

# Playground manufacturer blends recycled materials with nature

By Emily Vizzo

VISTA — In a child's world, dirt is for digging, water is for splashing and grassy hills are for rolling down.

At Progressive Design Playgrounds, owners John Ogden and Margaret Ryan believe there is a way to spark imaginative play among children, and it doesn't involve a stark metal slide.

They hope their "outdoor learning environments" stimulate children's imaginations with playground equipment that incorporates natural substances such as dirt, water, grass and sand.

"For quite some time, children's advocates and political leaders have expressed concern that disconnection with nature has adverse effects on children," Ryan said. "There's a nationwide movement to connect children to the outdoors."

Ryan and Ogden, who are married, purchased Progressive Design Playgrounds in 2004. The company, which has 20 employees, focuses on designing and manufacturing play equipment using plastic lumber made from recycled milk jugs, said Ogden, who is the company's president.

These structures can be augmented with natural elements, such as slides built into a grassy hill, play creeks built from recycled plastic water troughs and sandy areas for digging. A setup can cost \$20,000, including the structure itself, installation and safety surfacing such as wood chips or grass.

Ogden and Ryan live in San Francisco with daughters Milla, 5, and Nadya, 2, although Ogden regularly commutes to Oceanside during the week.

Both Ogden and Ryan are from Virginia. Ogden graduated from Radford University with a history degree in 1991. Ryan graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with a mass communications degree the same year.

After college, Ogden spent about two years working as a U.S. Senate staff assistant and legislative aide. He later worked with America Online in business development, marketing, sales and management roles.



**Playground designer James Wood works on pieces for a play structure at Progressive Design Playgrounds. The company, which recently moved to Vista, designs for kids with nature in mind.** Eduardo Contreras | Union-Tribune

Ryan spent 15 years working in public relations. She's held executive positions in California and New York, and after moving to San Francisco with Ogden in 1998, she started her own public relations company.

Ogden, 39, and Ryan, 40, also run their own Sonoma County boutique winery, Olson Ogden Wines.

When clients call looking for a new playground, Ogden said designers help develop two-dimensional and three-dimensional plans that take into account space, budget, and the age of the children. Perfecting the design can take four to six weeks.

Once government safety requirements have been met and the site has been prepared, building a playground can take from one day to a few weeks, depending on its complexity, Ogden said.

Yvonne Abdelrahim, director at Tutor Time in Oceanside, said children enjoy clambering on the rock-climbing wall and crawling in the tunnels of the Progressive Design Playgrounds structure installed there in 2007.

"They love the play structure," Abdelrahim said. "It has a little something for everyone."

"At that age, kids are learning how to coordinate their hand and leg

## Progressive Design Playgrounds

**WHERE** 2458 S. Santa Fe Ave., Vista

**PHONE** (800) 585-3131

**ONLINE** pdplay.com

movements to be able to get on the rocks. It challenges them in the gross-motor-skills way. It's the centerpiece of our play yard."

Ogden said the company has paid close attention to child-development research that indicates children learn and play better in more natural recreational environments.

"It allows them to learn without being told how to learn," Ogden said.

It made sense to them as parents. Their daughter Milla frequently came home from preschool happily soaked from experimenting with the playground water fountain, Ryan said.

"It allows them to step outside their comfort zone and experience the world around them," Ryan said.

Change continues to arrive for the company. Progressive Design Playgrounds is just completing a move from its Oceanside location to a new facility in Vista.

"We really see these outdoor learning environments as the next generation of play," Ryan said.

"It's really come full circle. We're living in a generation of Wii and PlayStation, and there really needs to be more activities that engage children in the outdoors."

**Emily Vizzo is a freelance writer who lives in San Diego.**