

FOLLOW THE "COLOR BRICK" ROAD

A large apartment complex in Georgia uses colorful season beds to attract new tenants and keep occupancy rates high. By Lindsey Getz

When Prescott Apartments, a 19-building complex situated on 21 acres in Duluth, Ga., wanted to stand out from the competition, it turned to landscape design to make a difference. NatureScapes, which operates a specialized seasonal color department, designed seasonal color beds blending several palettes and textures.

The challenge, says Shelley Threefoot Cowan, the company's seasonal color designer and floriculturist, was to create spectacular color beds while considering both budget and drought restrictions.

When it came to selecting plants, drought dictated the process. "If it wasn't a plant that could sustain the heat and the limited water available, it would ultimately be a waste of time and money," Cowan says. She used hardy plants like *Duranta* and *Vinca*. These were able to endure the difficult weather conditions and foot and vehicle traffic.

The height of the plants was also important, as more than one of the beds prominently featured apartment signage. "We could only use so many plants and ones that would not deter from the visibility of the signs," Cowan says. The primary goal of creating these beds was to remain competitive in the marketplace and to make the complex stand out. "Not only among other apartments, but internally as well," Cowan explains. "The client has internal awards for their properties so it was important to make that property feel competitive even within its own company. The client's goal was also to use an attractive landscape as a marketing tool for maintaining high occupancy rates."

Since the apartment complex was off of a main road it was important to use a variety of colors that "popped" and drew people into the complex. Once in, an attractive "color-brick-road" created

with an assortment of plants is easy to follow all the way to the apartment's leasing office. The complex has about 15 beds, plus some hanging planters and some pots in the pool area. Cowan changes color twice a year, and is always switching up the varieties when she makes her changes. "It'd be easy to just go back to the same thing because you know it works and people like it, but if you plant the same thing year after year the client is going to get tired of it," she says. "This client wants to look different and stand out and that means keeping it fresh."

For their work on this property, NatureScapes won the 2008 MALTA Seasonal Color Distinction Award for a multi-family property as well as a 2007 Southeast Regional Award for Best Flower



A walk-by bed featuring a combination of scaevola, setcreasea, begonias and caladium.

Display by Prescott owners Mid-America Apartment Communities. In addition, because Mid-America owns a variety of other properties, Cowan's effort on this job has led to future work. 🌱

The author is a freelance writer based in Royersford, Pa.

DESIGN DETAILS

Company: NatureScapes, based in Lilburn, Ga.

Revenue: \$10 million

Client/service mix: 80% Condominium HOAs; 20% commercial

Employees: 130

PRESCOTT APARTMENTS PROJECT

Project area: 943 square feet

Total labor hours: Bed preparation: 4 hours; Installation: 12 man-hours

Total design hours: Including coming up with design, implementing computer design and proposal presentation to client: 4 hours

Subcontracted services: None

Key plant materials used: New Gold Lantana, Scaevola Blue Wonder, Annual Vinca, Portulaca Yubi, Duranta. **Why?** Because they are water-smart plants, low maintenance, and insect- and disease-resistant. When water restrictions were relieved, Begonias were also added to the plant pallet.

Equipment used: Tillers, shovels, blowers, rakes, hand trowels

Materials: Soil amendments, a granular fertilizer which included slow and quick release products and fungicide