

# Knowledge Is Power

The more you know  
— *about your landscaper and your landscape* —  
the better off you'll be

BY MARIROSE KRALL

A LARGE-SCALE LANDSCAPING PROJECT CAN BE DAUNTING. As homes grow more complex, so too does the land surrounding them. Plants, patios, pools — these elements can make or break the look of a residence, says Tony Berrardo, president of Cross River Design Inc., a landscape design company in Annandale. “I’ve seen fantastic architecture messed up by bad landscaping, and I’ve seen the opposite.”

The outdoor environment can set the tone of a residence, making the first impression on guests. That’s why the creation of that environment needs to be handled with care. As Berrardo notes, “Landscaping is a big investment. But if it’s done right, it’s a lifetime investment.”

## Choose Wisely

At the outset, it’s important to choose a landscape contractor carefully. Outdoor projects can be lengthy ventures, says Michael Todé, a certified land technician and president of Todé, the Artistry of Landscape, in Midland Park. “You have to choose someone you’re comfortable with,” he says. Because “most of our projects are not [completed] in one day, pick someone you like working with.”

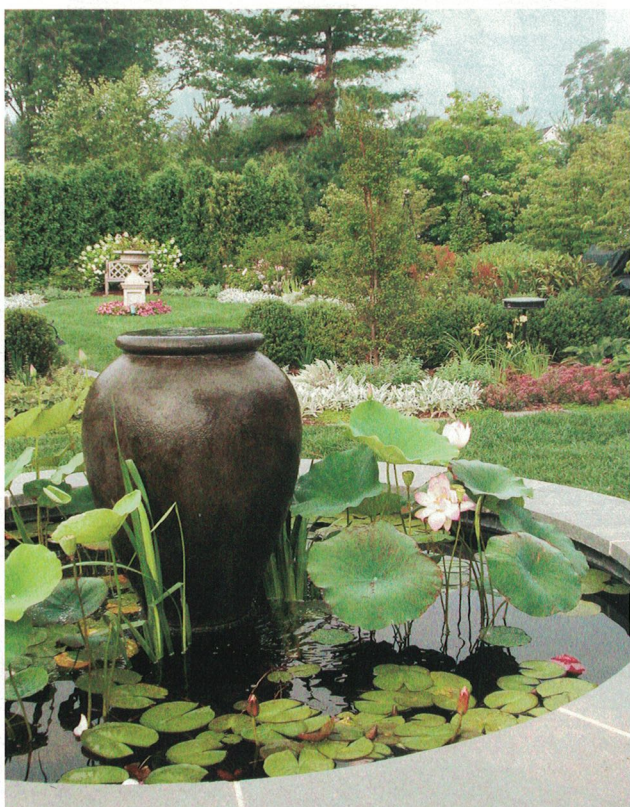
In addition to compatibility, you should look for expertise. Outdoor projects have an extraordinary number of variables, so it’s a good idea to select a landscape designer who’s accustomed to juggling the myriad issues involved. That kind of proficiency can often be found at a design/build company. These full-service companies handle all aspects of a project from conception through implementation, completion, and often maintenance. As such, they can ensure a smooth progression from paper to planting and beyond.

Bill Butler, president Landscape Dynamix in Mahwah, believes design/build companies can offer homeowners the most focused, efficient projects. A single company can “sit down with a client, determine what goal [the client] is trying to achieve, and implement it a lot better than three different [companies].” A full-service company, he says, will “get it right the first time.”

## plan properly

A pool can have a huge impact on a property, so proper positioning should be planned early in the design process. Sufficiently removed from the house and enclosed by a white-stained cedar picket fence, this Monmouth County pool complex by Cross River Design offers an oasis. Light gray plaster gives the pool a deeper blue shade that goes well with the bluestone pool deck. The elevated spa is a good place to relax after an invigorating swim, while the pergola provides a comfortable space in which to entertain. Two large concrete urns reinforce the architectural symmetry of the space (visible in lower right photo). Nearby, a raised pond is home to water lilies (lower left photo), while a sitting garden in the distance offers an restful spot to enjoy nature. Suzette Donleavy of Well-Designed Interiors, who worked on the project, says interior designers, landscape designers, and architects should use a team approach to achieve a seamless appearance of indoor and outdoor spaces.





PHOTOS COURTESY OF CROSS RIVER DESIGN INC.







**BEFORE**



**BEFORE**

## tame the land

Severe slopes posed a landscaping challenge at this stone farmhouse in Somerset County. The solution? Cross River Design designed walls composed of a granite blend to tame the incline. Large Silverbell trees flank the terraces and stairways to provide color, interest, and intimacy to the space. A mass of hydrangea near the staircase adds color in summer and greenery throughout the season. A new stone barn creates the backdrop for the pool on the property (below). The pool house (at left in photo) is constructed of matching materials and houses a changing room, bathroom, and storage. Behind the pool house, newly planted mature apple trees create the sense of an established farm. Retaining walls alongside the pool, planted with boxwoods and English ivy, take up some of the severe grade.



**AFTER**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CROSS RIVER DESIGN INC.





AFTER

## blend in

Set on a 20-acre farm in Morris County, this pool environment blends easily with the natural surroundings. Cross River Design brought in several large red oaks to create scale and provide shade and interest to the lawn within the fenced complex. Native trees lend a sense of permanence and age to the newly developed pool area. Spruces were added to assist in screening. Daylilies in the foreground provide a refreshing touch of color.



BEFORE

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CROSS RIVER DESIGN INC.

Todé adds that full-service companies can provide a host of benefits, including consistency and organization. And at the project's completion, every part of it will look like it flows together "instead of looking like 16 people worked on it," he says.

To get a feel for a landscaping company's vision, ask to see examples of its work. Butler urges homeowners to "look for a history of accomplishments, either a referral from a friend or a neighbor's house ... You don't want to choose someone out of the blue." Todé encourages poten-

tial customers to contact current or past clients, and he often takes them on a tour of completed projects.

## Spend Sensibly

Expertise has a price tag, of course. And though design/build companies may charge more up front, the extra cost can be worth it in the long run. The well-rounded know-how they bring to the table can translate into higher-quality service at each stage of a project.

Butler believes it's especially important to invest in pre-





PHOTO COURTESY OF LANDSCAPE DYNAMIX

## establish interesting lines

A retaining wall constructed of Pennsylvania colonial stone mimics the contours of the pool at this Mahwah home. The area, created by Landscape Dynamix, includes carpet roses and daylilies that frame the pool's perimeter with color. Tumbled pavers surround the pool and its "diving rock."

## create an entrance

Symmetrical urn-filled urns offer a friendly welcome to the pool area designed by Landscape Dynamix at this property in Franklin Lakes (right top). The steps are made of Tennessee gray stone. An imposing piece of garden statuary (right bottom) stands guard next to a driveway of tumbled mega pavers. The piers are made of granite produced by a quarry in Connecticut. Astilbe, under the pear trees at the left, and carpet roses on the right bring a touch of color to the manicured grounds.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LANDSCAPE DYNAMIX





liminary design services, but he sometimes meets with resistance from clients. "A lot of people don't want to pay a design fee," he says. "The extra dollars make the project worthwhile — the design is the most important thing in landscaping." In fact, the design plan may be the most vital place to allocate your money because it lays the groundwork for a successful project. "If [you're] going to spend \$30,000 and up, it's in your best interest to spend \$2,000 on the design fee," he says.

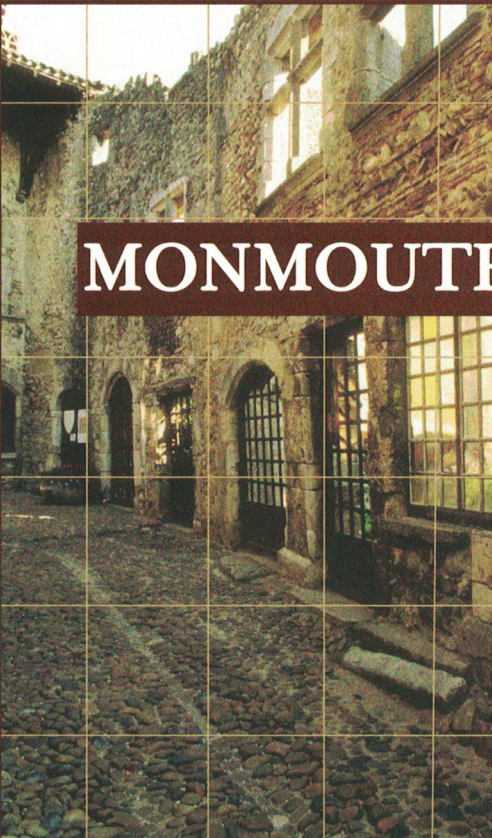
*The design plan may be  
the most vital place  
to allocate your money  
because it lays  
the groundwork for a  
successful project.*

### Gather Information

To give your project the greatest chance for success, learn everything there is to know about the property, perhaps even before you buy it. Homebuyers often have a starry-eyed vision of what can be accomplished on a piece of land; a knowledgeable landscaper can paint a more practical picture.

Howard Roberts, vice president of Cross River Design Inc., describes a client who hoped to install an in-ground pool on a newly purchased wooded lot. Roberts looked over the property and explained exactly what the homeowner was facing: tree removal, tree replacement (to comply with a local ordinance), rock blasting, and stairwell construction on a steep grade. Roberts estimated the completed project would cost \$350,000, to which the client replied, "If I had known that, I would never have bought this place."

Clearly, there's a lesson to be learned.



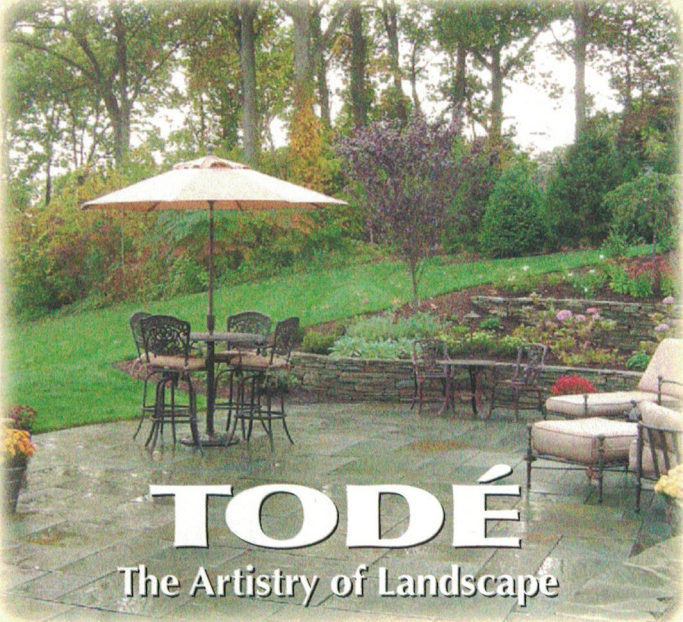
ARTISAN TILE  
IMPORTED STONE • MOSAICS  
DESIGN SERVICE

## MONMOUTH St. TILE

*See Our exclusive  
line of old world  
reclaimed stone  
saved from some  
of Europe's  
oldest estates*

44 Monmouth Street • Red Bank  
732-933-1760

2175 Hwy 35 • Sea Girt  
732-974-0048



## TODÉ

### The Artistry of Landscape

Landscape Design and Installation • Landscape Lighting  
Garden Enhancement & Project Management • Grading & Drainage  
Driveways & Entrances • Walkways & Patios (stone, paver, brick)  
Pools, Spas, Ponds & Waterfalls  
Custom Stonework & Masonry (outdoor kitchens, stanchions, planters)

**220 Bank Street, Midland Park, NJ 07432**  
**201.652.1524**

Call today for more information or visit our website: [www.todelandscape.com](http://www.todelandscape.com)  
LIC #13VH00609100 • CERTIFIED LANDSCAPE TECHNICIAN: Michael Todé • CERTIFIED TREE EXPERT: Kevin Todé, LIC #513





PHOTOS COURTESY OF CROSS RIVER DESIGN INC.



BEFORE

## correct previous problems

Improper grading and drainage caused damage to this sunken court garden in Morris County. The front entrance courtyard was redesigned to rectify those issues. Cross River Design then used boxwood hedges to structure the new garden room and screen it from the motor court. Artfully placed sedum, lady's mantle, daylilies, serviceberry, and inkberry add texture and color. Soft lighting hidden within the plantings extends the life of this room into evening.

## define & screen

At this home in Oradell, landscaping and hardscaping by Todé, The Artistry of Landscape, define distinct portions of the property. A seating area on a paver patio adjoins the raised pool deck. The wall and stairs are constructed of bluestone. Japanese maple, dogwood, azaleas, lamb's ear, and other perennials soften the spaces between the two levels.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TODÉ, THE ARTISTRY OF LANDSCAPE



It's best to know what you're getting into at the earliest possible stage. A good landscape designer will study a property and provide as much information as possible before a project begins, including potential problems. That way, surprises can be kept to a minimum, and you'll be able to tailor your requirements and wishes to the realities of a specific site.

To assist the landscaper in evaluating the property, it's a good idea to provide a survey of the land. That's easier said than done because often a survey from your municipality, the builder, or a previous owner is not accurate. It may be missing vital pieces of information, such as an inventory of plants and hardscaping elements. You may need to hire a surveyor — another upfront cost that can be worth the money.

Once you have an accurate survey, the landscaper can conduct a site evaluation. He or she may run tests to determine the soil's acidity or alkalinity and take note of plants that can be relocated and hardscaping elements that can be reused. This kind of individual evaluation is vital because each parcel of land is unique. "Your property is different from property in other parts of the state," Roberts says. "It's different from property in other parts of your town. It's different from your next door neighbor's property."

### Develop a Team

As your project gets under way, you may wish to assemble a design team, bringing in expertise from professionals in different areas. If you start with a raw piece of property, you might want to bring the architect on board with the landscape designer, the interior designer, and the engineer. Even if you're landscaping around an existing home, integrating disciplines can result in a more cohesive design.

Greg Porraro, president of PAI Architects in North Branch, an architectural



## CHESTER TILE & MARBLE INC.



- Sales
- Design
- Custom Installation

- Porcelains & Outdoor Tile
- Natural Stone
- Specialty Tiles and Backsplashes
- Electric Floor Warming Systems
- Custom Shower Doors
- Replacement Countertops

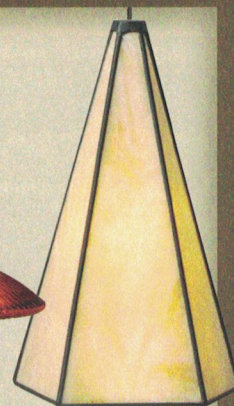
453 Main Street  
Chester, NJ 07930  
908.879.8335 • 973.537.1963



MINI PULLMAN



DEARBORN



PARKER

WILMETTE LIGHTING  
COMPANY

Come see the latest from Wilmette Lighting Company at:

**LightingbyGregory**

201.785.1985 Upper Saddle River  
274 Route 17 North  
Upper Saddle River, NJ 07458

lightingbygregory.com

©2007 The "Wilmette Lighting Company" graphic is a registered trademark of Wilmette Lighting Company. Wilmette Lighting Company reserves the right to change specifications for product improvement without notification. Holophane and the Holophane logo are trademarks of Holophane. Generation Brands and the Generation Brands logo are trademarks of Generation Brands.

Generation Brands™

WILMETTELIGHTING.COM



## fashion plates



We dress windows from head to toe

From in-home consultations to installation,  
with us, you won't make a mistake



THECURTAINEXCHANGE.COM

247 East Ridgewood Ave.  
Ridgewood, NJ 07450  
(201) 612- 0999

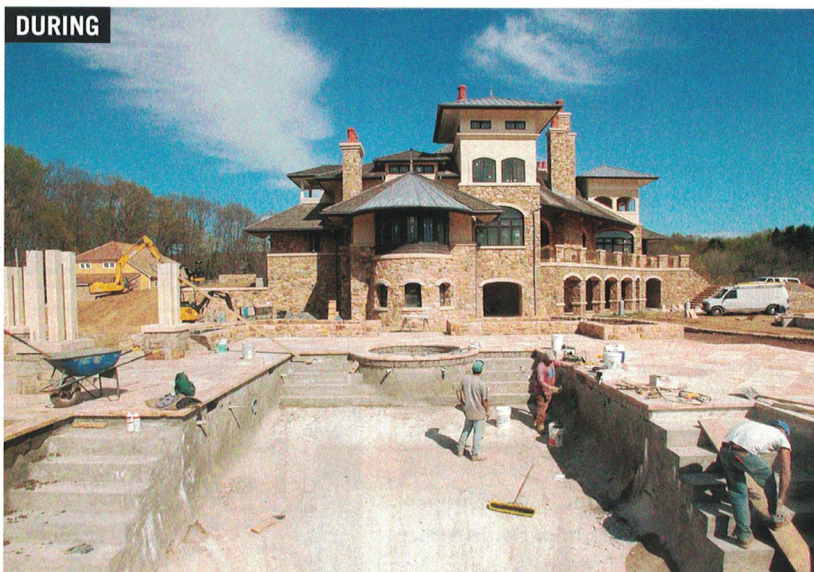


AFTER



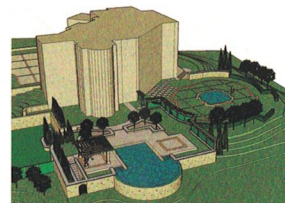
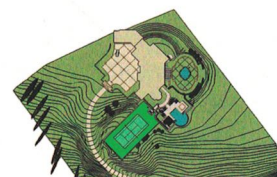
PHOTOS AND RENDERINGS COURTESY OF CROSS RIVER DESIGN INC.

DURING



## set the style

The combined efforts of the architect and landscape designer resulted in this majestic Tuscan-style residence in Somerset County. The pool area features a deck of travertine imported from a quarry in Turkey. The travertine remains cool and comfortable even under intense summer sun, say sources at Cross River Design. The pavilion (at left in photo) mimics elements of the residence. Fencing was chosen carefully so as not to obstruct views. Cross River Design's virtual renderings of the home (right) offered clients, architects, and landscape designers a realistic and cost-effective view of concepts and spatial relationships at the site.






design/build company, believes architectural design and landscape design go hand-in-hand and should be planned simultaneously. "The landscape design and the architectural design develop together because they affect each other," he says. "There are certain criteria for placing a house, such as the best views. You also want to understand the contours of the land ... It's much easier to incorporate landscape design and planting design as you're going through it ... The landscaper might see something the architect doesn't see. It's important that they work together to have a unified conclusion."


*As your project gets under way, you may wish to assemble a design team, bringing in expertise from professionals in different areas.*

Matt Porraro, Greg's brother and owner of PAI Architects, works with landscapers in about 70% of his projects. He agrees a joint effort among professionals can enhance every part of the project. "Your rooms don't end with the walls of the house," he says. "You have to include your property as part of the architectural space that differs in appearance from the space you've created with walls and rooms, windows, and doors. If you don't include that, you're missing out on opportunities."

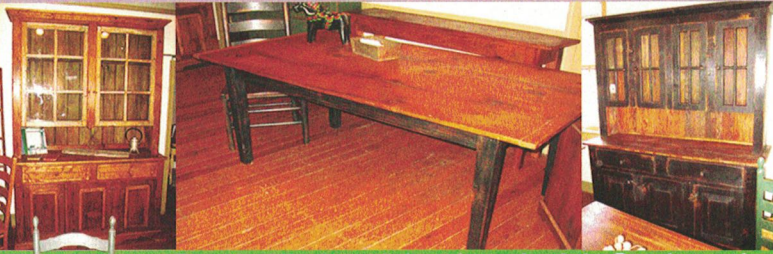
Having a team in place from the beginning also can save money overall, Todé says, noting he works as part of a design team about 20 percent of the time. By coordinating efforts, each team member is more aware of the scope and requirements of the entire project, so timing and budgeting decisions can be made accordingly. After digging the foundation for an addition



# Gypsy Farmhouse

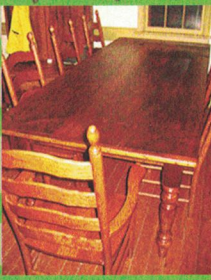



...the totally cool and unusual store



Rustic Kitchen Islands • Amish Cupboards  
 Rustic Farm Tables • Barnwood Furniture  
 Decorative Accessories • Amish Farm Items  
 Architectural Salvage • Barn Beam Mantles

Open 7 Days 10:30am-6:00pm

106 Drompton Ave. (Rt.23), Cedar Grove, NJ  
**973-239-9886**

## Our Only Limitation is Your Imagination!









**973-835-POOLS**  
[www.creativemasterpools.com](http://www.creativemasterpools.com)



# ORNATE™

## *Architectural Mouldings*

Photo: Lake Terrace, NJ  
Mouldings by: Ornate

Nothing defines the character of a room more than mouldings and no moulding can define your creative expression more than Ornate can.

Let us show you how to transform your space from ordinary to extraordinary - for much less than you think.

- Crown Moulding
- Panel Moulding
- Door Surroundings
- Wall Niches
- Wainscotting
- Casing
- Chair Rail
- Base
- Medallions
- Corbels

Wholesale Prices

**866.464.5596**

Showroom now open.

14 South Clifton Ave. Lakewood, NJ

[ornatemoulding.com](http://ornatemoulding.com)

to a home, for example, a general contractor working alone might dispose of the soil that's been removed, Todé says. But by consulting with the landscape designer, the general contractor would know the dirt could be used to smooth the grade. Todé recalls homeowners who paid to have soil removed and then again to purchase new soil.

An interior designer can play an important role on the landscape design team also. An interior designer for the exterior? Absolutely, says Suzette Donleavy, owner of Well-Designed Interiors in Shrewsbury. "It's important that we collaborate on these large projects," she says. "We complement the architecture as well as the integrity of the interior design. We carry that to the outdoor rooms and work with the landscape architect to tie all three things together: the architecture, the interior design, and the landscape design."

The professional alliance allows Donleavy to make more informed choices. "We work with the landscape architect in tandem to create outside rooms," she says. "When I'm selecting fabrics, I want to know what color flowers [the landscaper] is putting in and how he's laying out the floor plans in terms of seating arrangement and entertaining." The coordinated effort helps to create a unified project and a property that flows harmoniously from indoors to outdoors.

### Start a Paper Chase

You'll also have to hone your coordination skills when it comes time to apply for municipal approvals for your landscaping project. Slogging through codes, regulations, and paperwork isn't fun, but it has to be done — and it has to be done correctly.

To lessen the frustration, assemble all the information you need, correctly and comprehensively, the first time around. The application process can take some time, so it's best to file for



a permit as soon as the project plans have been established. It's even better to file before planting season begins. "The best time to apply is the winter," Butler says, "but that rarely is the case. Very few people plan like that." Depending on the volume of requests, you can wait weeks or even months for approvals.

Shifting regulations can complicate matters. "Ordinances change, sometimes monthly," Roberts says. "We're sometimes in midstream of design and a municipal ordinance changes. We have to scrap the design and start over." Even when the rules don't change, the reading of those rules can. "There's human nature involved," Roberts says. "How does the official or the zoning officer interpret [an ordinance]?"

In addition, human nature and Mother Nature are unpredictable. Both require delicate handling of sometimes-thorny situations. But with the right preparation and the right team, you can keep hassles to a minimum and be on your way to an exciting landscape design project. **DNV**

The second article in this two-part series discusses working with design professionals to create the landscape of your dreams. It will appear in the April/ May issue.

*Marirose Krall is a freelance writer based in Middletown.*

**SOURCES** **Plan Properly:** landscape design/build, Cross River Design Inc. in Annandale; pool house, designed by architect Cathy Zuckerman in Red Bank and constructed by Neighbor & Groves in Wall Township; interior designer, Suzette Donleavy of Well-Designed Interiors in Shrewsbury; extruded cast aluminum furniture under the pergola, Windam in Plains, Georgia; wicker furniture in front of the pool house, Whitecraft in Dania Beach, Florida. **Tame the Land:** landscape design, Suglinda Anderson; landscaping, Cross River Design Inc.; architect, Cyril Beveridge of Beveridge Architects in Clinton;

builder, Mike Schire in Clinton. **Blend In:** pool house design and construction, Porraro Associates in North Branch; landscape design/build and pool house siting, Cross River Design Inc. **Establish Interesting Lines:** landscape design, Landscape Dynamix in Mahwah; retaining wall, Braen Stone Industries Inc. in Haledon. **Create an Entrance:** landscape design, Landscape Dynamix; stones for driveway and piers, Braen Stone Industries Inc. **Correct Previous Problems:**

landscape design/build and obelisk, designed and constructed by Cross River Design Inc. **Define & Screen:** landscape design, Todé, the Artistry of Landscape, in Midland Park; Rinox pavers, Riverside Nursery in Oakland; bluestone, Pasvalco in Closter. **Set the Style:** architecture, PAI Architects in North Branch; construction, Porraro Associates; computer renderings, pool complex construction, landscape design/build, Cross River Design Inc.



**Come See Our New Custom Designs**

**WOVEN  
FLOORS.com**

1 east main street • mendham • new jersey • 07945 • 973.543.0012

73 route 34 south • colts neck • new jersey • 07722 • 732.625.1900