

STRONG CONNECTIONS LEAD TO **Success** in RESIDENTIAL DESIGN

Newton Landscape Group (NLG) connects with its clients and, as a result, the clients connect with the designs. The firm believes that these connections are essential to successfully conceptualize each project.





View of the lake at Rubicon Park

When the team is working efficiently, they have more time to devote to the true core of their business: building long-lasting client relationships.

Newton Landscape Group (NLG), a small design/build firm located in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, has a simple strategy for maintaining long-lasting client relationships: retaining a personal feel coupled with forming deep connections with customers in order to fulfill their most desired landscape wants and needs.

NLG was founded by principal landscape architect Peter Newton, ASLA, in 1990. NLG's projects are largely personal in nature—focused on the residential market—and the firm's overarching objective is to make sure customers will not only use, but also enjoy their outdoor spaces to the fullest. The NLG team connects with their clients and, as a result, the clients connect with the designs. The firm believes that these connections are essential to successfully conceptualize each project.



The pool's edge at the Turkey Creek Residence



Final product of the "negative-edge" pool

Conquering the Louisiana Terrain

A classic example of the firm's work is the "Turkey Creek Residence." This 12-acre estate is located just outside Baton Rouge in a private conservation community, surrounded by large lakes and a rich wildlife population. The clients originally approached the firm with a proposed master plan for their home and conceived the project's design to be "a meeting of sky and water." From the initial meeting until it was completed, the project spanned more than five years.

The design plan was to add modern features to the property's existing elements, which included a quiet pond, hundreds of feet of lakefront, a horse stable, and a pasture, in an attempt to fuse a high-end, elegant style with the natural beauty of the rural landscape. One of the challenges presented on this project was the need to conquer several feet of elevation change on the back of the site. To remedy the elevation problem, while also adhering to the client's request for a pool and terrace, NLG used the Vectorworks® Landmark software to build a negative-edge pool on the back property. The program's Site Model feature helped the landscape architects see the significant grades of the terrain, and this visualization tool made apparent what they needed to accomplish to achieve their desired effect.



The "negative-edge" pool gives the illusion of flowing into the lake

“It’s pretty flat here, and when we do have any amount of grade it definitely makes it more interesting for us,” said Seth Rodewald-Bates, ASLA, a landscape architect at NLG. “We came up with different solutions, both with and without the pool. Vectorworks allowed us to create several quick studies in section to help us look at the grade and see how the lines were going to work out from the house. The software allowed us to quickly develop those ideas.”

The proposed location and positioning of the pool and terrace provide spectacular views of the lake and woods. In order to enhance these views and maintain a strong visual connection with the landscape, NLG used site modifiers within the Vectorworks program to simulate a reshaped edge of the lake within the project’s site model to create the illusion that the pool was flowing directly into it. The team used 3D views available in the application to make sure there was a water-to-water view from the house.

During this part of the construction process, Rodewald-Bates said, the software also aided with accuracy and saved time when performing

estimations. “Since we are a design/build company, the ability to quickly go from construction documents into quantity take-offs has made a noticeable difference in the accuracy and speed of our estimation process,” he said.

With the help of architecture firm Montgomery-Waguespack Architects, other features were added, such as screened porches to keep out insects and a cabana for shelter from the strong winds that move across the property. During the construction of large residential projects such as this, clear communication between the landscape architects and client is always essential. The Vectorworks software allowed the landscape architects to easily share information with their clients, co-workers, and the project’s architects. Specifically, when collaborating with Montgomery-Waguespack Architects, Newton found it very simple to exchange DWG and PDF files between the firms, even though the architecture firm used a different CAD software program.

“The graphic output of Vectorworks is far superior,” said Rodewald-Bates. “A better drawing makes it easier to communicate with the contractors.”



The cabana of Turkey Creek along the pool and spa



View of the road at Rubicon Park

Award-Winning Design

In 1992, NLG won the Louisiana Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects Merit Award for their “McMains Residence” design, and the firm won another in 2004 for “Rubicon Park,” an industrial park located just south of Baton Rouge along the Mississippi River.

The Rubicon Park that exists today began as a vision of the leaders at Rubicon Industries to improve the company’s outdoor work environment by providing a calm, relaxing, and eye-catching location for Rubicon employees to enjoy. Since the park naturally borders Rubicon’s main entrance, the property’s new identity was inspired by an influx of color, plant life, and inherent Louisiana beauty.

Prior to construction, access to the park was very limited and undesirable due to the unsightly chemical plants adjacent to the property, as well as the accumulation of stagnate storm water, untamed grass, and weed growth. The entire area was also dominated by vehicle traffic, making it nearly impossible for pedestrians to safely pass through.

The initial landscape was lifeless and flat with no visual appeal, so NLG first created a site model with the Vectorworks application and used site modifiers to create “landforms” to revamp the park’s lackluster landscape. These landforms not only improved the park’s flat terrain, but also served as natural safeguards to protect pedestrians from passing traffic. The landscape architects added a railroad crossing to allow Rubicon employees unrestricted access to the park. In order to ensure this aspect of the park would be preserved, NLG designed retention ponds to naturally clean up the excess water that accumulates due to run off from storms, and the result provided areas for wildlife to flourish. NLG continued to reconstruct the area of the nearby lake and added a fountain spouting water from its center, new plant life surrounding the lake, and a gazebo overlooking the water.

This award-winning park was a result of NLG’s fifteen-year relationship with Rubicon Industries. The finished product was one of the first chemical plants in the region to improve its outdoor environment, and Rubicon Park has been cited in several Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) reports for its quality and overall improvement. Today, the park is occupied regularly by Rubicon employees, demonstrating the importance of landscape architects within communities.



Front of the Turkey Creek residence

A Total Design Solution

Newton has been using design software at his firm since the mid-1990s, when he started with MiniCAD®, the precursor to the Vectorworks program. Rodewald-Bates said he prefers utilizing Vectorworks as opposed to alternate CAD solutions because of its efficiency and ease of use.

“Vectorworks allows a lot more flexibility as far as reproducing and making changes,” he said. “It’s a lot easier than trying to cut out little pieces and paste them back together, like in a hand drawing. It’s also much easier to keep track of data than having a flat file as your only source for drawings.”

The firm has found it easy to integrate the application with other software packages, such as Google SketchUp®. A residential project designed by NLG, “The Tupelo Residence,” was drafted using both the SketchUp and Vectorworks programs. Like the Turkey Creek project, this site’s natural landscape had a large amount of elevation change, and it provided a difficult challenge for the landscape architects to overcome. The 3D capabilities of the software assisted the team in finding a solution.

They used SketchUp for the conceptual massing of spaces and also during the Construction Documents phase to create more detailed mock-ups of various elements, like the stairs, rail, and arbor. Then, they brought their design into the Vectorworks program to refine the design’s details.

NLG has continued to discover the benefits of integrating Vectorworks software into its workflows. “We still do a lot of schematic investigations by hand, but then from that point on CAD is the centerpiece to everything,” said Rodewald-Bates. “We basically take things from schematics all the way through construction documents in CAD. Since we’re design/build, it plays a big role in our information process. We use it to determine take-off for materials and labor, and it’s really helped us a lot as far as efficiency goes. It’s definitely played a big role.”

And when the team is working efficiently, they have more time to devote to the true core of their business: building long-lasting client relationships.



Gazebo at Rubicon Park

Acknowledgements

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Since 1990 Newton Landscape Group has designed, crafted, and managed classic landscapes in southern Louisiana. Through the careful use of local materials, they strive for the highest attention to detail and craftsmanship in their work. By developing long-term relationship with their clients, they offer an unparalleled level of service that spans generations.

Images: Courtesy of Newton Landscape Group

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