

FATHER Nature

WITH A LOVE FOR NATURE AND
A COMMITMENT TO THE
ENVIRONMENT, ONE LANDSCAPE
DESIGNER USES UNIQUE
APPROACHES TO TRANSFORM
THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST INTO
A HEALTHY, BALANCED HABITAT.

by JENNIFER HOOKS

Hendrikus Schraven plays with slides, jumps in fire pits and brews tea. He imagines, he creates, he heals. And while some people may find this typical Schraven day to be a lot of work, the landscape designer from Holland finds it's not work at all. It's just another opportunity to bring nature to its fullest potential.

For more than 20 years, Schraven has been playing in the Pacific Northwest — and loving every minute of it. His company, Hendrikus Schraven Landscape Construction & Design Inc. in Issaquah, WA, has been taking new approaches to the way landscapes are created since its founding in 1974, and it continues to evolve. From design to construction, installation to maintenance, the company treats each project differently and is proud of its results.

Looking at the company's track record, it's easy to see that others are impressed with the work as well: More than 45 awards have been given to Schraven for his work on various projects. They include Grand Awards from the Washington Association of Landscape Professionals and Associated Landscape Contractors of America, Contractor of the Year Award from the International Erosion Control Association,



Hendrikus Schraven's respect for nature and unique design techniques have earned him much respect among the landscape-design community.



HENDRIKUS SCHRAVEN LANDSCAPE CONSTRUCTION & DESIGN INC.

Schraven's projects are intended to bring a sense of well-being to all who visit.

and the Environmental Excellence Award in Education from the Association of Washington Business.

With all of these honors flooding in, one may think Schraven's head is in the clouds. But if this devoted landscape designer is anywhere, it's right in the earth — and Schraven wouldn't have it any other way.

NATURE'S CALLING. Having a passion for what you do sets a strong foundation when building up to success. It's

Schraven's passion and respect for nature that keeps his business standing strong. "Nature never repeats itself," Schraven explains, "and that's what's so awesome about it. A leaf never lands exactly in the same place — that's a miracle." Schraven uses that miracle to transform an existing site into a beautiful, natural setting that is custom-built to his clients' lifestyles and surroundings. But there's more to creating a landscape than planting some pretty trees and laying pavers around a back yard.

To Schraven, nature isn't something to simply look at and admire. It's something a person must feel. "There's an energy [in nature]," he says. According to Schraven, this energy emits a feeling of well-being, which can be sensed when a person walks into a garden. The gardens that emit this energy are the ones Schraven finds the most beautiful. "I've looked at gardens in England, Holland and Japan," he says. "The most beautiful ones are the ones where that energy came out, and they were absolutely wonderful. That energy is everlasting — like classical music. It's timeless and it's not connected to the time we have right now."

Schraven's strong attraction to nature helps him create landscapes that blend flawlessly into the natural surroundings. He creates forestlike settings, ancient-looking walls and makes newly installed, man-made waterfalls look as if they've flowed naturally for hundreds of years. He doesn't sit and draw up a plan. He visits the site and does what he feels.

"I take what I call an intuitive approach," he says. "I think you need to feel something before you can do anything about it. I think your senses can tell you a lot, and if you trust your feelings, you're pretty accurate. What I do is pretty much look at the site, the people and the surroundings. Is it steep? Is it sloping? Is it more sunny or shady? And that determines what I come up with." From creating fire pit areas to rebuilding eroding Seattle hillsides, it seems that Schraven has done it all. (For information on one hillside, see "Slope-Sliding Away" in the Nov. 15, 1996, issue.)

"What it comes down to is you become a channel. It's like having an antenna — you tune into a channel. I tune my station to a particular frequency, and I pick up what's in that frequency. I can sense it when a plant is not doing well. You can be in tune with the land. It becomes a part of you."

And while the company stresses its motto: "Like fingerprints, snowflakes and the stripes of a zebra, every project is unique," it approaches each undertaking with the same philosophy, believing that creating a landscape requires "a clear vision of the finished space, expertise in the balance of art and technology, and a strong commitment to preserving the environment." It's this commitment to the environment that ensures Schraven's creations don't just look nice, but that they bring back the balance of nature to a garden. It all starts with soil.

S.O.S. — SAVE OUR SOIL. We can lecture on the importance of recycling. We



HENDRIKUS SCHRAVEN LANDSCAPE CONSTRUCTION & DESIGN INC.

The methods incorporated by the company turn an ordinary site into a healthy, beneficial habitat.



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can stress the dangers of aero-sols on the ozone layer. But have we stopped to think about what we're doing to the soil? Schraven has.

Schraven takes to heart a quote by author John Thomas: "The Earth has skin. Her skin is called soil. ... Soil has life. The water that runs through the Earth's veins is its lymph. ... When Earth becomes stressed through man's abuse, her skin forms boils and her lymph becomes toxic. ... The plants become weak, the animals suffer and man experiences disease. ... The microbes and minerals are man's ticket to longevity — if he has the wisdom to recognize their importance in the overall scheme of things."

"That pretty much sums it up," Schraven says. "That's why I love that quote — it's what it comes down to."

Schraven doesn't believe in using chemicals. In fact, his company prides

The lush gardens, running creeks and plant combinations that grace Schraven's projects have won the designer numerous awards.

itself on using only all-natural methods to keep the earth alive. The soil used is a 100 percent organic mix containing minerals. The company uses organic fertilizers, soil amendments and sprays. It integrates organics, and conservation and recycling techniques in all of its projects in an effort to "bring life back into the soils as Mother Nature intended."

The reason is simple: Healthy soil means healthy plants, which leads to healthy animals, humans and a balanced ecosystem. "We've got it into our heads that we can do better than nature," Schraven says. "But I saw what chemicals did to the land. They have created a literal disaster area. Farm land is dying because there are no microorganisms there."

Plants need to absorb nutrients to remain healthy. Schraven says chemicals may kill pests and make a plant look greener, but they also kill valuable nutrients. "For example, [people] create these vegetables that look good, but there's nothing there inside," he says. "It's the individual-wrapped-slice-of-cheese syndrome — [plants] look nice, but there's nothing there." According to Schraven, adding chemicals only means "adding to a cycle that is 100 percent self-destructive."

Fortunately, people are becoming more aware of this issue and are working hard to change it. But getting people to listen wasn't always easy. "It was a struggle 20 years ago," Schraven recalls. "People weren't as open to it as they are today. They saw it as 'It's something hippies do.' But I kept going with it." And he's still going. Schraven and his team are constantly doing research and coming up with new ways to help bring life back into the soil.

There are little things the designer does to keep the soil active. He flies in worms from California to add to the soil as it's being installed. "They're my boys, as I like to call them," Schraven laughs. "And they're the cheapest crew I've ever had. They just go to work — no lunch breaks, no vacations — and they work overtime. They put back into the soil. They come in, the birds come in, the bees come in and the hummingbirds come in." But there are larger methods used as well. Compost tea is one of them.

Compost tea is becoming one of the more popular methods to maintaining healthy soil and plants. It helps control foliar diseases, as well as restores and enhances soil microflora. Schraven has been incorporating this tea in his installations to help add microorganisms to the soil. With the help of a new tea maker, the Micro-Brewer™, Schraven's team can enhance the soil quickly and effectively.

The Micro-Brewer™ is a unit designed to produce compost tea on an industrial scale. Introduced by Growing Solutions Inc., Eugene, OR, the Micro-Brewer's Vortex Nozzle reportedly produces compost tea with a high concentration of aerobic microorganisms and offers a cost effective way to provide microorganisms for unlimited applications. Compost tea helps reduce anaerobic growth in the soil and will continue to reproduce beneficial microorganisms on the site. Schraven thinks it's great. "[The Micro-Brewer™] is definitely going to be big time," he says. "If we all have any sense whatsoever, we will all be using this. This is our ticket to life."

Schraven uses the spray equipment to apply the tea mixture to the ground and plants, but is currently testing a method of adding the compost to the soil itself while it's being installed. "I'm working on the process of blowing topsoil," Schraven says. "It works like a charm. I can apply a large amount of soil to hillsides in an incredibly short amount of time." Microactivity begins immediately after application.

"Sometimes a person needs to ask 'What am I doing? Am I selling my soul and polluting my environment?' If we're really that concerned about our children — if we're really that concerned about our environment — we'll wake up. In a perfect world, we should put a stop to it now." It is Schraven's hope that all chemical use will be completely banned some day, and that natural methods will be fully incorporated. Until then, he can only continue his mission and hope that the rest of the industry will follow.

BECOMING WELL-GROUNDED. Replenishing the soil with life is the start of a healthy landscape. But Schraven won't rest until each project is completely safe and sound. With his new approaches to landslide and erosion control, clients don't need to worry about their newly designed landscapes slipping away.

The Schraven team addresses several issues when providing erosion control: the temporary life-span of wood retaining structures, unattractive structural retaining systems, difficult planting situations in impervious soil and the imbalance in the ecosystem. Its solution is to rebuild the area using a variety of structuring methods, including a combination of structural steel and shotcrete applications. The shotcrete is formed with the use of wire mesh and is then hand-carved and painted to resemble basalt or granite rock. Engineers give

Schraven their stamps of approval before installation continues.

The crew also installs carefully planned drainage systems and uses its special blend of topsoil, which is blown onto the hillside using pump equipment at a rate of 40 to 60 cubic yards per day. This topsoil retains enough moisture to feed the plants, yet it's permeable enough to let water through naturally so it won't satu-

rate the hillside, become too heavy and endanger the slope.

The result is a stunning, stable landscape that feeds the earth and brings a sense of well-being to all who visit. Not only have Schraven's installations provided hope that steep sites won't slide away, his technique and artistry has brought him one of his greatest honors — the International Erosion Control Associ-



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Schraven creates forestlike settings and makes newly installed, man-made water features look like they've been flowing naturally for hundreds of years.

ation's 1998 Contractor of the Year Award for his excellence in the execution and application of effective erosion- and sediment-control practices.

As confident as Schraven is in his abilities to create a sound landscape, he was amazed when he was presented with this distinguished honor. "It was great," he recalls. "I was really surprised. I thought, 'It's a worldwide organization and I'm just a small guy. I don't stand a chance.'" Just as exciting as the award itself was the opportunity to speak with other professionals on his techniques of erosion control. "I got some really good responses from people from China, Germany, England and the United States," Schraven recalls. "There were a lot of engineers from the US who were really interested."

With Schraven taking care of his creations, clients can be confident that their landscapes will emit energy for years to come. "I didn't start off with 'Okay, now I'm going to start a maintenance division,'" Schraven laughs. "But you put part of your soul into [your landscape designs], and I didn't want to see [mine] go to hell." To ensure his creations maintain their health and beauty, Schraven maintains his landscapes.

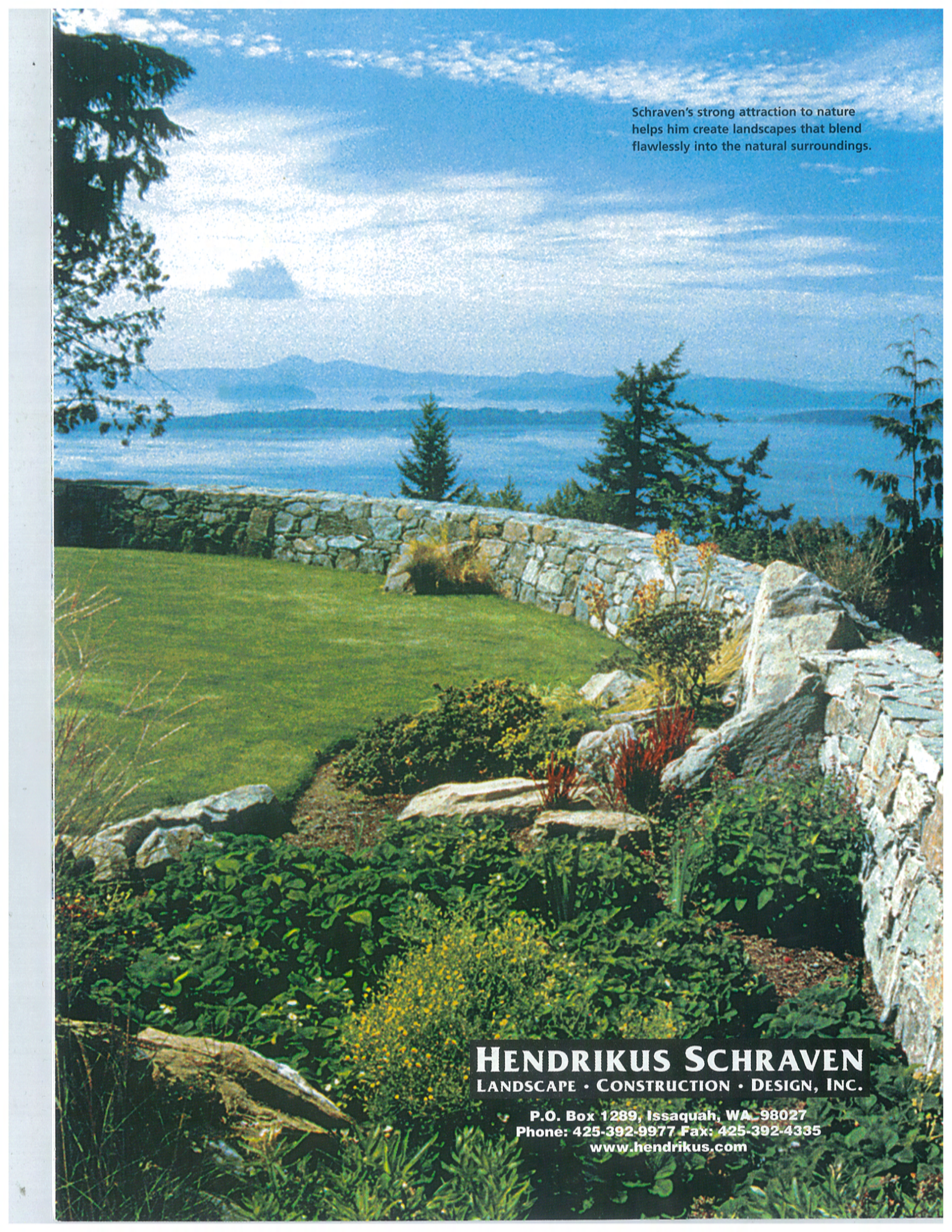
With all of these amazing projects, it seems Schraven has seen it all. But the landscape designer admits he's still learning himself, and he embraces each new challenge.

"A challenge is never a problem," he says. "A challenge is an opportunity. The bigger the challenge, the better, because it drains out of me a solution. If it's that difficult, I get energized because it draws energy for me. The more challenging and difficult it is, the more opportunity to do something amazing."

Hendrikus Schraven treasures the Earth. He lives and respects nature every day, and looks forward to each project with great enthusiasm. "We all make a fingerprint on the Earth," he explains. "If you're going to make one, it might as well be a positive one, and the most positive way is to blend it with nature."

Jennifer Hooks is an associate editor of AMERICAN NURSERYMAN.

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