so they had to do a higher base for it."

Although he's half-joking, Kelly says part of the reason for getting the project done so quickly had to do with the decision-making process tied to the job.



Photo: Mirror Lake Designs

"Since we were dealing with five families and six decision-makers who all had diverse opinions, it ran about as well as it could have," he says. "Getting them to agree on something was definitely a challenge, and we didn't want to choose sides any more than I would with my own family. Once everyone agreed on it, we were intent on getting it in the ground before anyone changed their minds."

There was some grading involved with the work. Although Kelly says the site is on top of a modest hill, there as enough slant that his crew had to do up to 18 inches of fill on the right side of the property to make sure a driveway going off behind the main home was at a sufficient grade.

"Our big concern was compaction," he says. "When you're building it up 18 inches, you don't want it to sink two inches a year later."

And, with so much paved space, drainage was also a concern.

"We have drainage everywhere on this," Kelly says. "We have drains all around the perimeter of the area. The owners actually put in a rainwater capture system, so a lot of the runoff is fed into that, but we also ran drainage off to the side of the property."

Lighting for this part of the project highlights the plantings, as well as lights for illuminating the walk areas and on the house itself.



Photo: Mirror Lake Designs

However, the entryway was only a small part of the job Kelly and Mirror Lake Designs ended up doing for the clients. One of the company's specialties is pools, and behind the main house it installed a massive pool area for the family.

"It has a huge grotto with a slide, multiple waterfalls and a separate spa

with a creek where the overflow goes into the pool,” Kelly says. “I also designed a cove which is part of the pool that returns heated water, so the adults can be in a warmer area while the kids are swimming in the cold pool. We have pergolas that reach over into the pool where we have a shelf for the kids to play and a shelf for lounge chairs and a splash pad.”

That work took the better part of 15 months and during that time, the company also installed paver walkways for the family’s children to ride their bikes. Kelly explains he entered the entryway in the HNA competition because he wasn’t concerned about having the landscape grow out before photographing it.

Still, Kelly says he’s proud of the front entryway – and its HNA award.

“It’s how we took what could have been a very institutional scale and broke it down into a personal scale,” he concludes. “We kept the idea that this is a residence while taking care of their needs. It’s not overpowering, and that was difficult to do.”