



Sloping Front Yard Tamed with Historical Granite Hardscape

Access is restored to the front of this Wakefield, Mass. home with reclaimed granite slabs used for retention and natural looking walkways

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There's more to the story than meets the eye in the front yard of this colonial home in Massachusetts.

Perched on an awkwardly shaped mound of earth, the owner of this home wanted some way of accessing her front door from the street. The unwieldy front yard lacked character and was largely underutilized.

Seeking to retain the slope and create a very natural-looking walkway, she was referred to Olde New England Granite, suppliers and installers of reclaimed historic hardscape materials. Using large slabs of granite quarried more than 100 years ago, pieces of history were used to transform her front yard.

Project Highlights:

- **Location:** Wakefield, Ma'ss.
- **Property size:** Roughly 4,000 square feet
- **Project Cost:** \$40-50,000



Before



After

"The owner had an architect that didn't know how to approach this onerous site," says Biz Reed, executive vice president/COO of Olde New England Granite. "We've had a lot of experience with hillside retention projects, and we know what works. We designed and sketched a basic plan, and luckily, the owner gave us free reign to make any changes in the field. When you work on a site like this, you have to be able to make quick decisions. She trusted our judgment."

Retaining the Slope

"The key to this project," explains Reed, "was to use substantial-sized pieces of granite. The rule of thumb is the steeper the hill, the larger the pieces. A lot of people spend a fortune on plant material trying to retain slopes of this size. Unfortunately, it oftentimes doesn't hold. We use a combination of plant material and hardscape for the best outcome."

To start, Reed's crew used a small excavator to create a temporary 'road' to gain access to the top of the hill. The 'road' would eventually become a natural-looking walkway. Working from the top down, the crew created shelf-like spaces in the hillside for the pieces of granite.

"We haul in all sizes and types of granite that we think we will need," explains Reed, "and then it really becomes a puzzle to figure out. You need a good eye for what pieces are required, and estimating is difficult." In addition, one of the most challenging parts to a job like this is access and logistics. "There wasn't a lot of staging area to store the material and spread it out to see what we had to work with," he says, "so it took multiple trips to the yard to get just the right pieces."



Before



After

Next, each selected piece of granite is hoisted and swung into place using a large excavator. "The 'shelf' that each piece sits on is prepared flat and compacted, then we key the piece into the hillside," he says. Each piece is chosen based on its shape, size and the function it is best suited for. "Many of the pieces were flat which lend themselves to a

walkway," Reed explains.

The large excavator was also used to place plant materials. A variety of plants were selected to balance the hardscape, provide groundcover to offset erosion, and for aesthetics. To counterbalance the walkway, a large specimen clump white birch tree was planted at the top left. Forsythia was planted along the right side. Other shrubs and flowering plants included PJM rhododendrons, sedum 'Autumn Joy', day lilies 'Happy Returns', ornamental grasses, hydrangea 'Endless Summer', vinca minor groundcover, creeping juniper, and rock phlox.

"Projects like this are very time-consuming and there are a lot of challenges for homes with ledge-like landscapes and erosion problems," Reed says. Even though it's not easy, the look that reclaimed granite lends to a home appears to be worth the obstacles. "Reclaimed granite has the age and the venerable look of New England. These pieces were quarried over 100 years ago. They not only look impressive, but they are rich in character and history," he says.

Olde New England Granite repurposes granite material from all over New England. They currently stock a wide variety of hardscape products such as historic Boston foundation/seawall block, trestle and bridge support block, curbing, pillars, posts, turn-of-the-century cobblestones, antique brick paving blocks, window lintels, granite monuments and more. Their two-acre granite farm is an impressive display of nicely arranged reclaimed pieces in all shapes and sizes. Pieces are also available for shipping.

Learn more at: www.oldenewenglandgranite.com

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