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Photos by Courtney Perry/Staff Photographer

The homeowners tore down their previous 1940s residence to build a one-story modern design featuring native materials in the house and landscape.

GARDENING

Going native

Desire for a sustainable dwelling leads to earth-friendly work of art

By **MARIANA GREENE**
Garden Editor
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It's an unusual cistern that grabs attention from a well-designed house and landscape, but the 1,650-gallon galvanized-steel cylinder has pride of place in a Devonshire front yard.

It is symbolic of the owners' finally realized dream for the home they had always talked about having one day. Once all five children in their blended family were on their own, the couple tore down the 1946 two-story residence in North Dallas to make way for a low and lean Texas-modern design with a metal roof, exterior walls of stone and a sustainable, low-maintenance landscape plan.



Last year's heavy rains almost filled the 1,650-gallon cistern, which was purchased online from a farm and ranch supply company.

Architect Stephen Chambers and landscape architect Shane Garthoff, both of Dallas, were instantly on the same page with the husband and wife regarding their desire to create a new homestead that trod sensitively, respectfully upon the site.

"You have to be responsible in caring for the envi-



See a **slideshow** of the Devonshire property.
dallasnews.com/gardening

ronment. It's everybody's job," says the homeowner, who did not want to be named. "I didn't want well-manicured box hedges. We wanted something that would be sustainable, that wouldn't take a lot of work and that was kind to the environment."

This man clearly takes delight in his new home, whose landscape was on the national Garden Conservancy's Open Day tour last May. Visitors, sophisticated garden lovers, circled the imposing cistern with the same wide-eyed awe as the gawkers in automobiles who roll to a stop to stare. If tour visitors, strollers or motorists show interest, the homeowner, from his frequent perch on landscape boulders in the shade, is happy to hold forth.

Architect Chambers says his client told him, early in planning conferences, that he wanted big barrels positioned around the house's exterior to catch rainwater. Chambers replied, "Why don't we do something a little bigger, make a bigger statement that

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EVENTS

Seminars to ask, what lies ahead?

By **MANUEL MENDOZA**
Special Contributor

At the first Festival of Ideas, organizer Larry Allums recalls, Elizabeth Kolbert declared there was no hope of reversing climate change. Rather than shutting down discussion, however, the environmental writer's pessimism sparked a series of forums at Allums' Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture exploring her contention.

Three years later, the executive director of the institute expects the second Festival of Ideas, scheduled for Saturday at the Dallas Museum of Art, to prove as fruitful. Its theme, "The Fu-

Plan your life

10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday at the Dallas Museum of Art, 1717 N. Harwood St., \$65 to \$110. 214-981-8803. www.dallasinstitute.org.

ture," takes up four topics: religion, American power, journalism and the media, and medicine and health care.

"Our culture seems more and more to be a listen-and-leave kind of culture," Allums says of a paradigm that the Dallas Institute, celebrating its 30th anni-

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BOOKS

Mystery-yarn spinner to visit Dallas

By **DAVID MARTINDALE**
Special Contributor

Many people look at wind turbine farms that are popping up across America and see an important energy source for the future.

When mystery novelist C.J. Box gazed long and hard at a field of those 250-foot towers, what formed in his devious brain was a vision of murder.

"I wondered if there's a possibility of getting a body up to the top of a tower and hanging it off one of the blades," he says.

That's precisely what Box made happen in *Cold Wind* (Putnam, \$25.95), his 11th book featuring Wyoming game warden and sleuth Joe Pickett.

With each new book, the *New York Times* best-selling author is cementing

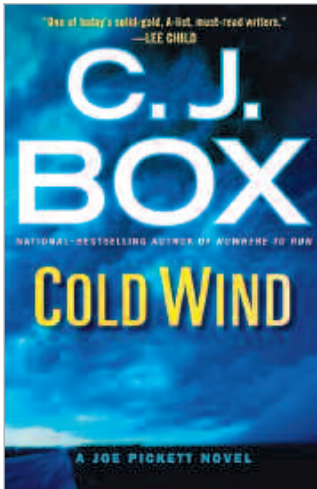
a national reputation as one of today's authentic chroniclers of the American West. His 2008 stand-alone novel, *Blue Heaven*, won the 2009 Edgar Allan Poe Award from the Mystery Writers of America for best novel.

Box, who will appear Saturday in Dallas, talked by phone from his home in Cheyenne, Wyo.

Is it true that, in the name of research, you climbed to the top of one of those towers?

I wanted to see what it was like. I was under the mistaken impression that there were elevators inside them. But it's a ladder, all the way to the top. It's dark inside, and the rungs of the ladder get greasy toward the top, because the turbine spits off a film of oil that gets on everything.

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Plan your life

C.J. Box will appear 2 p.m. Saturday at Barnes & Noble, 7700 W. Northwest Highway, Dallas.



The blooms of ornamental pink muhly grass, positioned near the front door, glow in the morning light.



Landscape architect Shane Garthoff made the clients' vision of environmental responsibility come to life.



Miscanthus sinensis 'Adagio' is considered a dwarf variety among ornamental grasses.

Cisterns for rainwater can be hidden, or not

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[water conservation] is important to you?"

The architect points out that a cistern can be buried underground or placed in a far less prominent position than one's front yard, "but that wouldn't be as dramatic." He shopped farm and ranch suppliers online (not a rare occurrence since his firm designs ranches and weekend properties in the country), and chose a model that has a boldly lettered gauge to indicate the tank's water level.

Although the cistern has a commanding presence, it is the lawn turf that is dearest to the owner's heart. In early spring, 'Emerald' zoysia is cropped short, like an Aggie's scalp. A few weeks hence, it will be green and fine-bladed.

"It is absolutely gorgeous when it gets grown up," he says. "It reaches a maximum height of 10 inches, but it falls over on itself at 5 or 6 inches, so it never exceeds the height limit the city will allow. It's like walking on a thick, well-padded rug. It feels so good."

The owner is in the habit of walking barefoot in his front yard? "Of course!" he answers,

as if people his age have no reservations about baring snake-belly-white feet.

The zoysia takes the Texas sun, performs well in shade, says the landscape architect, and is mowed only once, in late winter before warming days and spring rains trigger fresh growth.

"We designed the landscape to closely fit sun patterns, shade patterns and topography," Garthoff says. "As the beds in the front yard transition under the tree canopy, it starts to get more shade-tolerant plants."

The planting plan was developed around large, old trees, including a majestic male bois d'arc the homeowner says is about 100 years old, a spreading live oak and a row of sizable, multitrunk crape myrtles that screen the side street. These valuable trees and others were protected during construction and seem to have survived without damage.

The property employs an automatic irrigation system, which was designed and manufactured in Israel; the homeowners consider it a state-of-the-art option. It supplements rainfall, admittedly, but Gar-



Casey Williams' photograph of a container ship printed with UV-curable ink on aluminum is one of many inspired by the Houston Ship Channel. It is mounted over the hot tub on the back patio.

thoff heeded his clients' wishes that not a drop of water be wasted.

The neighborhood is close to a lake, and the homeowners

did not want rain or sprinkler runoff from their property streaming down streets and into the city's aging and over-worked storm sewers. That breaks the rules of good stewardship.

The landscape, therefore, has as little paving as possible. Permeable surfaces — lawn and landscape beds, bands of crushed stone between the concrete expanses of the driveway, dry streambeds that double as walkways and the backyard's crushed black basalt — absorb heavy rains rather than deflect the water.

This is where the imposing cistern plays more than an ornamental role. It catches rainwater from the house's guttering system to hand-water the yard, wash the dogs and top off the water feature

near the front door.

"It's like a piece of yard art, a piece of sculpture," Chambers says. "And a lot of their neighbors have sculptures in their front yards."

He says the water features and native plants that flower, including coneflowers, rudbeckias, sages, Turk's cap and butterfly bush, draw in wildlife such as amphibians, raccoons, opossums, squirrels, songbirds and butterflies.

The plants Garthoff specified, including several species of ornamental grasses, dwarf wax myrtle, coralberry, hypericum and sumac, are arranged "in big, broad sweeps of mass plantings," Garthoff explains, to go with the informal aspect of the architect's modern riff on a Texas farmhouse. Garthoff prefers the word "sustain-

able" to describe the landscape's style, not "xeriscape," because that word has come to have negative, desertlike connotations of bare earth and thorny greenery.

Chambers praises Garthoff for planning a landscape that relates well to the house's pared-down interiors and provides pleasing views. "The house has large windows down to the floor," Chambers says. "We wanted the openness of the house to flow to the outside. When you are inside, the windows almost disappear."

For the homeowner, who likes to ramble around his property from one favorite plantings," Garthoff explains, realizing his dreams of shelter, comfort and environmental stewardship.

Large rocks serve as seating in the front yard planted with 'Emerald' zoysia grass, a tough selection that takes sun and shade. The homeowner mows it once a year, in late winter.



Sticker shock aside, grafted vegetables make sense

This is going to sound bizarre. It sure did to me until I did some research on this new product: grafted vegetable plants.

I don't know why I was so skeptical. Grafted fruit trees and hybrid tea roses are common. But tomatoes? Weird.

As it turns out, not so much. Although vegetable grafting is a relatively new practice in the United States, commercial cultivation of them began in Korea and Japan at the end of the 1920s, according to Masayuki Oda College of Agriculture

GARDENING FOOL



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in Osaka, Japan. Then, watermelon plants were grafted onto gourd rootstock; by 1990, 59 percent of Japan's production area was in grafted watermelon, cucumber, melon, tomato and eggplant.

The rootstock contributes

vigor and disease resistance while the scion is chosen for fruit flavor or quality. The main objective of grafting vegetables is to avoid soil-borne diseases, a particular plague of tomato plants across the United States.

Log House Plants in Oregon's Willamette Valley is growing a line of 15 grafted tomato varieties, called Mighty Matos, and one grafted eggplant sold online as SuperNaturals in conjunction with GardenLife in San Diego County, Calif. GardenLife, a weekend national radio show, is the sole retail source of these grafted vegetables for us in North Texas.

Scientific experts at North Carolina State University and Ohio State University, among others, have published articles vouching for the benefits of grafting vegetable crops, especially tomatoes. They agree grafting is a valuable disease management tactic for heirloom tomato growers. In addition, worldwide research has demonstrated increased yields in comparison to nongrafted plants, according to NC State.

"Grafted tomato transplants are able to combine the high-quality fruit of heirloom cultivars with the disease resistance, stress tolerance and



Compare the tomatoes on the 'Big Beef' grafted plants (right and center) to the standard ungrafted 'Big Beef' transplant on the left.

vigor of modern rootstock cultivars," says a paper from NC State. The application is ideal for those farmers cultivating fresh-produce crops.

Long story short, if you want to be first on your block to grow single- and even double-grafted tomatoes, you must order them online — by Monday. Before you gasp at the price tag, remember how tedious and time consuming grafting is, especially when dealing with the tomato's soft, vascular stems instead of the woody stems of fruit trees.

The SuperNaturals brand was developed between Log House Plants and John Bagnasco, a horticulturist with GardenLife. Double grafts —

meaning two heirloom cultivars are grafted onto one rootstock — are \$19.95 for a 4-inch pot. Single grafts are \$11.95 for a 4-inch pot.

"This is going to change the way Americans grow tomatoes," Bagnasco says.

Because it can take six weeks to develop a grafted tomato plant, especially one that has two cultivars grafted on the same plant, and because the SuperNaturals line is in its first year, inventory is limited. There are just 50,000 Mighty Matos available this year; next year inventory will increase to 1 million plants. Bagnasco says plants ordered through Monday cannot be shipped until May 16. That is late for North

Texans' planting schedule. Bagnasco, however, is cautiously optimistic. "We haven't tested all of the grafted tomatoes yet," he says. "But the ones we have tested have taken the heat with no problem. These grafted tomatoes are resistant to diseases, resistant to nematodes and resistant to environmental stresses, including heat and cold."

Although this may sound like an expensive and risky experiment, don't these online descriptions make your mouth water?

- Double-graft 'Chocolate Stripes' (very sweet) and 'Paul Robeson' (sweet and smoky).
- Double-graft 'Green Pineapple' (green, yellow and purple inside) and 'Hawaiian Pineapple' (yellow and red mottled flesh with a hint of pineapple sweetness).
- Single-graft 'Big Zac' (meaty red fruits 3 to 7 lbs.).
- Single-graft 'Costoluto Genovese' (an Italian standard for fresh eating and preserving).
- Single-graft 'Juliet' (early bearing and prolific grape size).
- Single-graft 'Sun Sugar' (a cherry tomato with three times more Vitamin A than most red tomatoes).

NORTH HAVEN Gardens



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