

THE LISTS



Best Harris
County Mortgage
Lenders

PAGE 8B

Best Houston-
Title Companies

PAGE 12B

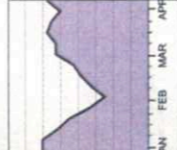
INSIDE



Pricing Up

Homebuyers go to great lengths to get the best value for their money, but the market is more active for buyers.

PAGE 4B



Market report

The housing market is showing signs of recovery, with buyers looking for value in the market. The market is more active with rest of the year.

PAGE 6B



Bathroom renovations

Homeowners are renovating bathrooms, kitchens and laundry rooms in their homes.

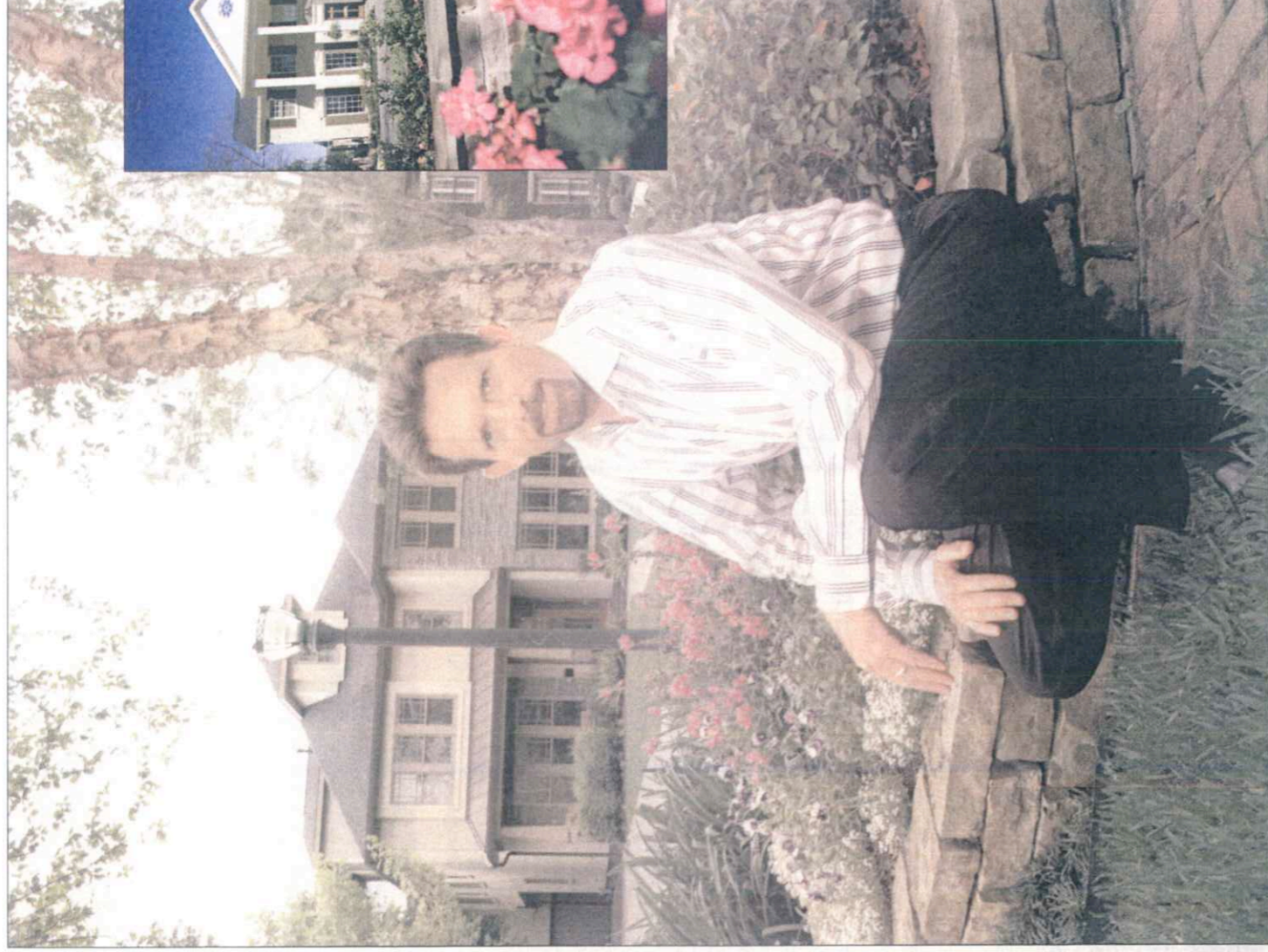
PAGE 8B



Going strong

Bob Hale, president of Hale & Associates, has been in the industry for 20 years and is one of the country's largest real estate trade groups into the future.

PAGE 10B



Mark Sitterding of Texas Nursery, a landscape architect for 27 years: "When you have a small area where the land value is high, you can really come in and make a fantastic statement."

Sellers turn to landscaping to lure buyer traffic

BY NICOLE BRADFORD
HOUSTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

After almost 30 years in landscaping, Mark Sitterding instinctively looks at a million-dollar house as a backdrop for his work.

Sitterding, a landscape architect for Texas Nursery Co., is acutely aware that people — especially potential buyers — tend to judge a book by its cover.

"I've had people whose houses had beautiful interiors tell me, 'People pull up and they pull away without ever coming in. I must be doing something wrong; if I can't even get people to stop,'" he says. "It's something people find hard to understand — seeing what the problems are, and why buyers don't stop."

"Problems" can range from a steeply slop-

ing driveway and unremarkable yard to a host of tile-looking, muddy wilderness. The average cost of landscaping is between 5 percent and 10 percent of the price paid for the house, yet professional landscaping could add three times its cost at the time of sale. In addition, Sitterding says, landscaping will bring back a 100 percent to 200 percent return on an investment.

BEYOND FLOWER BEDS

"Before, you pretty much had straight lines," Sitterding says of traditional landscaping as it was seen 20-30 years ago. "You put a four-foot flower bed in front and you're done. Now, you do see a lot more curvilinear landscaping, but it all goes back to the client."

Today — especially in Houston's mild cli-

mate — outdoor living is more popular than ever, with summer kitchens among the most desired features of upper-end homes, he says.

"Instead of just a patio with plastic folding chairs, now the exterior often is just a continuation of the interior — and it can be as finished as the interior and you can create almost the same environment," he says. "There are also high-end homes — two- or three-story — with a very small footprint. What's left are small courtyards, and that is an opportunity to create something special," he says. "When you have a small area where the land value is high, you can really come in and make a fantastic statement."

Professionals usually try to steer clients to-

SEE LANDSCAPING, PAGE 2B

ESSENTIAL REAL ESTATE

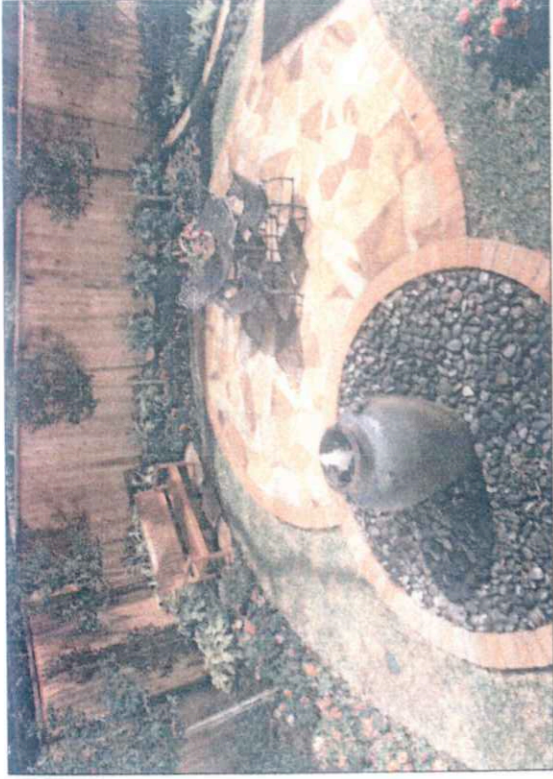


PHOTO COURTESY OF WOODALLER PHOTOGRAPHY

Although geometric-style landscapes are still popular, curves and circles are more common today.

LANDSCAPING

FROM PAGE 1B

ward exterior landscaping that complements the architectural style of the house, he says, with more formal, tasteful elements in the front and "more loose, even tropical" styles in back.

"The two are rarely in the same sight line," Sitterding says. "Especially in the back, people tend to be a little more eclectic."

CURB APPEAL

Most buyers decide if they want to see the inside of a house based on the outside, says Deanna Zugheri, real estate consultant for Keller Williams Realty Metropolitan.

"Investing time and money into the exterior of your home can increase the value by 15 percent to 20 percent," she says. "As potential buyers drive past or see the primary photo on HAR.com or other real estate Web sites, the condition of the yard and exterior will create their first impression."

Enhancing the best features of the outside is what entices buyers to schedule a showing or even visit the photo gallery to see the interior, she says.

"Today the architecture of homes is much more diverse," says Sitterding, "because you have traditional and stucco, stones and brick. Years ago, you would have a subdivision where all the homes look basically the same. Yes, there were Mediterranean-style homes,

SEE LANDSCAPING, PAGE 4B



PHOTO COURTESY OF WOODALLER PHOTOGRAPHY

A back yard, unlike more formal landscaping in the front, can be more loose, even tropical, since the front and back yards are rarely seen together. In this back yard, a mosquito system and full irrigation was added for comfort and to keep the plants and trees uniformly hydrated.

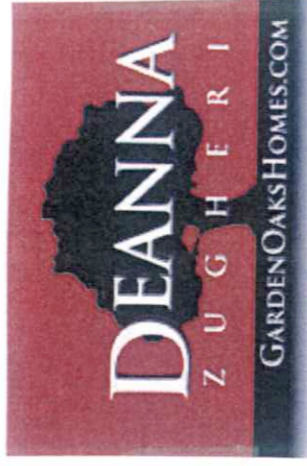


CONTACT DEANNA

P 281.658.4514

email/ deanna@gardenoakhomes.com

CONTACT DEANNA



An eye-catching exterior invites buyers to take a look at the inside.

LANDSCAPING

FROM PAGE 2B

but not in the numbers there are today. All the different styles allow landscaping to be different and unique, but it definitely will help move a house faster — that's always been true."

Landscaping is an investment, but Sitterding, who decided years ago to pursue it as a career because of the "creative outlet," doesn't like to think of it as solely such.

"It's a lot like art," he says. "You don't necessarily buy it as an investment, although some people do. Art is usually purchased for the enjoyment. At the same time, most landscaping will bring a pretty good return on the investment, and it will definitely move a house, but hopefully there is also a lot of enjoyment while you're there." ■

nhaadford@bizjournals.com • 713-395-9629