

Story of a Landscape: Gas Lamps Light Up a New Orleans-Style Project

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The Highland Park neighborhood may be one of the oldest in Minnesota's capital city, but one resident couple had a completely different Mississippi River destination in mind when they redid their backyard: New Orleans.

Matt Burton of Minneapolis-based [Southview Design](#) immediately saw the possibilities their limited space offered. The end result: the project Burton dubbed Big Easy has garnered multiple awards from the [Minnesota Nursery and Landscape Association](#), the [National Association of Landscape Professionals](#) and the [National Association of the Remodeling Industry](#).

"Some of the biggest challenges come in small spaces, and being able to make it usable is always fun," says Burton.



Before the backyard re-do Photo: Southview Design

The designer's vision of the space included gas lamps, red brick, wrought-iron and a water feature. The gas lamps were an especially good choice.

"She loves the [Bevolo](#) gas lamps that are manufactured in New Orleans," he says. "She picked the style she wanted and ordered six for various spots in the landscape."

As a side note, the project reused more than 600 square feet of cut/patterned bluestone to replace a concrete sidewalk, widen an existing walkway across the front of the property, and add a new sidewalk to the front door.



Photo: Peter Kowler/Southview Design

Additionally, an old fence was removed and replaced with a privacy cedar fence with brick columns that runs across the back and along the sides of the property until it meets a wrought-iron fence in the front. The cedar fencing is embellished with wrought-iron accents.

The project installation took from late October 2014 into August of the following year.

A private nook in one corner of the courtyard area was built using cedar and brick.

"The homeowners are empty-nesters and wanted an intimate space where they could sit and have a glass of wine or read a book and have a cup of tea," Burton says.



Photo: Peter Kowler/Southview Design

To further enhance the experience of the nook, Burton added the water feature, a fountain, nearby. His main goal with that element, he says, was to keep it simple.

Patterned after a similar fountain in New Orleans, "We built a holding basin with a brick back and added a copper weir – simple but effective," Burton explains.

With homes less than 10 feet apart, Burton says the sounds of splashing water can be heard throughout the courtyard and into the clients' home, muffling

the sounds of the neighborhood.

A second seating area is located in front of a brick fireplace. Again, the idea was to have a space to sit outside and room to relax between the house and garage.



Photo: Peter Kowler/Southview Design

Burton explains the courtyard patio pavers are from [Pine Hall Brick, Inc.](#), using a mix of its full-range red units. The pavers are dry laid over a class 5 base and finished using polymeric sand in the joints. The courtyard wall around the fireplace, the pillars for the fence, and the fireplace are brick-and-mortar utilize a brick closely matching the pavers.

“The client really wanted that almost-messy type of mortar work that looks like it was done many, many years ago,” says Burton. “My mason kept trying to clean it up and the client kept saying, ‘No, no, no. Leave some of the mortar to crust over.’”

He adds the top of the chimney was raised three feet to make it more of a focal point.



Photo: Peter Kowler/Southview Design

Burton's research showed gas lines weren't always buried in New Orleans.

"We tried to keep them somewhat hidden," he says. "However, the client didn't mind that stubs for the lines were visible."

Burton says the client is particularly pleased with the gas lamps and they are lit most of the time.

Drainage was also a concern in the courtyard area.

"The elevation change is about 18 inches from the back door to the patio," Burton says. "We controlled the drainage with a PVC drainage system and catch basins. Just behind the fireplace, we planted a few larger junipers not only to provide screening but also help absorb some of the water."



Photo: Peter Kowler/Southview Design

It's that view looking across the courtyard at the fireplace Burton describes as his favorite.

"There's something about the gas lamp on top of the chimney and the extra height," he says. "I love that space; it's just beautiful."

Naturally, Burton is proud of the awards the project has garnered, but he says even more significant for him is that he and the clients were on the same page.

"I'm most proud of how, when I presented my drawing, she said, 'You nailed it,'" Burton says. "She saw my vision from the very beginning. She felt confident my company would install exactly what I was selling in words and design."

And, Southview did deliver, even though access to the backyard was difficult.

"You can only do so much with a skid-loader in a small space," he says. "For this project, a lot of it was done by hand. However, I think it's the kind of challenge that makes the installers and the homeowners appreciate the end result."



Photo: Peter Kowler/Southview Design

The project has also added a new product to Burton's repertoire: gas lighting.

"This was my first time working with gas light fixtures," he says. "It was uncharted waters but after discussing them with my plumber and building inspectors, we know the installation is acceptable in every city we work in, and I'm trying to use more of them.

"It's a unique feature that really gets a lot of people's attention," he concludes.