



# Anatomy of a Green Landscape

The landscape architect for the VISION House Aspen offers sustainable design pointers.

For David Cristiani, it's all about the water: "Colorado is the only state where you can't store water on-site, so I use native vegetation and landscape with the idea that if you turned the water off, it's not going to fall apart."

That philosophy has shaped his plan for the grounds of the 2009 VISION House in Aspen, Colo.

"The first thing I do when designing is look at the natural eco-region, the topography, climate, and the species," he explains. "I am designing the landforms and hardscapes and integrating them into a manmade version of what is in nature. It's not exactly like nature but the same patterns would be found."

The VISION house, which is in the Roaring Fork Valley, is being built on ranch land that was overgrazed. Cristiani, who is the principal of Albuquerque, N.M.-based Quercus, envisions restoring the grassland setting while creating unique beautiful spaces that interact with the house.

The plan above shows some of the drought-tolerant and indigenous plants chosen for the VISION House Aspen. The elevations show how each side of the house—not just the front—gets the landscaper's attention.

The land plan on page 16 details some of the choices Cristiani made, which you may want to consider for your projects. Although water isn't as scarce in every part of the country as it is in Colorado, conserving it is the environmentally sound thing to do.

# Green Scene

Where housing and the environment connect

» Turfgrass is kept to a minimum to conserve water. In its place are ground cover and trees, which offer more lushness and less mowing. Cristiani salvaged the site topsoil to provide the optimum environment for new plants.

» Controlling runoff is aided by the use of permeable pavers, and grading forms and berms, which help enclose spaces and lower areas that capture runoff water like a streambed.

» The irrigation system controller is an automatic digital multiprogrammable unit that optimizes water use seasonally and diurnally for best plant health and compliance to local regulations.

» Cristiani includes native mountain grasses and wildflowers in swales, giving a nod to the past, when tall swaying grasses dominated the natural landscape.

» One-size-fits-all doesn't work on most sites. In this plan, areas near the house on higher land use upland plants, and those along stream and ponds (shown) have riparian plantings.

» Plants don't need shaping/shearing, which offers low maintenance for the owner and a natural look to the landscape.

» In the entire planting and seeding areas, Cristiani spec'd an organically based product that includes beneficial mycorrhizal fungi and soil inoculant, which benefits the soil for plant health and to conserve water.

