

Builder/Architect

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Patrick Zaremba & Jeff Hennig

Environmental Artists
Pioneering the New Generation
of Landscape Design/Build

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Thirteen years ago, Jeffrey Hennig submitted a landscape design to his first client. The client was a neighbor, and Hennig, at age 15, took his first insightful step toward developing a remarkable talent and a prosperous business. The business has evolved into the exclusive landscape design and build firm Environmental Artists based in Clarkston. As president and senior designer, Hennig has assembled a team of young professionals, all of whom add in unique ways to the firm's pool of talent.

The energy, confidence and ability of youth have been harnessed by Hennig's imaginative vision. Dramatic, undulating terrain massive plantings, the suggestion of an abandoned stream, a river under a driveway-the projects generated by this team are like nothing seen before in this area.

"I'm always bored with the way things are," Hennig explains. "I like to see things evolve. I like change. When I first got into this business, it was stuffy and humdrum. Environmental Artists was created and it shook the foundation.

"That is not to say that Environmental Artists' work is different for the sake of being different. It is different because each site presents a unique personality and challenge. The firm's designers have no formula answers. They thrive on the challenge, and believe every problem deserves a new solution."

Aside from a few spectacular pieces, we take the same materials as anybody else, but we bend and shape them to the specific needs of the site. Instead of going up with a berm, we may invert the grade with a cavern. We create excitement and drama-unexpected surprises," Hennig says.

Environmental Artists' approach to the business of landscape design and construction has earned the company a very desirable reputation among Oakland County's premiere residential builders, developers and architects. Hennig consistently promotes the idea of the architect, builder and professional landscape design/build firm working together as a team from the onset of a project to create a truly spectacular housing product. The "team approach" to building, as he calls it, allows the full potential of the house and its property to be realized.

"The builders, architects and developers we agree to work with understand our 'team approach' philosophy," Hennig says. "They sense that we sincerely care about them and their

projects. They enjoy our enthusiasm."

Hennig's business savvy is extraordinary, but still, his designs showcase his strongest talents. Both Hennig and E.A.'s star designer, Patrick Zaremba, studied under Dr. Robert Schutzki in the department of Horticulture at Michigan State University.

"Jeff is one of those unique people that come along maybe once in your career as a teacher," Schutzki said. "He has an uncanny ability to translate the principles of design into completely original ideas. Pat, on the other hand, has a real thirst for knowledge. He seeks the answers to questions other designers wouldn't even think to ask."

"They both live and breathe this stuff, and they create exceptional work because of it," Schutzki says. Hennig and Zaremba admit that they love their work. They constantly strive to achieve perfect harmony between the architectural and natural lines in their designs. The sensual spark created by the juxtaposition between the strong lines of the house and the soft lines of the ground and its plantings literally integrate nature, architecture and time. "These are our guiding design principles. It is important to create a flowing transition between architecture and nature as man moves through it," Hennig believes.

Although they are never completely satisfied with their creations, if, when the project is completed, the casual observer can't tell which came first-the house or the landscape-they know they have gotten close. Clients Jack and Patty Hazen, for example, are very pleased with the results Environmental Artists achieved with the landscape design for their new home in North Oakland County.

"They did a wonderful job of making the house look as though it was carefully constructed among all this greenery-when in fact, it started out as just an empty lot with some real problems to it," Patty Hazen said.

According to Hennig, every good plan originates from a particular feeling.

"When I visit the site initially," Hennig says, "I try to capture the essence of the place itself. A good analogy is the feeling you get from a fire or the ocean. It's not something you can capture on film. It's more than visual." All of the firm's designers spend as much time in the field as they do at the drawing table.

"We're not just office designers," Zaremba explains. While a finished drawing may seem perfect to the client, the design develops a personality and really begins to take on a life of its own during construction.

"Only half the design is done on paper, the other half is done out there-you get down and dirty in the field," Zaremba explains. When you are building the landscape and it starts coming together, it's like the middle of a great party. It's exhilarating."

For Hennig and company, blazing trails as the pioneers of new generation landscape design/build seems completely natural.

"I have very definite ideas about everything I design and that crosses over into how we do business as well. Unless someone proves me wrong, I go with what I know," he maintains.

MSU's Dr. Schutzki believes that Hennig's knowledge is instinctive and his talent innate.

"I like to keep up on what Jeff is doing," Schutzki says. "He's definitely ahead of his time."