



## Tree Company Branches Out

by John Wagner

Have you seen a 45-ton, 75-foot spruce tree you want to wrap up and bring home? Or maybe you've spotted a cute little stand of Japanese maples—30 tonners—that would look great sprouting blossoms in your backyard. We know just the guy to call.

But hold up, because moving monster trees is not something you dream up over beer and ribs at Saturday's barbecue to do for kicks Sunday morning.

For 17 years, urban-foresters Steve Clark and Associates, of Brentwood, Tenn., have been advising developers on how to transplant trees or preserve them on site. In many cases, Clark and his company consult during the planning stages of a project, and architects will actually change a building's design to feature trees that Clark has managed to keep in the ground and healthy. Clark and his team sometimes come on site before land is purchased to appraise the standing trees and top soil. Their estimated financial value can even be favored in when negotiating a bank loan. Clark insists that saving trees is cost-effective. Besides, Clark emphasizes, "People like trees!"

"Just consider all the replacement cost for one tree cut down during construction," Clark explains. "An oak tree with a 9-inch circumference costs only about \$250 to relocate, but \$1,200 dollars to buy. On one project, where a developer might otherwise have thought nothing of spending \$100,000 just on shrubs, we were hired

to move eight big trees."

Moving big trees isn't cheap. But if you consider that the value of the land increases because it becomes a more desirable piece of property, and then factor in landscaping fees and the cost of growing big trees from saplings, Clark might just have a point.

"That site looked a lot different with those big beautiful trees than if you had spread some shrubs around,"



The developer changed the original design of this Texas industrial-park building to feature trees left in place during construction.

Clark said. "After we were done, some of the people who worked there thought they were at the wrong place when they pulled up and saw the trees. They got back in their cars and

drove away," he says. Three of the eight trees they moved were Norway-spruces, as tall as 75 feet and weighing up to 87,000 pounds (see photos below).

When moving such big trees, Clark's team starts by evaluating the project, the trees' condition, and the soil over a period of months. They prune the root systems to concentrate the root ball near the tree. Before the move, Clark lines up low boys, cranes,

it off if somebody doesn't show."

A trench is dug around the root ball, and the ball is wrapped in burlap. Then steel girdles are slid under the burlap-wrapped root ball through hand-dug tunnels. The girdles are hooked up to a chain-cinch system. Strung under the steel girdles for extra support are five, 150-pound metal plates.

Next, cables are carefully threaded down through the tree's branches, and a 150-ton crane puts the tree on a low boy. Never is the tree tilted or laid on its side.

"The low-boy driver thought this was going to be easy," Clark said, "but when we loaded the tree, the low started grunting and groaning; [the driver] went from casual to worried in a hurry."

Clark is able to calculate very closely the weight of the tree, so he generally knows what to expect. But it rained the night before the move, causing this tree to suck up between 6,000 and 10,000 extra pounds of rain water.

After a short trip on the low boy, the tree was placed in a bed of top soil. Once the tree is in place, we have some rain "installed." We put hoses that can make it rain any time we want. We apply a good mulch at the tree's base. When you see trees in the forest, they have mulch around their base, not grass. That's the way God does it. He does it good, and we figure we'll do it His way and maybe get the same results." ■



It's a cinch: These Norway-spruce trees (top left) were recently moved to this Washington, D.C. site. They are up to 75 feet high and weigh as much as 45 tons. Before moving such a large tree, its root ball is wrapped in burlap and supported by steel girdles and a chain-cinch system (bottom left). One of the trees (center) sucked up between 6,000 and 10,000 pounds of rainwater the night before the move, making the crane operator and the low-boy driver a tad nervous. Nonetheless, a 150-ton crane (right) successfully lowered the spruce into a carefully prepared bed of topsoil.