

# Landscaping investment can pay off when it's selling time

BY MIKE STUHLREYER  
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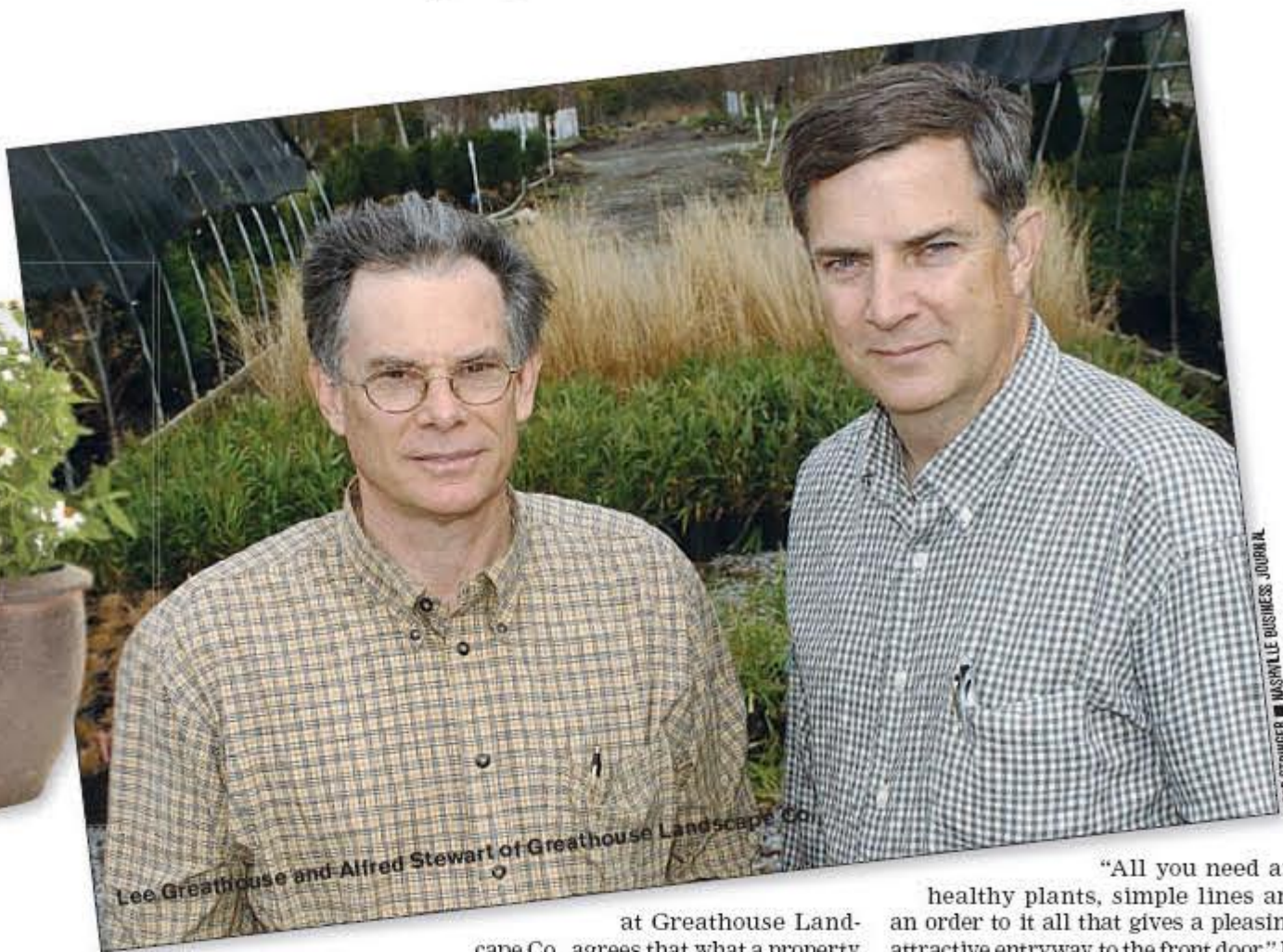
If location, location and location are the three most important qualities for a residential property then the fourth is likely curb appeal.

In real estate, much like life, there is only one chance to make a good first impression and the condition of a home's landscaping can inflate or damage that impression.

"Landscaping can be very important in making somebody feel like the house has been well-maintained and cared for," says Christie Wilson, managing broker and partner of the Wilson Group Real Estate Services and 2006 President of the Greater Nashville Association of Realtors.

"There is nothing more unattractive than walking up a sidewalk to a front porch and seeing dead flowers, dead or overgrown bushes or a bunch of weeds," Wilson says. "You get into the psychology of the buyer, and they start thinking 'Is this house not clean? Have they not maintained it?'"

One of Wilson's top priorities is educating her sellers on the importance of that first impression by making sure the landscaping looks good, noting



Lee Greathouse and Alfred Stewart of Greathouse Landscape Co.

"It doesn't have to be expensive or over-the-top. It just needs to be tidy and being tidy doesn't cost anything."

William Crone, a landscape architect

at Greathouse Landscape Co., agrees that what a property looks like from the street is vital. Crone also agrees that achieving a welcoming look doesn't have to be an expensive, high-maintenance endeavor for the homeowner.

"All you need are healthy plants, simple lines and an order to it all that gives a pleasing, attractive entryway to the front door," he says. "It's important that the landscape have some warmth, that it encloses you and makes you feel at home."

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Greathouse, founded by Lee Greathouse and Alfred Stewart in 1981, has worked on a slate of commercial and residential projects, including Nashville Public Square and Highland Ridge and has a staff of 90 in the peak season.

To pay just due to residential curb appeal - not just for homes but whole communities - Franklin-based developer and builder Southern Land Co. makes landscaping a central component of its business model. Landscaping is a defining characteristic in all of the company's community designs and a major point of emphasis in its marketing.

Southern Land staffs 10 landscape architects, a horticulture group and a large maintenance crew. They plan,



Greathouse has grown into a \$4.5 million business.

install and maintain unique plant varieties and other landscape design elements for each community's streets, open spaces,

and perform front-yard landscaping for most homes in the communities.

In cases where an outside designer is used, a Southern Land design review board maintains control by setting minimum landscaping budgets and giving final approval. The ultimate goal is to allow for individualism while offering continuity.

"We give each home a unique landscape plan, but there have to be elements that tie each into the next one," says Daniel Woods, a Southern Land landscape architect. "We complement the individual architecture of the home and complement the overall intent of the community."

Woods says one way continuity is maintained is through a "street-tree element," such as lining streets throughout the community with a particular tree to create a corridor reminiscent of Savannah or older parts of Atlanta.

While Crone says 75 percent of his clients focus on front yard aesthetics, the Greathouse landscape architect says he thinks it behooves homeowners to spend more time thinking about the potential throughout their entire yard.

"Most of the time people are thinking of just the very simple," Crone says. "They're wanting the front of the house to look nice to the neighbors and people

**'If your house has tidy landscaping, chances are it will sell before the one five doors down.'**

Christie Wilson  
Wilson Group Real Estate Services

driving by. But they don't think about a foot-path through a wooded natural bed in the back, a water feature with a pond, outdoor lighting. There are so many possibilities."

Crone says the landscape's design needs to reflect the goals and lifestyle of the homeowners. That includes how much time they want to spend on maintenance and how they intend to use the area.

"I'm always asking: What kind of time do you want to spend in the garden?" he says. "If people want annual flowers, for example, they're going to be putting some time into it."

The design dynamics change considerably when a client's back yard doubles as a living and entertainment space.

"Afternoons in the summer can be brutal and if people get home from work and want to barbecue and their whole outdoor living space is in full sun, it's a real problem," Crone says. "Or if they entertain large groups very often, we really have to open the space up and give it some airiness."

No matter how extensive a landscape makeover is, homeowners aren't necessarily guaranteed a dollar-for-dollar return on their investment, Wilson says. She notes however that there are very real benefits.

"You're gaining time on marketing," she says. "If your house has tidy landscaping, chances are it will sell before the one five doors down with a scraggly, unkempt yard."

Mike Stuhlreyer is a Nashville-area freelance writer.



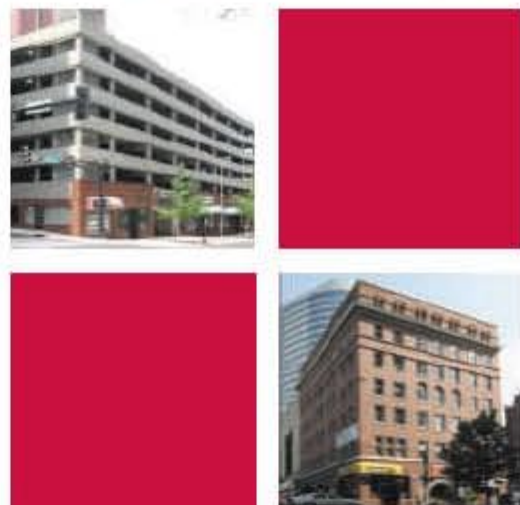
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