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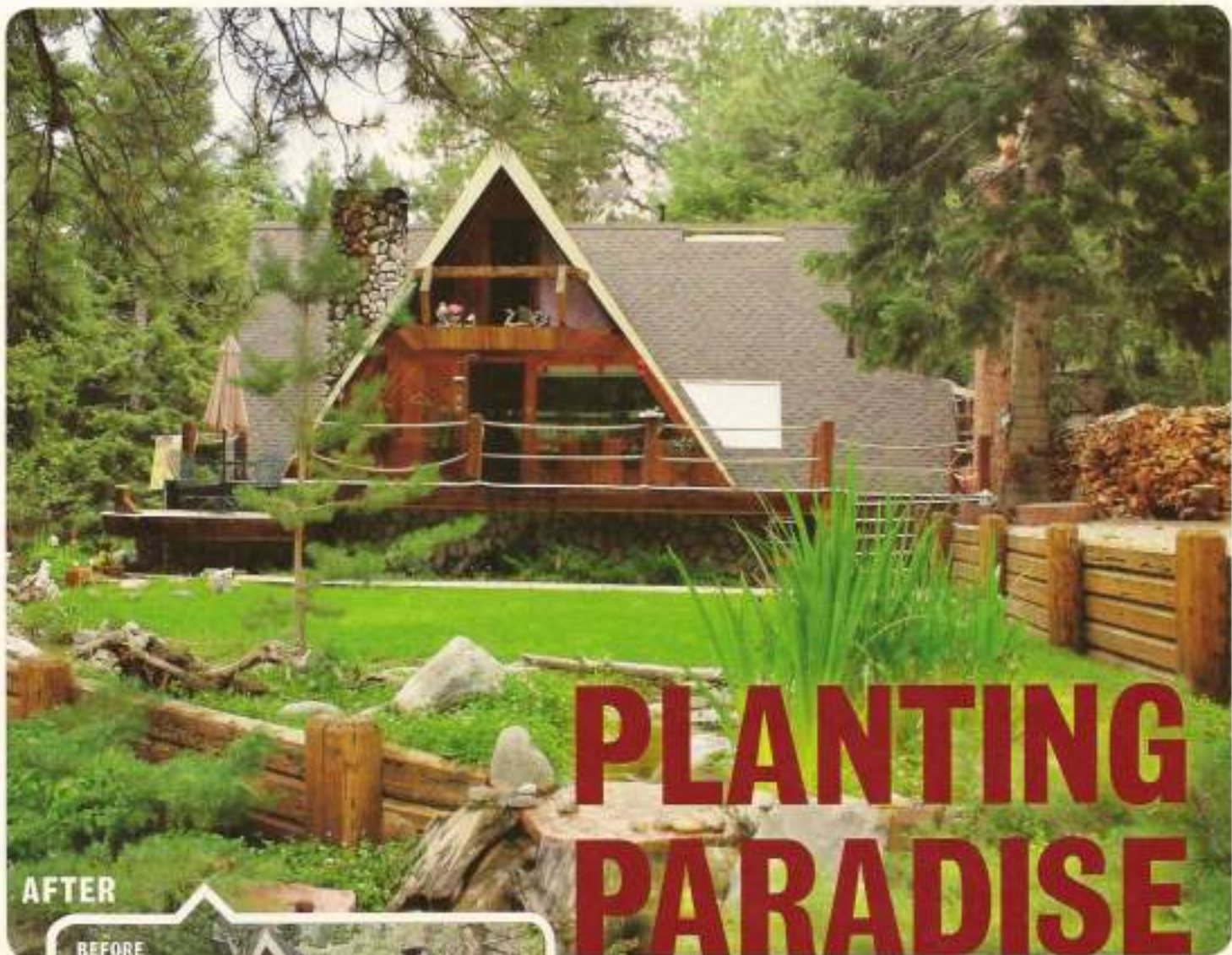
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PLANTING PARADISE

by Lucie B. Amundsen

FROM VEGAS TO EDEN

AFTER

BEFORE



During the 20 years the Tomashowskis have owned their Nevada mountain retreat, they've come to love their outdoor spaces best.

A peaceful mountain retreat might not be your image of Las Vegas, but with Nevada's Spring Mountains less than half an hour from the bright lights of The Strip, it may just be the area's biggest prize. At least, that's what the Tomashowskis think.

In the shadow of this snow-capped mountain range ringed by desert, Garry and Angie Tomashowski have created their own little Eden. Near Mount Charleston, peaking at nearly 12,000 feet, the couple planted their first garden at their retreat – in grand style.

The Tomashowskis bought their cedar A-frame place 20 years ago with the idea it would be their primary residence. "We had been married 10 years and couldn't have a family, so my wife suggested we change up our lifestyle and buy a mountain house," says Garry.

Perhaps it was the crisp mountain air, but their family now includes three children. So they decided to add a home in the city.

photos courtesy the Tomashowskis

Three waterfalls, a pond and 2,000 feet of slate walkways and patios are just a few of the landscaping features that define "Tranquility Base 1," the Tomashowskis' name for their outdoor-focused mountain retreat.



"Once our kids graduated from the little two-room school house in Mt. Charleston, we needed to be nearer the high school and all their activities," admits Garry.

But the family dashes up the 7,500 feet to their mountain retreat – named Tranquility Base 1 – every chance they get, and not just Friday nights. "When your cabin is 25 minutes away, you don't have to wait for the weekend," says Garry. "It's like a little bit of retirement everyday."

However, for many years Tranquility Base 1 seemed anything but tranquil – given the extensive projects underway. "We did so much. We even opened up the whole top floor to make a cathedral ceiling," said Garry who then reclaimed every scrap of excess cedar. He reworked that old cedar flooring into everything from French doors to planters.

TAKING IT OUTSIDE

When the Tomashowskis finally felt the cabin's interior was complete, they set their sights outdoors. They walked the property and found areas that inspired them. Some were spots they could envision family and friends gathering, and other areas were set aside for quiet contemplation. "We took the general shape of a space, found a view or a pine to be

the focal point and went from there," says Garry.

Once the couple had an idea of their plan, it was time to link the pieces together. Nearly 2,000 feet of slate was laid to create the extensive walkways and patios that would connect the different gardens to create a whole landscape. But with some pieces of stone weighing in at 300 pounds, Garry needed help.

"I rented a mini-backhoe, which honestly was fun," he admits, but it was still a daunting task to lift and place the delicate slate slabs. Although he did hire some labor to help, Garry wanted hands-on involvement. "Placing stone is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle, and I wanted the best fit possible."

WHIMSICAL SHAPES

With the project's foundation now defined by the stonework, it was time to select the plantings. And true to the Tomashowskis' style, it was a large-scale operation. The couple rented two moving trucks and drove 200 miles to Cedar City, Utah. The draw was Big Trees Nursery, a business that specializes in hardy plants perfect for the mountain climate.

In addition to trees and perennials, the Tomashowskis also picked up an education. The nursery owner, Brad Williams, taught them everything from how deep to dig the holes to how to maintain mature plantings. "I took lots of notes, because when it comes to plants, he's the man," says Garry. ■





The couple returned home with eight different species of pines, numerous mid-sized shrubs and a bounty of flowing plants to create what Garry calls “whimsical shapes” within the gardens.

WATER WORKS

The couple wanted to add the magical sounds and smells of water to both their meditative and barbecue

areas. They decided they needed a waterfall – actually three waterfalls that flow into a night-lit pond.

Water now runs under the garden’s spectacular 60-foot cable suspension bridge offering an unsurpassed view of the landscape. “Because of the driftwood we’ve collected off the mountain and added to the beds, they feel organic,” says Garry. Lush plants, which were selected for

This deer enjoys the Tomashowskis’ cabin grounds too and lives in stark contrast to the Vegas strip less than a half hour away.

their tolerance for flowing water, thrive at the stream’s edge.

BASKING IN SUCCESS

Now the couple enjoys after-work walks through the garden, weeding and trimming as they go. “We were never what you’d call green thumbs, but now we find we just get lost in the work of the garden,” says Garry, who regularly pulls out bushels of trimmings.

The Tomashowskis estimate it would have cost the family a quarter of a million dollars to hire professionals for their dream landscape. But they’ll tell you they wouldn’t trade all their hard-won experience. It feeds their cozy winter daydreams of the next cabin project. ~

Lucie Amundsen is a writer and modest gardener who found inspiration in the Tomashowskis’ story.