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## Big Boy Blocks

### A commercial retaining wall system finds a niche in the residential market

*by Fernando Pagés Ruiz*

When Bob Hampton built his dream home on a Nebraska hillock, the best views on the site came at a steep price: a nearly vertical backyard. Hampton considered the option of building retaining walls to level the garden, but the excavation costs and backbreaking labor of stacking thousands of Keystones discouraged him. Then he discovered Stone Strong, a large, hollow precast block that promised to do, for his backyard, what it did for bridge abutments and tidal walls. Namely, the large-dimension block could hold up the dirt around his house without compromising the foundation and without extensive digging for structural tiebacks and gravel.

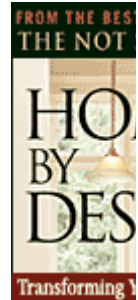


**Commercial pavers hold back a lot of earth in residential landscapes.**

Although mostly used for commercial construction projects, Stone Strong has made inroads into the residential market, where it often represents the best option for retaining walls if the size and surcharge demand mass and strength. In Hampton's case, it meant he could stack the large, hollow precast concrete blocks tight to his neighbor's property line and not worry about the weight of his house blowing out the backyard retaining walls.

Beyond structural considerations, tall walls stacked with small blocks can look artificial and out of scale. Stone Strong can stack almost vertically and looks natural on the landscape because it appears like massive blocks of chiseled stone.

Made with ordinary 4000-psi air-entrained concrete, Stone Strong blocks come in 24-, 6-, and 3-sq. ft. sizes to accommodate large and small structures. The blocks interlock precisely and feature built-in reinforcement-bar handles that make it easy to lift and place each lightweight unit with a standard excavator or rubber tire loader.

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Since Stone Strong was not a product Hampton 's landscape contractor had installed before, he negotiated a time and materials contract. Hampton was delighted when he saw that a three-man crew could lay about 2,000 sq. ft. of block in a day, nearly six times the production of a small-block installation. This helped with project schedules and reduced labor costs. In the end, this crossover product actually cost Hampton less money than a standard retaining wall and turned what would have been a bank too steep for a barbeque into bona fide backyard.

For more about Stone Strong Retaining Wall Systems, visit the company's Web site at [www.stonestrong.com](http://www.stonestrong.com).

Fernando Pagés Ruiz builds homes in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Photo: Bob Hampton

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