One of landscape architect Ted Viator's biggest problems is getting people to understand his role in the design and building process.

"I'm not a contractor. I'm not a horticulturalist," says Viator. "As a landscape architect, I try to take my client's ideas, likes and dislikes, and use this as a basis to build an exterior living environment that can be functional, good-looking, practical and also exciting."

The key words are "exterior living environment." Viator says his work is basically the same as that of the main project architect on a house or building. But instead of designing interior spaces, his "rooms" are on the outside.

To be sure, selecting the appropriate flowers, shrubs and trees for a site is a major component of Viator's work. However, when doing a comprehensive landscape plan for a client, his design responsibilities are much more extensive.

A case in point is his plan for the home of Mickey and Beth Marceaux in Greenbriar.

The Marceaux home had a major landscape asset that was also a serious liability. The rear of the lot fronted the Vermilion River, but the backyard was so steeply sloped it was unusable.

To solve this problem, Viator suggested that the backyard be terraced from top to bottom. He designed a multi-level patio consisting of brick terraces and steps, framed with iron rails. Viator also recommended that the Marceauxs build a fountain in the center of this patio to provide a focal point from the house and to add the pleasing dimension of sound to the environment. He installed lights in the trees—so-called moon lighting—to make the space accessible at night.

Viator's plan, now executed, allows the Marceauxs to take full advantage of their backyard and its river views. The outdoor space is an excellent venue for

"Any job has to reflect the client," says Ted Viator, shown here at the home of Dr. Stephen Abshire.
parties and intimate family gatherings.

Viator faced a different set of needs at the home of Dr. Stephen Abshire on Twin Oaks Boulevard. The Abshire home is moderately sized but situated on a two-acre lot dotted with several large live oak trees.

The abundance of property was one of the attractions of the home when it was purchased several years ago. The owners were very outdoor-oriented and enjoyed entertaining—in large groups and small, formal and informal. Teen-aged children in the family enjoyed having their friends over for visits.

Viator was retained to enhance the natural beauty of the site as well as to create spaces suitable for extensive outdoor activities. Working in collaboration with the architect, Viator recommended that the owners position a guest house and swimming pool in the rear corner of the yard under one of the oak trees. The swimming pool, which was designed in a geometric form with a waterfall at one end, is both a spot for recreation as well as a water feature for the entire garden.

Plantings were of a tropical nature in keeping with the taste of Dr. Abshire. Sago palms, hibiscus and banana trees dominate the vegetation around the pool, which creates a tropical oasis in the middle of the city.

Recommending appropriate vegetation is a major, if not dominant, aspect of Viator’s service to his clients.

His taste tends toward plants traditional to Louisiana—azaleas, camellias and crepe myrtles—because they look good and flourish in this climate and soil.

He is pleased that the fad for plants imported here from California is dying out. “They just don’t do as well as your old Louisiana plants,” says Viator.

Viator is not enthusiastic about recommending a rose garden “unless it’s kept up and done in a very formal manner.”

The New Iberia native does not hide