

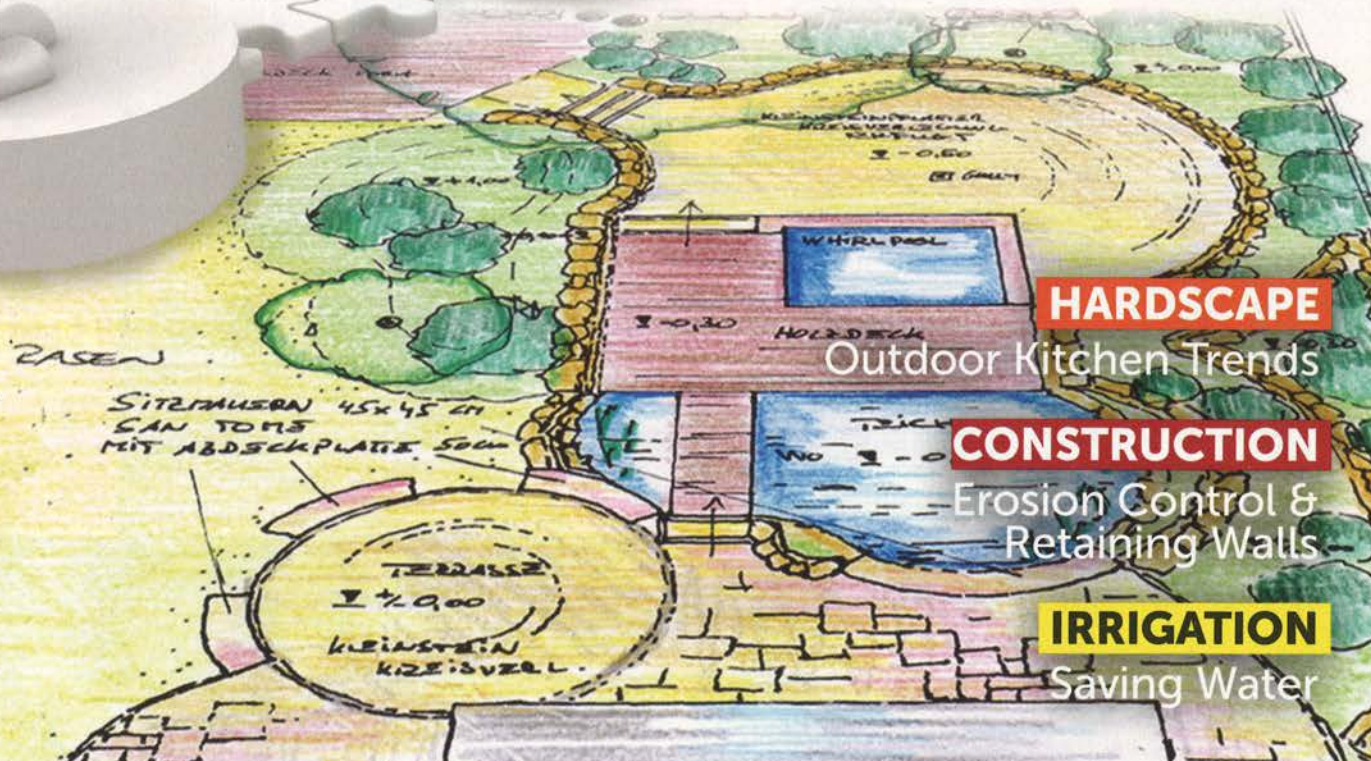
TURF Design Build

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Frank Mariani

By Tom Crain

Client mix: 93% high-end residential design, installation and maintenance, 7% commercial design, installation and maintenance
Service mix: 50% landscape architecture and 50% construction
Business motto: The client is always right.

Since he was in first grade, Frank Mariani helped at his grandfather's nursery—John Fiore & Sons—in West Lake Forest, Illinois. His own father, Italian immigrant Vito Mariani, founded Mariani Landscape in 1958 to provide landscape maintenance services to upscale residents of Chicago's North Shore. Today, Mariani Landscape has grown to be one of the largest landscape design, installation and maintenance firms in the country operating throughout the Chicagoland area, Fox Valley and Southern Wisconsin. It also became the first landscape company to be approved to the ISO 9001 Quality Standard.

In 2011, Mariani received the "Mentor to the Industry" award from the Illinois Green Industry Association (IGIA) at the organization's annual dinner. Mariani and his wife, Sherri, own a 1929 Tudor-style 10-acre estate with a prairie, orchard and woodland and ornamental kitchen gardens in Lake Forest, serving as a laboratory where Mariani Landscape staff can experiment with designs and learn proper maintenance techniques.

Proudest moment in business: About 15 years ago, we were invited to compete for a design project for a 7-acre Japanese garden in a private home in a Chicago suburb. We had limited experience prior to this in designing and installing Japanese gardens, especially of this scale. We were awarded the project, dove in and ended up winning a top ASLA award for it.

Biggest business challenge: It's difficult to nail down just one. I have been running the company since 1973 after my dad passed away—that's 40-plus years. I think I'd have to say finding the best people to join our company as we continue to grow is one of my biggest challenges. We look to the best colleges and universities for talented, young landscape architects, and we are also fortunate to have team members who have been at Mariani for 20-plus years. Our company has more than 400 associates, and it's

always a challenge to make sure our team is the best it can possibly be.

Best sources of landscape design/build inspiration: In my spare time I like to see what the industry is doing on a local, national and international level. I subscribe to a few dozen different gardening and landscaping magazines and I check out what my industry peers are doing on social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest. ASLA also does a good job of identifying great projects conducted by landscape architectural firms.

Favorite plant or plant combination: Ask me the question: "What is your favorite Italian restaurant?" and I would give you the same answer. I can't choose just one restaurant, and it's the same thing with plants. It really depends on the project I am working on, what plants work well into the design and what is



in season. I'm fortunate to have the 1,700-acre Morton Arboretum in Lisle and the Chicago Botanic Gardens so close where I can look at a variety of trees and other plants. I am a big fan of beech, sycamore, london plain and oak trees. At my home right now, peony plants are in bloom so they are a favorite of mine. And the month before that, redbuds were in bloom.

Monday morning motivation: I look forward to coming into the office and seeing everyone on my team, which for the past 40 years just keeps getting better and better. I am motivated by constantly working on keeping good people at Mariani, making their experience here a career and not just a job. Also, I always look forward to meeting with our great clients.

Business worry that keeps you up at night: Quite frankly, I am proud to say that nothing keeps me up at night anymore when it comes

to the business. I have been through a lot over the years and learned nothing is worth losing sleep over. I know I have the right people in place that can handle any problem. If, God forbid, any serious challenge or tragedy occurs, I am confident we can overcome anything. The only time I lose sleep is when I am thinking about new ideas for the business. I have become really good at writing notes in the dark in the middle of the night when new ideas come to mind.

Landscape design mentors: There are several I can identify: Beatrix Farrand, the only founding woman member of the American Society of Landscape Architects in 1899. She also designed Dumbarton Oaks within walking distance from Georgetown University, which is my favorite garden in the world. There's also modernist landscape architect Dan Kiley and Ohme Van Sweden's founders Wolfgang Oehme and

Photos: Linda Oyama Bryan



James van Sweden. I have had the privilege of working on landscaping projects with local Chicago architect and personal friend Douglas Hoerr and New York-based Deborah Nevins, who has also become a great friend. Also, my brother John Mariani, who I am fortunate to work with and who is a very accomplished, award-winning landscape architect.

Favorite business or landscape design books: "The Education of a Gardener" by British landscape architect and garden designer Russell Page, who did his best work in the 1930s-1960s, and "Gardening with Nature" by James van Sweden.

Landscape design project that makes you smile every time you drive past it: It has to be a project right down the street from the Mariani offices designed by my brother John 25 years ago on a 30-acre site that we still maintain today. It has the look and feel of a charming

yet formal country garden and continues to get better with time.

Describe your business in five years: We will continue to become a more and more environmentally sensitive business. Being in the green industry, it is our industry's responsibility to lead the way on this. I am not a zealot in this area but an advocate. Preserving our water resources and keeping our air and water clean is becoming more and more important whether or not you believe in climate change. It's our duty to be sustainable in an authentic and meaningful way. TDB

Connect with Frank Mariani and Mariani Landscape:

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Blog: In the Garden with Mariani Landscape at blog.marianilandscape.com