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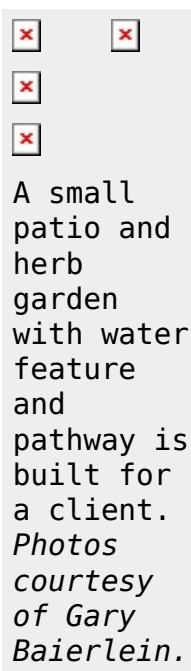
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Gary Baierlein is passionate about landscaping

Like many teenagers, Gary Baierlein picked up a few bucks by mowing lawns when he wasn't in school, and earned money working for an existing landscape and maintenance company. For Baierlein, though, working with turf transcended a job and became a passion that stuck with him, even as he pursued a college degree. "I went to college for architecture and continued my mowing job on Saturdays and summers," Baierlein says. "I changed my major in college to landscape design and ornamental horticulture. I graduated college and kept working for the company as an installer and running a mowing crew."



After eight years, Baierlein decided it was time to strike out on his own. "I decided that I wanted to do more landscape construction and hardscaping, not just foundation plantings and perennial gardens," he says. In 1991, he

started Baierlein Landscaping in West Pawlet, Vt., working up a customer base through lawn maintenance. He worked by himself for the first year, with his father helping out as needed. Every year, he added equipment and employees, growing his business to what it is today: a daily operation with six employees who mow, tend to gardens, provide landscape maintenance and installation.



This facing concrete wall helps keep soils from eroding away from this barn.



In the meantime, Baierlein has continued to gain knowledge and earn certifications. He holds a pesticide applicator's license from Vermont and certification from the Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute and the National Concrete Masonry Association.

His company services an area that encompasses southern Vermont, including the Rutland and Bennington areas. Most of the clients are in the residential sector and their properties serve as second homes. The company also does commercial work.

"What has made my company a success is hard work, a lot of hours on the job and in the office, a drive to create the best product we can and a love for what we do," says Baierlein. "What separates my company from others is that I want quality and not quantity. We cater to the customers we have and provide quality services no matter what we are doing."

Baierlein Landscaping handles both design/build projects and maintenance. Other services include turf programs, caretaking, snowplowing, sanding, provision of firewood and a 24-hour response to home alarms.

Baierlein says his company's philosophy is to create landscapes that fit both the property and the desires of the client.

"Landscapes need to be sustainable," he says. "You have to use the right plants in the right spot—plants that are suitable for the Northeast—and do not overplant."

Baierlein says the biggest mistake he's seen people make in landscaping is overplanting trees and shrubs and improper placement. "You do not put a sugar maple under a power line to hide the pole, and you do not plant them next to

roads. They do not compact soils or salt. You use something that will not grow as tall, like a type of crabapple, which can be great trees for various trouble spots," he says.

Baierlein also sees people make the mistake of placing large trees or shrubs close to houses. "They will trap moisture and rot the clapboards," he says.

"It is our job to educate the homeowners as to what is right and wrong," Baierlein says. "Sometimes they insist on more plants and if that is the case, give it to them as long as they know that you will be dividing things a little sooner. I find that plantings are always changing, and we are always moving things around every spring and fall."

Baierlein also believes in creating four-season landscapes for his clients that emphasize color and texture. "The drawing is only a guide, and while it may look good on paper, a lot of creativity comes out when we're there with the material," he says. "No two designs are the same."

Even with basic mowing, Baierlein emphasizes aesthetics. Weekly yard care encompasses mowing patterns that rotate from two diagonal passes to two perpendicular passes for four patterns to create an artistic effect.

A few projects stand out as Baierlein's favorites. One is a project he worked on this year in which his company designed the project, did all of the plantings, grading and sod work. "The long view is something that you cannot create, but only reveal," he says. "The homeowners had the vision on this one. The house is a post and beam with all of the comforts. It has a screened-in porch with a fireplace and views that reach the Adirondacks. The road and the house site had to be blasted because it was the side of a mountain. The homeowners had a lot of input, which made it easier for us. Now, granite retaining walls, a nice balance of plantings and lush Kentucky bluegrass surround this house," Baierlein explains.

Baierlein has a format he follows to guide him in landscape design so maintenance will be problem-free, and the landscape itself will provide ongoing enjoyment for clients:

- Plant placement is key. "You have to spec out plants that will reach the mature size you are looking for so you do not have to prune it two to three times per season," he says. "You try to use plants that are native to the area. There's no guarantee they will survive, but you have a much better chance of it."
- Each region has a microclimate that deserves special attention. "Dorset, Vt., typically gets more snow and is about 5 degrees colder than Manchester, and they are 10 minutes apart," Baierlein points out.
- Be aware of various animals that will invade a landscape. "Deer are a huge problem for us, so we try to stay away from plants that they like, such as hemlock, hostas and yews," he says.
- Use proper pruning techniques. "Most deciduous shrubs do not want to be hedged," says Baierlein. "You should make lateral cuts to the collar. Some shrubs, like lilacs, except for the Korean, Miss Kim and spirea varieties, need to be rejuvenated. You have to prune one-third of the

oldest wood from the base to allow for new growth to come up. You have to deadhead things that will not reseed and let others reseed, such as lupins and columbine.”

Baierlein Landscaping’s fleet and equipment inventory includes plow trucks, dump trucks, pickups, an excavator with a hydraulic thumb, backhoe/loader, skid steer, a tree-planting auger, plate compactors, stone saws, Scag mowing equipment, trimmers and a variety of power and hand tools.

Good employees to execute the work the way he sees fit are difficult to find, says Baierlein. “We live in small communities, and most teens and young adults do not really want to work,” he says. “They want to play video games, and if they are forced to work for whatever reason, you have to watch them all of the time. There is no drive or pride in what they are doing.”



This backyard, which includes a waterfall and a fire pit, was designed and installed by Baierlein Landscaping.

He finds that experienced landscapers are always a plus, but it depends on who they previously worked for and if they developed some bad habits along the way. “Sometimes it is easier to train someone the way you want it done rather than to spend time to break their bad habits,” he says.

There are some unique challenges working on people’s second homes, Baierlein says. “Some are great to work for, and others are not right with anything,” he says. “The ones who are here for the whole summer or visit often are typically fine. They see you working and what you accomplish for the day. The ones who are not here that often do not understand that you can not leave a property unattended for the time they are gone, and then all of a sudden make it look beautiful.”

Baierlein says dry weather this year has made his job especially tough; those client’s properties that are not irrigated have required watering every other day.

The economy has added extra challenges. “People have definitely cut back, but we do our best to accommodate them,” Baierlein says. “We cut maintenance hours back and do what has to be done. Maybe we visit the property every other week for two hours instead of every week. Mowing is still every week unless we are in a drought like this year.”

Maintenance kept the company busy last year. “We had a few installations, but

nothing big," Baierlein notes. "This year, it was a complete 180-degree turnaround. I hired another person, and we have gone from one installation to the next: stone walls, plantings, sod, you name it."

Looking ahead, Baierlein sees the industry growing every year, and he sees his company as part of that growth. "People want to spend time in their backyards," he says. "They want them to be beautiful, with fire pits, plantings, patios and outdoor living spaces."

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