



Photos courtesy of Reflections Water Gardens.

Gardening with Water

BEAUTIFUL OUTDOOR WATER GARDENS OFFER A RELAXING OASIS

Larry Carnes grew up near Barrington and as a young man, found himself interested in art, architecture, and landscape design while in school. Today, he uses those interests and honed skills in a business he owns, Reflections Water Gardens, that specializes in custom water gardens, ponds, waterfalls, and even natural swimming ponds. His company also creates manmade wetlands, constructed with gravel and other natural substrates, wetland friendly plantings, and a water flow rate that keeps the ecosystem healthy.

Carnes started his business in 2010, after having worked for other landscape firms. His first natural pool was built in his home's backyard. The project featured here was a complete re-creation of a South Barrington backyard, one with an outdated and poorly functioning waterfall and pond that were original to the then 28-year-old home. "We were updating the entire back yard area and wanted a more impressive water feature," homeowner Debby Piraino said. "We wanted something unique, with several levels of dramatic waterfalls, that would blend with our landscape. Larry met, and then exceeded, our expectations, making this area of our backyard landscape look so beautiful and we are extremely grateful," Piraino added.

Carnes is often a part of larger home redesign projects, like the Piraino's, that includes construction and hardscaping of the property beyond the water feature. It's best for him to come in first to get his work done, so as to not disturb the other projects with the heavy equipment he uses, crossing yards and patios. The Pirainos had heard about Carnes through another contractor who was fixing their leaking pool. The homeowners also didn't care for the look of the pool and pond, and they wanted to bring in larger fish, and would need more water for that.

"We hired Larry because he came highly recommended," Piraino said. "He came up with a design after several discussions about features we wanted to see incorporated into the design. Throughout the building process, Larry was very accommodating. He was always open to tweaking the design here and there to make it look as awesome as it does."

For all his projects, Carnes listens carefully to the homeowner and personally constructs custom illustrations and videos for his clients to review. "What is most important to me is to make elegant water gardens and ponds that look real," Carnes said. He hand-selects the materials for the designs and then creates an oasis of tranquility, the natural sanctuaries that his clients so desire. U



Larry Carnes is owner and principal designer for Reflections Water Gardens, a water garden and pond design/build firm based in Northern Illinois. Carnes offers maintenance and consulting services in the greater Chicago area, but also travels to Virginia, Georgia, and Florida for projects from small ponds of 100 square feet, to 20,000 square foot ponds. His work features water gardens, natural swimming pools, and waterfalls, and is mostly residential. He has commercial clients whose outdoor water features he maintains. All work is warranted in perpetuity (exclusive of mechanicals that have manufacturer's warranties). Larry Carnes may be reached at larry@reflectionswatergardens.com, or 815-955-4911. Visit reflectionswatergardens.com.



The pool and pond to be replaced were original to a home in one of South Barrington's first subdivisions. The pool was leaking and a remodel and rebuild was underway. The pool contractor brought in Reflections Water Gardens. Its owner, Larry Carnes, did a sketch that included darker stones, and a larger space with multiple waterfalls and features that would also allow for large fish. The water garden project took one month; this did not include the pool. The client's concerns and interests were: no leaking, a place their grandchildren could enjoy, a safe perimeter around the installation, no unsecured rocks, and an aesthetically pleasing design that would also sound good—able to drown out nearby traffic noise, but also enable conversations.

Carnes had to build a temporary bridge between the patio and the pond work area to move heavy equipment and the large, multi-ton aqua blue boulders. To avoid disrupting other projects, Carnes had to get in and finish first to not disrupt any landscaping. All water mechanicals were secured and hidden out of view. A couple of years later, he added three more waterfalls to the scene upon client's request, without having to move any of the hardscaping.

This "Aqua Falls" project by Reflections Water Gardens earned a "Gold Award" from the Illinois Landscape Contractor Association for Specialty Element. The complete waterfall and pond re-design includes four-season native and Midwest perennials and offers a healthy habitat for aquatic life, birds, and beneficial insects.

