

# Creative And Artistic Paver Installations



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There's a little bit of art in every hardscape project – the way the lines flow, the way the colors come together, the way the finishes shine. Some projects, though, take artistic creativity to a whole new level.

That's the type of project that Brian Larsen loves. His company, [County Wide Landscaping](#) in the Chicago area, has created and installed about 20 hardscape projects that incorporate intricate paver patterns and designs to create stunning driveways and walkways.

"The very first one I did was about 14 years ago. It was for a customer who really wanted something that no one else had," he explains. In fact, that homeowner already had a custom driveway featuring a diamond pattern, but he wanted something that stood out even more. "So, I just sat down and designed something that sort of looked like flowers with circles and petals," Larsen says. "I sketched it out, and once he liked it, I just went in and started sketching them out all over his driveway."



Brian Larsen of County Wide Landscaping draws out his designs using computer-aided design software, or CAD, then prints the designs on a large-format printer. The patterns are set on top of pavers and cut out by his crew.

He now draws his designs out on computer-aided design software, or CAD, and prints the patterns out on the company's large-format printer. Then, these printed patterns are set on top of pavers and cut out; in the case of repeated patterns, the shapes are moved and cut out multiple times. "There's a lot of time that goes into each one of those," he says.

The second project of this type that he did incorporated a rose motif into a

massive 12,000-square-foot driveway. “We were there for about two and a half months cutting in roses,” recalls Larsen.



When clients say they want something special, he asks if there’s a symbol they like, a piece of art they are fond of, a favorite sports team logo, etc. Sometimes it’s as simple as incorporating their last initial into the design (“those are easy now!” he says). If the client doesn’t have any ideas, Larsen has plenty.



“If I go to Las Vegas or Miami, I’ll look at things I see in hotels. I’ll pick up patterns off the floors. I’ll sketch them or take photos and save them in a folder on my computer to go back to at a later date to get ideas from,” he explains. “When somebody wants something intricate, I’ll find one of those designs and recreate it on paper. Then I’ll scan it into the computer, and, in my CAD program, I just start shrinking and expanding them all over the driveway.”



Once he has a general design, Larsen meets with the client to fine-tune it. “They can see how busy it will be, and then decide if they want more designs or fewer,” he says. Once the final design has been printed on paper, his crew arrives at the job site, lays out the pavers that will make up the design, places the paper on top and then starts cutting the pavers accordingly. The printed designs are also placed on the driveway where the design will be inserted so that the existing pavers can be cut out in the exact shape of the design. Then it’s just a matter of putting the design puzzle together in that space.

Of course, this is all over-simplifying what is often a painstaking process. And a tremendous amount of cutting.



“When we’re done, it looks like it’s snowed everywhere,” jokes Larsen. “If you’re cutting into a 12 by 12 paver and there’s a point right in the middle, that’s where it’s a challenge. There’s a lot of cutting and grinding to get everything to fit exactly.” The key is to have a wide variety of different tools, he says. County Wide Landscaping uses three different sizes of cut-off saws (14, 12 and 10 inches), a table saw and five different sizes of grinders.



Another key is patience. The whole driveway (the background) can usually be installed in two days – “that’s the easy part,” says Larsen. “The inlays usually take about 16 to 18 hours each.” That means there’s a lot of calculations that go into bidding each job; if you’re going to install intricate hardscape designs, you need to know how long it will take or you can lose your shirt, he emphasizes.

## The right materials

County Wide Landscaping has worked with a variety of materials for its hardscape designs. While clay is the easiest because it is soft and can be cut quickly, they rarely use it for these projects because the small pieces and sharp angles don't hold up well. Larsen likes [Unilock pavers](#), "because they have so many colors and styles and textures," he explains. Sometimes the company travels long distances for these projects and ends up using what is popular in that region; most of the major manufacturers offer a good variety of pavers that can work for this type of application, adds Larsen.

More than the brand, it's often the boldness of the pavers that decide what will be used for a given project.



"Some people don't like the really bold colors; they like the inlays but they want to keep it simple, so the colors are more neutral and match one another. Other clients want really bold statements," he says.

Sometimes it's a mix of the two; one recent project was a patio with a dragon design that was created using green, rough-faced pavers from Unilock that resembled scales. The tongue was done in red, the teeth white and the mane was tan. Given the detail and the artistry of the work involved, Larson uses one specific crew that handles the intricate hardscape installations.



Not surprisingly, these sorts of unique hardscape projects don't come along every day. "It's difficult to sell intricate designs like that to clients, just because of the cost and the time that goes into it – so it's really for people who have seen my work and want something special like that," says Larsen. "It's not that we advertise it, but people see one and it sort of spreads by word of mouth."



It's a niche market for contractors, too. "A lot of companies don't want to bother with it because there's just not much money in it after you add up all of your hours," Larsen says, but he enjoys the challenge of getting to be creative rather than doing the same old patio or driveway all the time: "It's fun. And it's nice to see it when the job is done – the guys all take photos of the design ... they're proud of their work."

## Paver Art



For hardscape installers who want to add creativity to a paver project but don't want to do extensive free-hand cutting on-site, a New Jersey-based company called [Paverart](#) produces intricate designs (such as logos, art and photo-like images) at its facility. These pieces of paver art are not created with paint or stain, but rather are cut from colored concrete pavers using

the precision of a waterjet. The pieces and instructions are then shipped for installation by the hardscape contractor. At that point, it's like putting together a pre-cut puzzle.