

The Bridge

PENNSTATE



Mont Alto



My Fifteen Minutes of Fame

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BEFORE



AFTER

*F*ive years at Penn State University in pursuit of a degree in Horticulture with an emphasis on Landscape Architecture gave me much more than an education. The invaluable experience I gained as a student at Penn State includes not only Organic Chemistry, Biochemistry, and grueling hours spent in design classes, but also relationship-building skills with professors, students, and roommates. The Penn State experience provided me with the skills and knowledge necessary to conceive Designs for Greener Gardens, Inc., a fine gardening and design company specializing in the creation of eco-sensitive artistic gardens.

One snowy January day I received an e-mail offering me the opportunity to participate in Home and Garden Television (HGTV) *Landscape's Challenge*. With nothing to lose and much to gain, members of our Greener Gardens team filed the necessary application complete with pictures and credentials for the preliminary selection process. Within weeks we learned that my husband, Pierre Moitrier, and I would appear on national television as one of three landscape contracting companies competing to win the *Landscape's Challenge*. My "fifteen minutes of fame" had arrived!

The show proceeds like this: The three designers competing to win the challenge meet individually with the client, create a full-scale design, and then present the design to the client, all while being filmed. The client selects the winner, who creates the design for the nationally televised show. The entire process utilized many of the academic and relationship-building skills I acquired at Penn State, from the initial meeting to the creation of the design, thru the application of the appropriate horticultural techniques to the use of proper speaking skills for the camera.



Once we made personal contact with the homeowners, the client's dream was expressed and the site analysis data was collected. The challenge began!

The homeowners desired an outdoor living area with a tropical ambiance, an outdoor kitchen, a view of the Chesapeake Bay, a hot tub, and a low maintenance garden. They wanted their outdoor living area to be comfortable for a few guests, yet easily expandable for more than 100 guests. The existing landscape of the 7,500-square-foot property, located adjacent to the Chesapeake Bay, was not ecologically sensitive because 90 percent of the surfaces were impervious. Competing against two larger landscape contracting companies, our Greener Gardens Bayside Garden design won the challenge. The design's tropical ambiance, multifunctional entertaining areas, environmentally sensitive construction, and our personal connection with the clients won the home-owners' hearts.

Creation of the garden began with cameras rolling. The existing ten inches of impervious pea gravel was reused to create a raised, recycled bluestone terrace providing a view of the Chesapeake Bay, a place for the hot

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tub, easy access from the indoor kitchen to the outdoor kitchen, and a place to gather. Placement of the outdoor kitchen created a hub where burgers can be flipped, beverages can be served, and mingling can occur. Elevation changes and a variety of surfaces make this small outdoor living space feel intimate, yet appear large. A handcrafted, rustic arbor of native grown eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) helps define individual garden rooms. Garden beds are filled with a variety of colorful blooming native plants, a few exotics, and even a touch of the tropics with the hardy banana, *Musa basjoo*.

The Penn State experience still shapes and affects my daily life, both personally and professionally. Beyond the practical and technical skills acquired at Penn State, the interpersonal skills I learned during college help me deal with and win professional

challenges every day.

They certainly came in handy when my "fifteen minutes of fame" arrived out of the blue!

