

# Down to Earth Landscape Design and Construction: *A True Calling*



The Urbanski family — *Standing left to right:* son Olek, daughters Monika, Joanna “Asia,” and Julia and son-in-law, Christopher. *Seated:* Lucian and Anna.

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Photography provided by: **Lucian & Anna Urbanski**

In 1982, Anna Urbanski’s toddler daughter Monika was near death. The best doctor in Poland advised Anna and her husband that the child’s only hope was to move to the United States to escape the toxic environment and to receive medical treatment. Soon after Anna’s husband Lucian left to begin the process of establishing a home for them in America, martial law was declared in Poland, which meant Anna had to start over again in obtaining passports and permission to leave the country. This led to the family asking for, and being granted, political asylum. Ultimately, Anna





**Above:** One of Anna's ponds nearing completion. Anna in foreground with two of her "muscle men," Ty and Clay.

**Inset (right)** shows the waterfall feature cascading into the many layers of this pond's depths.

**Facing page:** Anna's first pond in which the owner was very involved in the build, with Anna's supervision.

and her two children (Monika and son Olek) were able to join Lucian. They lived in a relative's un air-conditioned attic in terrible heat as her husband worked and Anna strove to care for her growing family (two more daughters, Julia and Joanna, were born), learn English and acclimate to a new country.

Decades later, she is proud of her immigrant family's success, and she is grateful—grateful that the United States allowed them to enter the country for humanitarian reasons; that her daughter thrived with the medical care and diet that were possible here; that after a few years her husband was able to find work in his field of expertise, electro-mechanical engineering; and that she was able to pursue a dream vocation.

Anna's original education was in archaeology. In fact, she met her husband in the Polish Archaeological Museum in Warsaw where she worked and where he had been hired



to design and install security systems for priceless international exhibits. However, since childhood, she has loved nature and natural materials such as stone, so when the family settled into a large rural property in Mount Savage, near Frostburg, Maryland, and Anna had no opportunity to work in archaeology, she decided to learn all she could about landscaping and building natural ponds. She took a two-year correspondence course in landscape design, obtaining her diploma in six months. She continued her pond building education based on the methods of Aquascape, Inc., and built a pond on her own property.





PHOTO BY DEBBIE DAVIS

**Just a few of Anna's many beautiful landscape designs — with and without water features. Her designs often include rock structures, streams, waterfalls and lush vegetation.**

**Inset: Anna with the Butterfly Koi fish "Mermaid," with the history of being relocated three times — from the pet shop to Anna's pond, then to a client's pond on the East Coast, then back to Cumberland, Maryland, for a permanent location in a larger pond.**

Soon, neighbors and friends were clamoring for her to assist them with similar projects; she traces her "Down to Earth" business to these early projects beginning in 1993. In the decades since, her husband and son have worked with her when they could, and she has hired other laborers. She relies on her "forewoman" Edith to supervise on site, and some members of Edith's family are also on the crew. Anna has never established a website because clients find her via "word of mouth."

When requests come in to provide maintenance or extensions of gardens she has designed, Anna gives these "children" of hers priority. She says she usually spends the early part of the season (until around the Fourth of July) taking care of these existing projects before she turns to new

landscape designs each year.

Anna feels she has found her true calling. She embraces methods that lead to balanced micro-ecosystems that will maintain

good health with minimal chemicals and other interventions. She stocks the ponds with fish, and other animal life is naturally attracted to the beautiful water features she creates. Her plans often include pond-less waterfalls, streams, rock structures, and plantings that develop into lush scenes.

Down to Earth has designed and installed projects all over the mid-Atlantic area, but these days Anna tries to take new work that is within a one hour drive of Mount Savage, Maryland.

The twist of fate that led Anna and her family to move to the United States has resulted in her discovery of the work she was meant to do, and has allowed her, over more than two decades of landscape creation, to give people what she describes as "a little piece of heaven" in their backyards.