

Plant growth can soften the appearance of a water feature, bringing out the natural beauty of the boulders.



Photo by Yemm Photography

by Alan Koontz,  
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**B**uilding a water feature — and making it appear as natural as Mother Nature would intend it to be — can be a huge task. Unfortunately, many pond builders have a hard time understanding this when installing a water feature in someone's landscape.

Many companies offer pond building services with little or no experience, training or artistic ability. Thus, sometimes a pond owner who previously had a pond installed

you have chosen. There is a place for each boulder, so before you start placing stones, study them, flip them over and look at them from every angle ... but try to always make sure the weathered side is up. Broken, triangular and square boulders should be left at the stone yard. They are unattractive when placed in a water feature.

To add to the natural appearance, look for moss and lichen growth and even stones with small plants growing from them. Choose stones that have different layers or grooves in them.

Once you have chosen the perfect boulders, have them loaded onto a flatbed trailer where they can be removed

## Act Natural!

Creating that natural "wow factor" in your water feature project

in their landscape by an inexperienced company will want to tear it out and rebuild it to make it look more natural. Anyone can build a pond, but adding enhancements that create a well-constructed and natural-looking water feature will set you apart from the by-the-numbers pond builders.

Walking away and being excited about the feature you just built not only brings you happiness, but it also brings out the "Wow Factor" in the customer's mind.

### Case Study

Dwayne Chambers (chief marketing officer of Krispy Kreme Donuts) and his wife, Dee, wanted their water feature to sound good and appear as though it had been taken straight from the Colorado Mountains, since that is where they are originally from. After evaluating the hillside behind their house, which had a slope of about 45 degrees, we knew we had the perfect setting to create an amazing waterfall using large boulders. We knew the techniques we'd use, too. Using weathered or mossy logs, echo chambers and shadow effects — and paying attention to the characteristics of the stones — will bring out the best in any water feature construction, and that was definitely true here. When constructing a natural water feature outdoors, you must always think about what Mother Nature would do.

### Boulders Must Have Character

Japanese wisdom states, "You can grow moss, but you cannot grow character." When visiting the stone yard, look for boulders that have character to them — ones that have been exposed to the natural elements and the environment. Think about what type of boulders will enhance the area

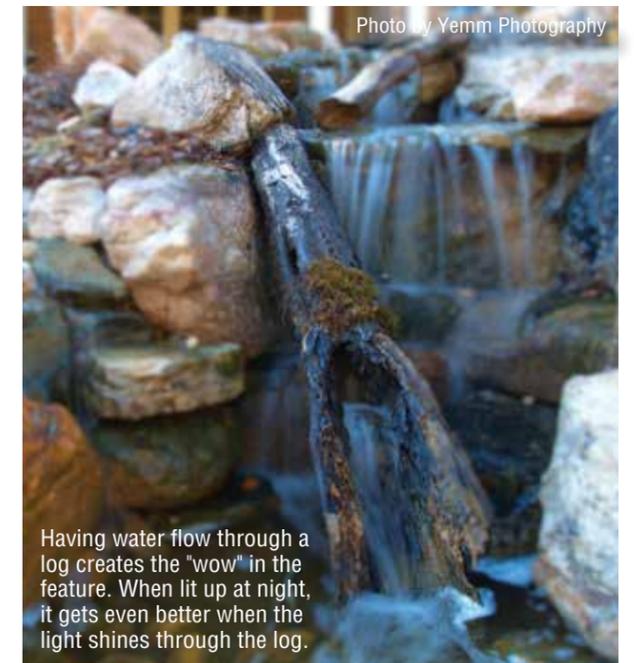


Photo by Yemm Photography

Having water flow through a log creates the "wow" in the feature. When lit up at night, it gets even better when the light shines through the log.

by the use of a Bobcat or forklift instead of having them dumped on the ground with all of the other stones. Chipped and cracked stones will tend to ruin your masterpiece. If you have to move a stone around several times just to highlight the character portion of that stone, do so!

### Creating Shadow Effects

The goal when creating natural water features is to build them like Mother Nature would have ... or at least try to imitate her handiwork! And a big part of that



Creating a shadow and a void underneath this waterfall rock provides sound and draws your eyes to the area, sparking interest.

natural beauty is lighting. Many contractors make the mistake of not creating shadows in their features. They place boulders that have no irregular shapes or natural appearance in the stream or in the waterfall and expect the water to perform the magic. Stones that are too geometrical in shape do not create interest and end up appearing man-made.

Shadows, on the other hand, provide a 3-D appearance, which draws the eyes into the feature and creates depth. If you look at a waterfall in nature, you will see that the water has carved through the stones due to its force over time. The carved appearance leaves the top of the stone in place, while underneath you will see a shadow where it has been cut away. This provides a real, natural appearance in your feature.

### Echo Chambers

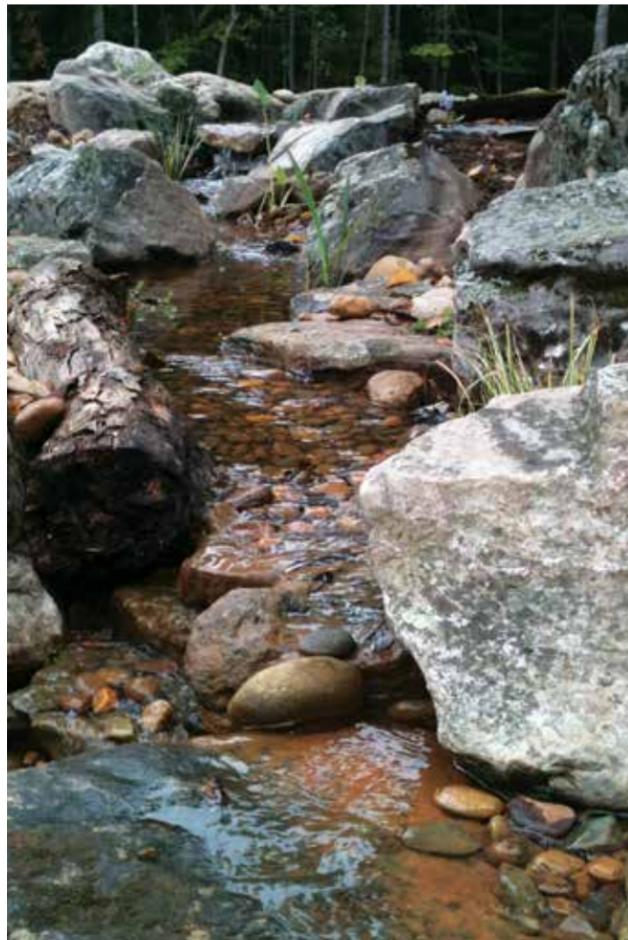
When you are trying to increase the sound and direction

of the water, adding an echo chamber in the waterfall can be just the trick. Make sure to place boulders in the waterfall where you have a void or cave-like area behind the water. This will enhance the sound coming from that location in the feature. Echo Chambers are like small amphitheaters, creating their own sounds during Mother Nature's concert.

### Mossy Logs

Okay, so the water feature is built, the water is running ... now what? This is the time to start visualizing what would happen if there were a storm or a flood or some natural event that Mother Nature decided she wanted in this area.

Step back and observe the entire area around the feature. Are there trees? Are there additional boulders in the landscape or any other existing natural features? The goal is to make this



Adding a log to the stream softens the appearance. In nature, you see many trees or logs that have fallen over and have become part of the feature itself.

feature look as though it has been there for years, so you may have to add these elements!

Tree limbs or weathered logs that have moss on them will always add



Layers, like the ones in this boulder, should be used where the water is flowing. This boulder appears to have had water carving it out over a long period of time.

interest to your water feature. In nature, you may see fallen trees laying down along the waterfall or up against the side of the river or stream. Adding some type of weathered, mossy log or branch to the feature will fine-tune it

and give you that "wow factor." You see them in nature ... why not on a man-made project? By adding a tree branch or log and visualizing it falling over the feature, you again add that three-dimensional effect.

Once the water feature has been installed, it's time to get as many plants around it as possible to soften the appearance. Look for plants that grow over the stones and stick out into the stream or waterfalls. This will greatly enhance the natural appearance.

### Waiting for Spring

With all the elements of our customers' water feature in place, we are now eagerly waiting for spring to arrive to see it filled with plants of all types. This final touch will really soften the appearance and give the project its striking natural beauty. Then, we'll be ready for the final step that all pond builders want to perform: stepping back to say, "WOW!"

### About the Author

Alan Koontz is the Owner of Carolina Pondscapes, Inc. and has been building water features for over 17 years. He is a past director of the NAPP (National Association of Pond Professionals) and the Advisory Board for the Southern Ideal Home Show in Greensboro, N.C. He served eight years in the US Army as a Paratrooper and Drill Sergeant and has a background in mechanical, computer and electrical engineering. Alan and Sherry, his wife of 27 years, have four children, with whom they spend time with at the gym and ball field. Alan enjoys working out in his spare time with his sons' wrestling team, and is a certified firearms instructor.



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