

Rick Scheen

landwest

Photography by
Michael Thad Carter



As a city of true outdoor people, Austin loves nothing more than a thoughtful, innovative outside space. From the formal, lush old English garden to the stark lines of a modernist yard of green agaves and gray stone, Rick Scheen, owner and founder of LandWest, has done it all. He's a true visionary, turning raw spaces into something beyond what his clients even imagined. And he's just getting started.

Scheen launched his career in the landscape architecture business in Baton Rouge after graduating from Louisiana State University. He had a successful company there for several years before moving to Austin, where he spent a few years working for a large firm. In 2000, he founded LandWest, and after almost a decade, he and his team have put their stamp on some of the most interesting landscape architecture projects in the city, like Lance Armstrong's home, as seen in *Architectural Digest*. "I never have preconceived ideas until I meet with the client and see the architecture of the site. I need to get the client's input before I get too crazy with all my ideas," he says with a laugh, showing the approachable likeability that most of his clients seem to mention.

"Once I take it all in, my mind starts spinning. I could be in the shower and a light bulb goes on—it could be something simple like an abstract idea of angles or a shape. It's a concept, and we are off and running once that happens."

The project pictured is a modern Westlake Hills home that presented Scheen with a few challenges—a former drainage ditch had to be transformed into a flowing creek; steep grades covered much of the land; and the property, a mere 75 feet below Westlake Drive, had to be made to feel like a quiet, secluded escape. The landscape stands now as a perfect example of the visual impact of opposites placed side by side, as rough-textured agaves sit atop a smooth concrete wall and green grass swoops over rustic steel walls—all showcasing the power of contrasting modern man-made architectural elements with nature. The stairs leading down to the creek were built to look as if they were floating on the natural element. Scheen excitedly explains: "We wanted the whole piece to feel like a landscape architectural arm reaching out into nature, into the actual element."

With this project and all his others, Scheen always enjoys revisiting to see how the plants have matured, something he often does as part of what is particularly special about LandWest—he not only designs and builds all the landscape projects for a house, but the company also does property management. "I have been working with a lot of the same masons for over a decade, so I always know who is out on what job. We are all working together to do better every day, and we design, build, and physically take care of our projects with the specific client in mind. We've built quite a machine, and it's unique." **L. Ford**