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## Lessons in Landscaping

Call it a case of the shoemaker's children always going barefoot, but after regularly investing our energies in helping our clients redesign kitchens and bathrooms (among *many* other spaces!), Janie and I have had little enthusiasm in putting our energies into our own home. But, after years of keeping our front yard on life support during the drought, we finally decided it was time to reimagine our own front yard.

While the project still has about a week to go, gone is the cracking asphalt driveway, water sucking lawn and unsightly storage shed. In their place is a new paver stone driveway (ideal for our expansive soils), new poured concrete path (more inviting entrance), modern, decorative fence (adding both depth and privacy to our front yard), drought tolerant landscaping (California!) and raised bed gardens (yes, in the front yard).

Of course, we've learned a few lessons and had a few surprises along the way:

- Landscaping isn't rocket science, but if you want to include low voltage accent lights on trees or downlights embedded in steps, these items need to be part of the design. Planting a tree just requires a shovel; designing a coherent new front yard is easier with an experienced landscape designer.
- It is not onerously hard to add drainage and electrical even under existing hardscape - if you know the tricks. The crew doing our work put in a drainage pipe under 10-12' of concrete pathway without cutting any cement.
- Speaking of drainage, we can't emphasize enough how important it is to have good drainage around your home. We added 4 drains including one tied to a downspout to better control runoff.
- It didn't occur to us that replacing the driveway would require a permit. However, after coming home to find a stop work order from the county (yikes!), we learned that we not only needed a permit for a new driveway, but also to move the mailbox (seriously?) and other items. The big surprise though was finding out that the county has a 6' easement just inside the sidewalk for "future street widening" that didn't appear in our title report – and code calls for that that section of driveway to be concrete even though pavers are much easier to remove if needed. Fortunately, Janie visited the building department and got everything resolved within a few hours including a variance to use pavers all the way to the sidewalk.
- One nice side effect of investing money in our front yard is that we've been inspired to invest the time to improve the inside of our house as well. Like many people, we have a lot of stuff that we simply no longer use or have outgrown, etc. While we have a ways to go, the decrease in clutter and extraneous "stuff" has been good for our mental health.

While completely re-landscaping our front yard has been relatively costly, the improvement in property value should more than make up for the cost – and that doesn't count the intangible improvement in enjoyment!

Best Regards,

Janie and John Barman

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