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## Homes

# Hampton homeowner's renovation echoes Fallingwater

Saturday, July 26, 2003

By Susan Banks, Post-Gazette Garden Editor

R.W. Wobb can put a death grip on adversity and wrestle something positive out of it. So it comes as no great surprise that when a tree branch from an overhanging oak fell through the roof of his home a couple of years ago, it started a rather remarkable chain of events.

The home in Hampton where Wobb has lived for 27 years has a flat roof. When repair efforts failed, he decided to raise the roof. With the help of architect Jim Cardillo, Wobb has indeed raised the roof, blown out the back wall of the home, renovated that space and, as the *piece de resistance*, added a huge stone waterfall right outside the



**The combined minds of R.W. Wobb, left, architect James Cardillo and landscapers and stone contractors Dave and Marianne Hill produced a natural-looking pond and waterfall right off the**

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back door.

**back of Wobb's house in Hampton. (Lake Fong, Post-Gazette photos)**

And it was all built around the offending oak. Wobb insisted that the renovations spare the tree that started the trouble. And they did manage to save it, with only inches to spare.

Wobb wanted the theme of the project to be "Wow!" Or, as he told Cardillo, "Jim, I want something spectacular." He obviously succeeded in that effort, but getting there took time, work, patience and plenty of money.

He declines to say exactly how much the project set him back, but he estimates that the renovations and waterfall cost twice the original cost of the home.

"My cash reserves are going down quickly," he adds, laughing.

It wasn't by chance that Wobb ended up with a waterfall as part of his renovation. He is a fan of architect Frank Lloyd Wright, especially of Wright's masterpiece Fallingwater on Bear Run, Fayette County. The home already had a Wrightian Modern feel and a wooded hillside where a stream would look at home.

Wobb was adamant that the waterfall had to look like a natural extension of the property. Louie Jakovac, a stone mason who did much of the new stonework around the home, built the 15-foot retaining wall behind the falls. He then recommended Dave and Marianne Hill, owners of Hill's Tree Care & Nursery in Sarver, for the job of constructing the falls. Dave Hill has been building water features for 20 years and has had his own business for 10.

For the falls, Hill decided

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**The backyard waterfall, inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, was part of a renovation Wobb undertook when a tree branch crashed through the roof of the house.**

that he wanted large boulders as well as smaller ones, to better mimic nature. With the help of a front loader, the Hills hoisted stones, some the size of a small car, over the lip of the wall and lowered them, one by one. The end result is an astonishing natural-looking fall that comes over the hill in three tiers, ending just below the back terrace of the newly remodeled room.

The waterfalls are a dry-wall construction, meaning no mortar was used. The stone is stacked against the retaining wall, and gravity holds them in

place. The Hills, who finished Sept. 9, left existing moss intact to help lessen the brand-new look.

"We worked two solid months, every day," says Marianne. "We had many 10- to 15-hour days."

Their hard work and careful touch are apparent. The pool, for instance, was designed so that guests can walk out over it from the back terrace. As another nod to Wright, Wobb had a staircase built right down into the water, like the pool under Fallingwater.

The Hills also lent their expertise to the plantings around the fall. They chose different types of evergreens and viburnums to complete the natural theme.

In the house, Cardillo had come up with a wide open living space with lots of glass, recessed lighting and heated marble flooring. Floor-to-ceiling windows border two sides of the room and overlook the falls and the woods-covered hillside behind the house.

A large glass etching of Fallingwater, done by John Miller of Greensburg, covers a back wall. The raised ceiling has been outfitted with skylights complete with rain sensors that automatically close when the weather becomes inclement.

On one wall of the room Wobb commissioned a mural, painted by artist Sandy Kessler. It depicts Wobb, his fiancée, Cheryl Theisen, Robert Redford and Meryl Streep, dressed in 1920s period style. It's a tongue-in-cheek reference to "Out of Africa," one of Wobb's favorite movies. While the new space is used for entertaining, it's also a peaceful place to sit and contemplate nature in any season.

Cardillo is pleased with the outcome of the work.

"The end results are greater than the sum of parts," he says, adding that he merely translated Wobb's ideas.

But without Cardillo, the plan wouldn't have jelled. Wobb says he consulted several other architects before approaching Cardillo, whom he already knew. Cardillo was the only one who had the ability to "put down on paper" just what he was dreaming up.

"He just got it," says Wobb, who is thrilled with the result.

So what's in the future for the Wobb domain? You might think he's had enough of renovations, but he is full of plans for work on the master bedroom, which overlooks the renovated room.

"It's what is possible" is his mantra. Clearly, when it comes to Wobb, anything is.

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