



HOW TO DESIGN
**YOUR
DREAM
GARDEN**

EXPERT TIPS FOR CREATING
A GARDEN THAT FEELS GOOD

IS YOUR GARDEN A NIGHTMARE?

- Are you struggling with a small space?
- Does your garden miss the mark for your family's lifestyle?
- Did you inherit a messy design?
- Does it require too much maintenance for your busy schedule?

If you answered yes to any of these, don't give up...



WITH GOOD DESIGN CHOICES YOU CAN HAVE YOUR DREAM GARDEN.

The right changes can transform even the worst outdoor space into an exceptional garden.

In the following pages you'll find expert design secrets for making the most of your garden.

- You'll learn how to find your garden's power spot and use patterns more purposefully.
- You'll discover ways to enhance the views within and beyond your garden.
- You'll get tips for creating a landscape awash in color, and how not to overdo it—and so much more.

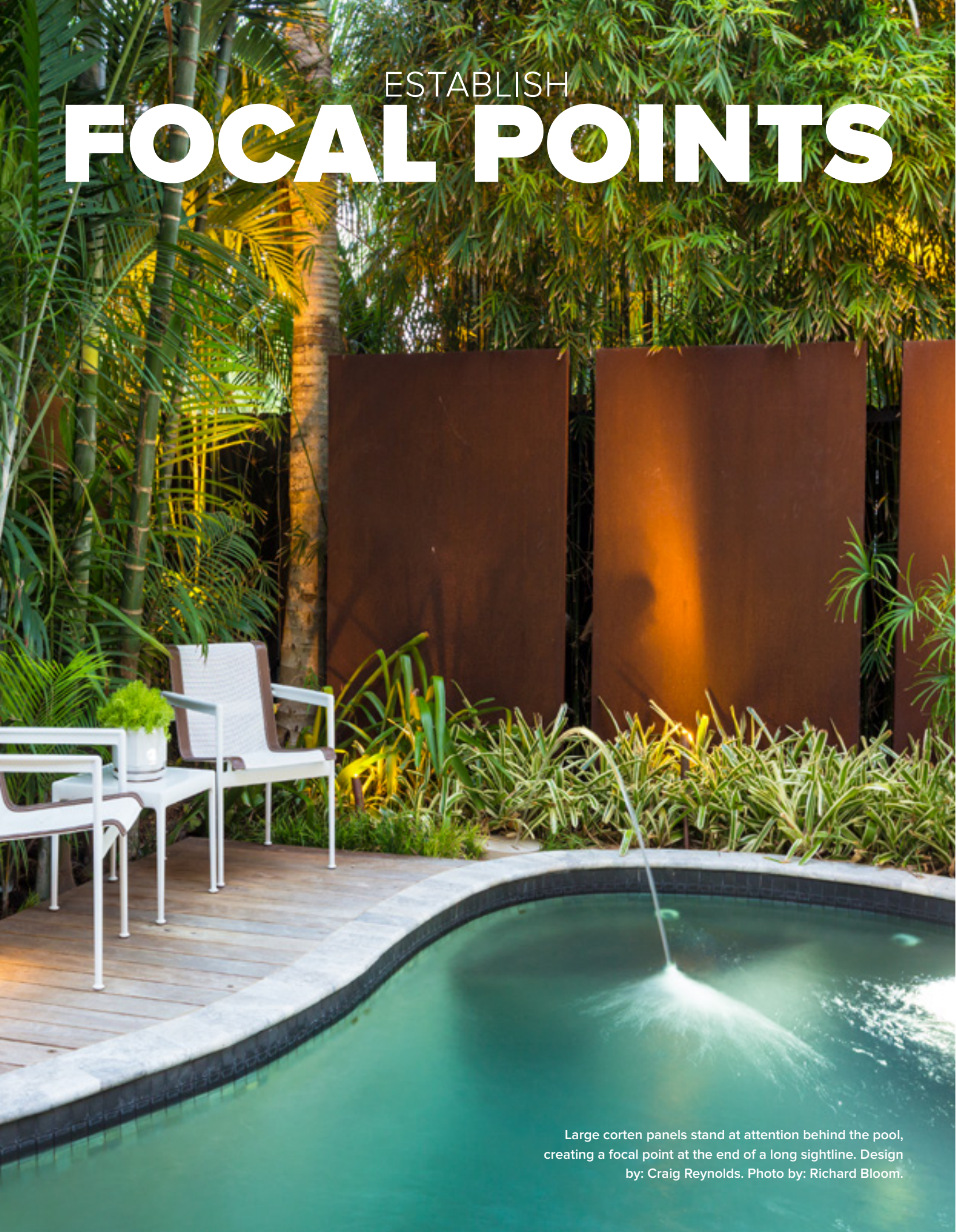
Stop stressing over your garden and start enjoying it!

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ESTABLISH FOCAL POINTS



Large corten panels stand at attention behind the pool, creating a focal point at the end of a long sightline. Design by: Craig Reynolds. Photo by: Richard Bloom.

“Create a definite focal point to anchor your garden—this could be an entire area, such as a formal knot garden, or something as simple as a bench or piece of statuary,” says Maurice Horn, co-owner of Joy Creek Nursery in Scappoose, OR.

Find your garden’s power spot

Not sure where to establish a focal point? Here’s some advice:

“A site’s power spot is any place that seems more interesting than any other. It may be just a high section of lawn, a shaded corner, or a hidden rock,” says Jan Johnsen, designer and author of *Heaven is a Garden*.

To determine where it is, walk around. Stand quietly in different areas and feel the mood each one generates.

Once you decide where the power spot is, here are some ways to signify the area:



This garden’s power spot is the corner of the low stone retaining wall built into the lawn. “People like to sit on the wall, talk, and enjoy the all-encompassing view of the Hudson River,” Johnsen says. “It’s an ‘ahhhh’ moment.” Illustration by: David Despau.



Play with patterns

Want something that visitors to your garden can interact with? Try this idea from Chanticleer, a renowned garden outside Philadelphia:

When Bill Thomas arrived, the garden began using patterns more purposefully with the intent to draw the eye into the garden and invite exploration. Each pattern is created with the scale of its surroundings in mind. In a woodland area with large trees a pattern might be 300 feet long.

Thomas notes: “Small details are important, too. A spiraling metal handrail or an intricate raked pattern are eye-catching components of the garden.”

CRAFT DESIRABLE VIEWS

In this Key West garden, *Ficus repens* greens up a white stucco wall, while a borrowed view of neighboring palms fosters the illusion that this garden continues beyond its quarter-acre boundary. “We used what was next door so that we didn’t have to plant on the inside of the wall,” Reynolds says. “This gave us a little more space for a patio.”
Photo by: Richard Bloom.

Not everyone is blessed with incredible garden views. But luckily, with a few expert tricks, you can create compelling vistas that lend depth and perspective and lead the eye through the scene.

Here are four ways to enhance views within and beyond your garden:

01 Edit out unwelcome views

Ted Flato of Lake|Flato in San Antonio recommends carefully siting structures like sheds, outbuildings, and screening walls to “edit out” neighboring houses or other unwanted views. A partially blocked view can give the impression of unlimited nature surrounding your home, even if the neighbor’s party deck sits just behind your shed.

02 Borrow views from beyond

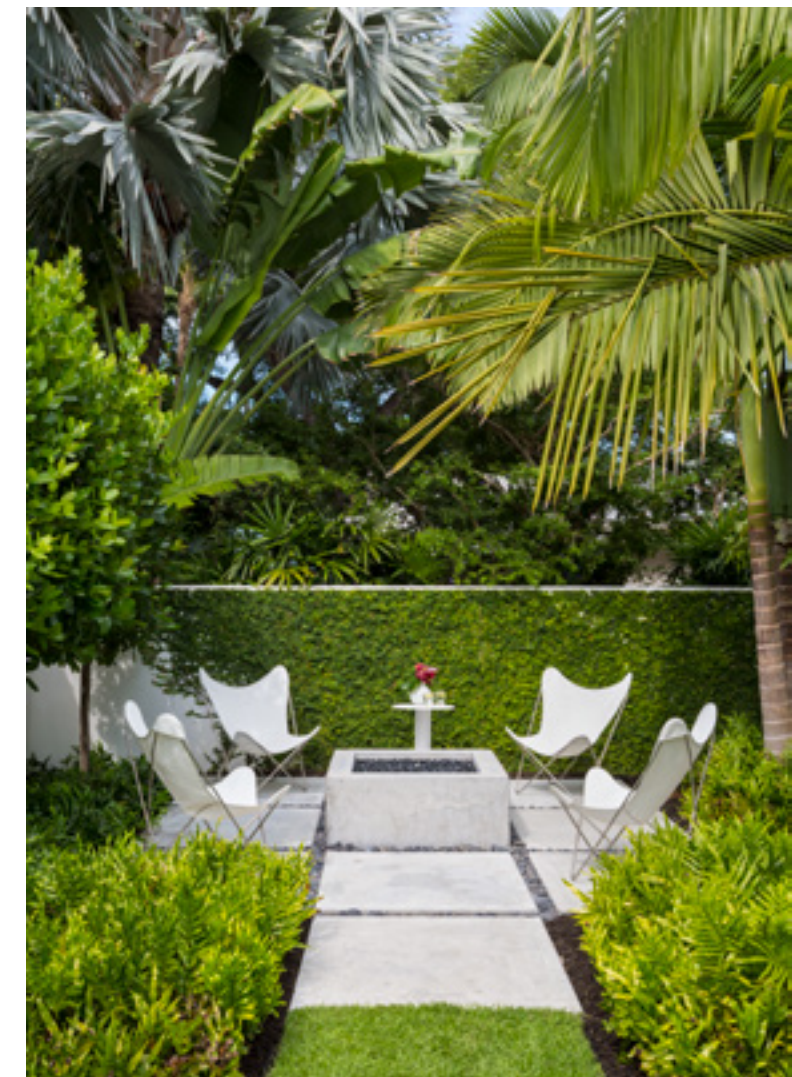
“Use the Japanese technique of borrowing scenery and incorporate a view beyond your garden,” suggests Johnsen. You can do this simply, by placing plants or fencing to frame a distant rooftop or a neighbor’s pine tree or crabapple. Another easy method is to keep shrubs along the property border low—you’ll capture nearby and distant views, plus your garden will appear larger.

03 Make windows, frame views

Developing vistas in a garden breaks up monotony and allows visitors to discover new elements. “Instead of always looking down on plants or seeing them next to you, views are framed,” says Thomas. The pattern of a planting might run through a wide field. It’s more interesting to see from an outlook high above. Or a window in a wall draws attention upward, as it does in Chanticleer’s Ruin Garden. “You look up through the windows, and all of a sudden you notice the tree canopy and the filtered light,” he says.

04 Embrace the long view

Small gardens gain a sense of depth when you accentuate long views across the garden. “Instead of making a design you meander through, take advantage of one single, long view,” Key West landscape architect Craig Reynolds suggests. Emphasize its length with a straight path and dramatic focal points at each end.



A PARTIALLY BLOCKED
VIEW CAN GIVE THE
IMPRESSION OF
UNLIMITED NATURE
SURROUNDING YOUR
HOME



Johnsen installed this simple rectangular pool and lined it up with the Hudson River beyond to accentuate the river view and support (rather than compete with) the landscape. Illustration by: David Despau.



INCORPORATE **PERSONAL TOUCHES**

At Lotusland, naturally weathered and tumbled stones arranged in a mosaic pattern border a red brick pathway leading toward the Neptune fountain.
Photo by: Ngoc Minh Ngo.

Johnsen believes that the most personal part of a design is anything that gladdens your heart: an artful accent, a fire pit, a woodland garden dotted with foamflowers and ferns.

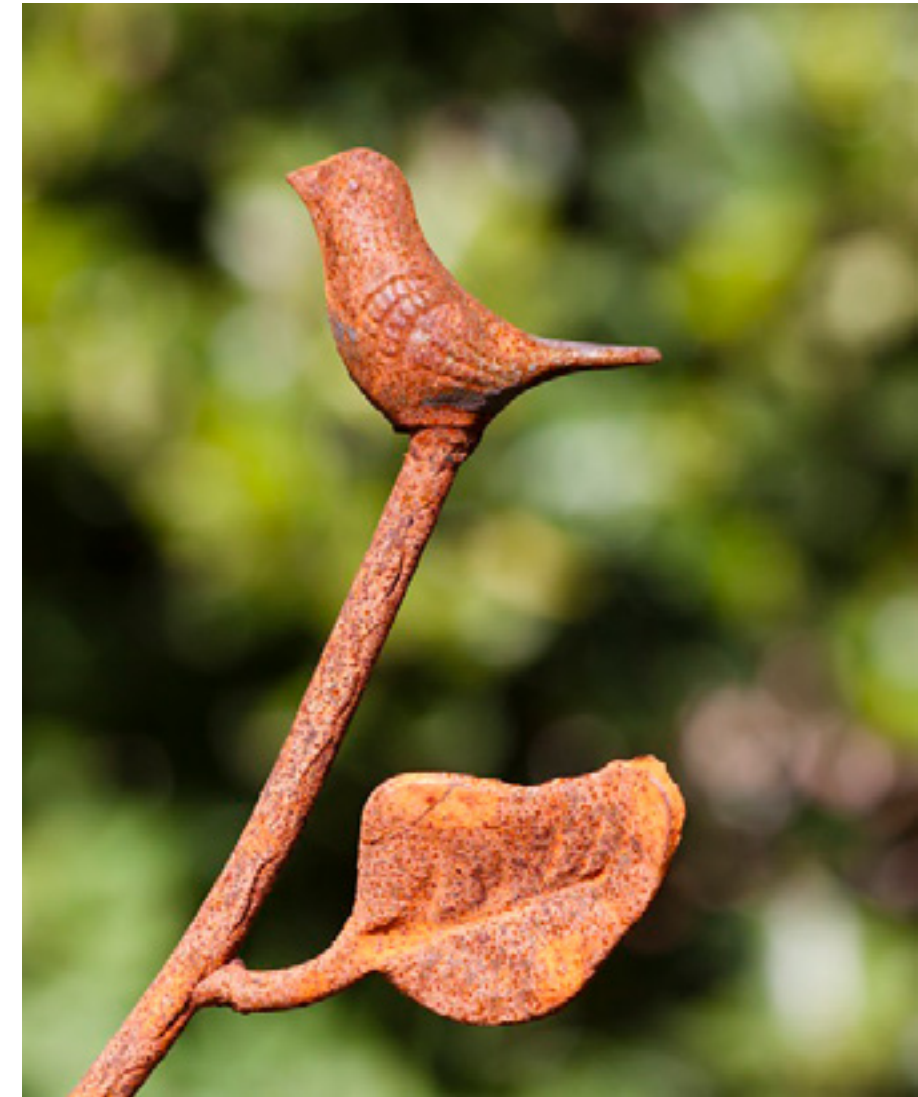
Here's how two of America's most inspiring gardens surprise and delight:

Play more

When selecting plants and ornaments, follow your personal taste. If you have a significant personal item, give it a place of prominence. And if there's a lot of uniformity to your plantings, as there is in the distinct gardens at Lotusland in Montecito, California, there's less need to worry about sticking with "rules" or a single style. The succulent garden features a large steel sculpture of sunflowers and several stone statues. There are lead roosters in the bromeliad garden. The Parterre boasts whimsical pebble mosaics and a restored statue of Neptune.

If an artisan can create it, let them

Since Chanticleer is closed in the winter, many of the gardeners—a lot of them moonlight as carpenters and blacksmiths—use this time to make furniture and other elements for the garden. They are always adding more: a metal handrail here, a hand-carved wood bridge there, bamboo edging along one of the many paths on the property. "These elements add to the craftsman aura of Chanticleer," says Thomas. "It is not a garden with mass production at its core. It is a hand-touched, intimate garden."



DON'T BE AFRAID
TO PUT YOUR
THUMBPRINT ON
YOUR GARDEN—
AFTER ALL IT'S
YOURS!

USE PLANTINGS EFFECTIVELY

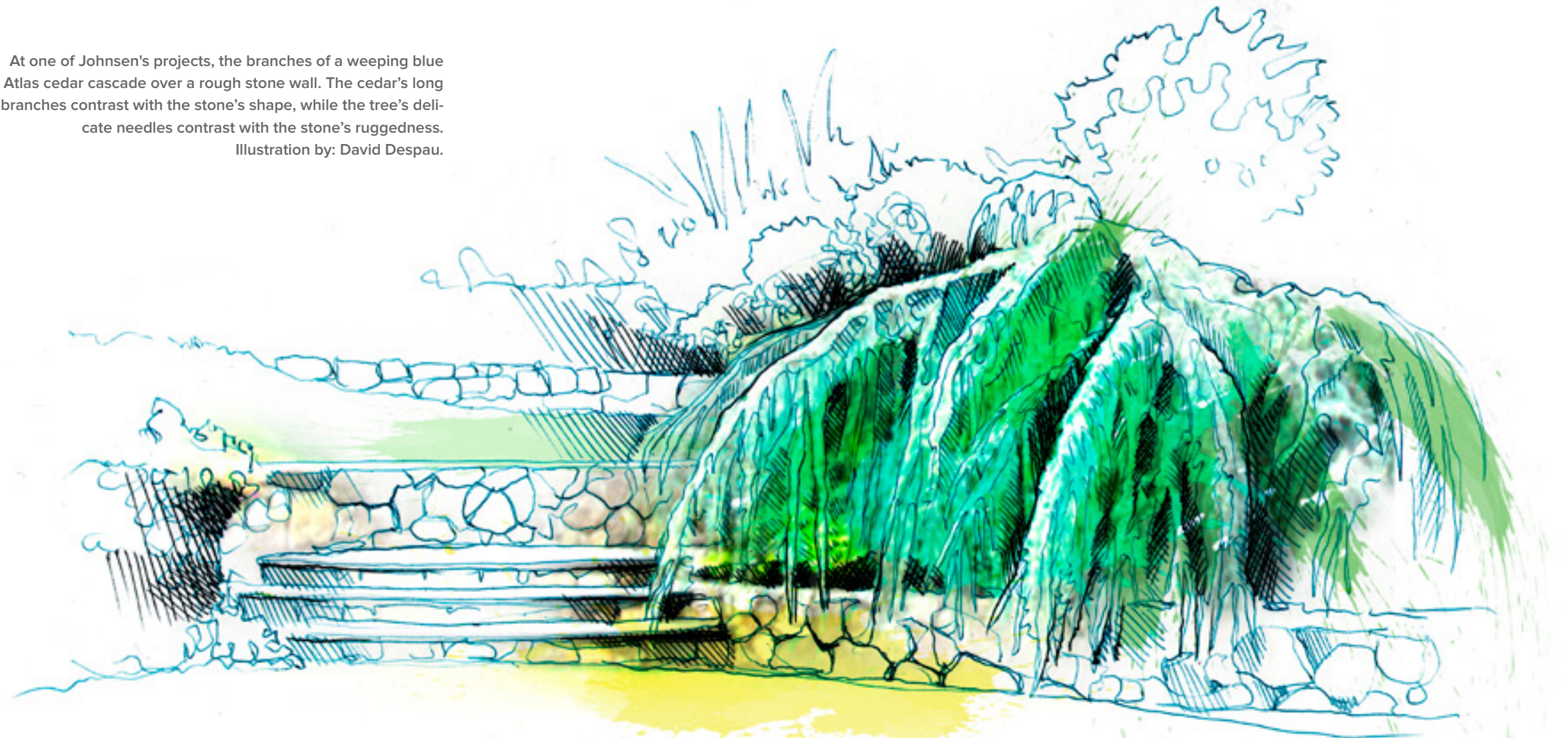
Plants are essential to creating an enjoyable garden. They offer color, texture, fragrance and more.



An ipe boardwalk floats over massed bromeliads and *Philodendron* 'Burlie Marx', with dwarf *Psychotria ligustrifolia* and fern *Podocarpus* adding height and texture along the fence. Photo by: Richard Bloom.

At one of Johnsen's projects, the branches of a weeping blue Atlas cedar cascade over a rough stone wall. The cedar's long branches contrast with the stone's shape, while the tree's delicate needles contrast with the stone's ruggedness.

Illustration by: David Despau.



Pick powerhouse plants

When selecting plants for your landscape, Oehme, van Sweden principal Eric Groft and his team suggest:

- **Plan for at least three seasons of interest.**
- **Make sure one-third of the plants are evergreen.**
- **Include plants to support wildlife.**
- **Opt for plants with low needs (water, maintenance, fertilizer).**
- **Intermingle plants in triads—choose one for color, a second to punctuate, and a third to blur the edges.**
- **Use plants with fragrance, movement, and tactility to feed your senses.**

Keep plantings simple

“If you want a garden to enjoy with less maintenance, pick a few plants, make sure they’re happy growing there, and allow them to grow. Learn the ability to edit,” says New York City-based landscape architect Edmund Hollander.

He also suggests growing well-chosen native plants because they require less traditional maintenance such as pruning, fertilizing and watering.

Repeat plants, colors & shapes

According to Keith Wiley of Wildside in Devon, England, the repetition of key plants, shapes, or colors provides a sense of calm and visual unity.

Select plants that meet the following criteria:

- **Have a long season**
- **Don't look untidy after flowering**
- **Flourish in your garden's conditions**

But don't overdo it, he warns. Limit the number of different shapes and colors; it's difficult to take in too much variety.

Contrast and balance plantings

Johnsen believes that plants can be the ultimate delight of a garden. Make sure there is a balance of fine and bold, dark and light, soft and hard. The contrasts enliven a garden and provide the balance that we all can sense and enjoy.

For example, the delicate beauty of a spreading threadleaf Japanese maple is highlighted when it's contrasted against a low-lying stone or hanging over a wall. Similarly, the rigid blades of iris, yucca, or aloe come to life when surrounded by softer foliage.

Don't forget foliage

Emphasize greenery throughout the garden. “There are so many different textures, colors, and sizes of foliage at Chanticleer,” Thomas says. “And the flowers are often the accents.” In the Pond Garden, the lotus leaves on the pond are the main attraction; in the Teacup Garden, the large and colorful foliage of banana trees is mixed with texture-rich bromeliads and ferns.

Mass it

No matter what size space you're planting, “you need masses of things,” Reynolds says. “You may have five or six species of plants, and use maybe 10 of one, 20 of another, and 100 of the smaller groundcovers. Masses unify a textural, heavily planted garden.”

HARNESS THE POWER OF COLOR



“Color brings personality to the garden and is one of the primary factors in how a garden feels,” Johnsen says. Here, the large blooms of ‘Jackmanii’ clematis are trained over a white arbor and gate. Bringing color up to eye level—or better yet, above it— has a greater impact on the space. Illustration by: David Despau.

A landscape awash in color catches our eye, sends visual cues to birds, insects, and animals, and affects us all with intensity and contrast. The entire natural world reacts to the language of color.

Add colors you love

Johnsen encourages the use of colors you personally like in your garden. Of course, the personal meaning you find in any hue may be very different. Use your taste above all.

Once you’ve settled on your favorite colors, employ these tips from Wiley:

- **Play with color tones** – the same form repeated with subtle differences makes impact without dominating
- **Exploit opposites** – complimentary colors create juxtaposition that is fresh and lively
- **Add vibrant splashes** – occasional splashes of hot orange and red add a little thrill, but practice restraint—too many can feel tiring

Borrow from some colorful cultural associations:

- **Red is the color of excitement and power.**
- **Orange radiates fun.**
- **Yellow is the happy color.**
- **Green is the color of peace and renewal and is the most restful color to the eye.**
- **Blue lends depth and stability.**
- **Purple connotes higher wisdom and is associated with originality.**
- **White is the pure color of light and serenity.**



This sun-drenched slope at Wiley’s garden in Devon, England, is home to the shapes and colors that evoke open, sunny environments. Agapanthus in various shades of blue add depth, yellows provide a counterpoint, and grasses contribute movement with every breeze. Photo by: Richard Bloom.

Can you have too much color?

Color can be tricky. Here’s how not to overdo it:

Repeating colors in flowers and foliage is a good way to prevent chaos. According to Hollander, sticking to a few similar hues creates a feeling of harmony.

“You can’t have everything screaming at you in the garden. A palette of green plants gives the eyes a chance to rest,” says Thomas. Separate areas with intense color or high drama (think large, bold, multicolored foliage) with neutrals. “There’s often a visible calmness when people are in these restful spaces,” Thomas notes.

Johnsen tries to use local material on every project; she used garden stone from this site to build the low wall and nook around the pool. Native grasses are planted behind the wall. Illustration by: David Despau.



WORK WITH NATURE

Working with nature, rather than against it, will result in a garden with more authenticity, less maintenance and ultimately more enjoyment.

Take inspiration from your area's natural features

Johnsen advises taking a cue from natural scenes. Combining local stones with native plants creates a harmony between garden and surroundings that is palpable.

Horn suggests using nature as inspiration, even in the abstract. A dry rock bed or curving staircase can represent a flowing stream; the crimson red blooms of 'Lucifer' crocosmia can symbolize the element of fire.

Create environmentally unique gardens

Designing distinct spaces in which you grow a variety of plants will bring diverse wildlife into the garden.

Chanticleer has everything from large flower-filled hillsides that bring butterflies and bees to calm, dry woodlands where you can listen to the birds sing. "At home, gardeners can achieve this on a smaller scale," Thomas says. "For instance, a wet area of

their garden, a small pond perhaps, will house new, interesting flora and fauna that add life to the garden."

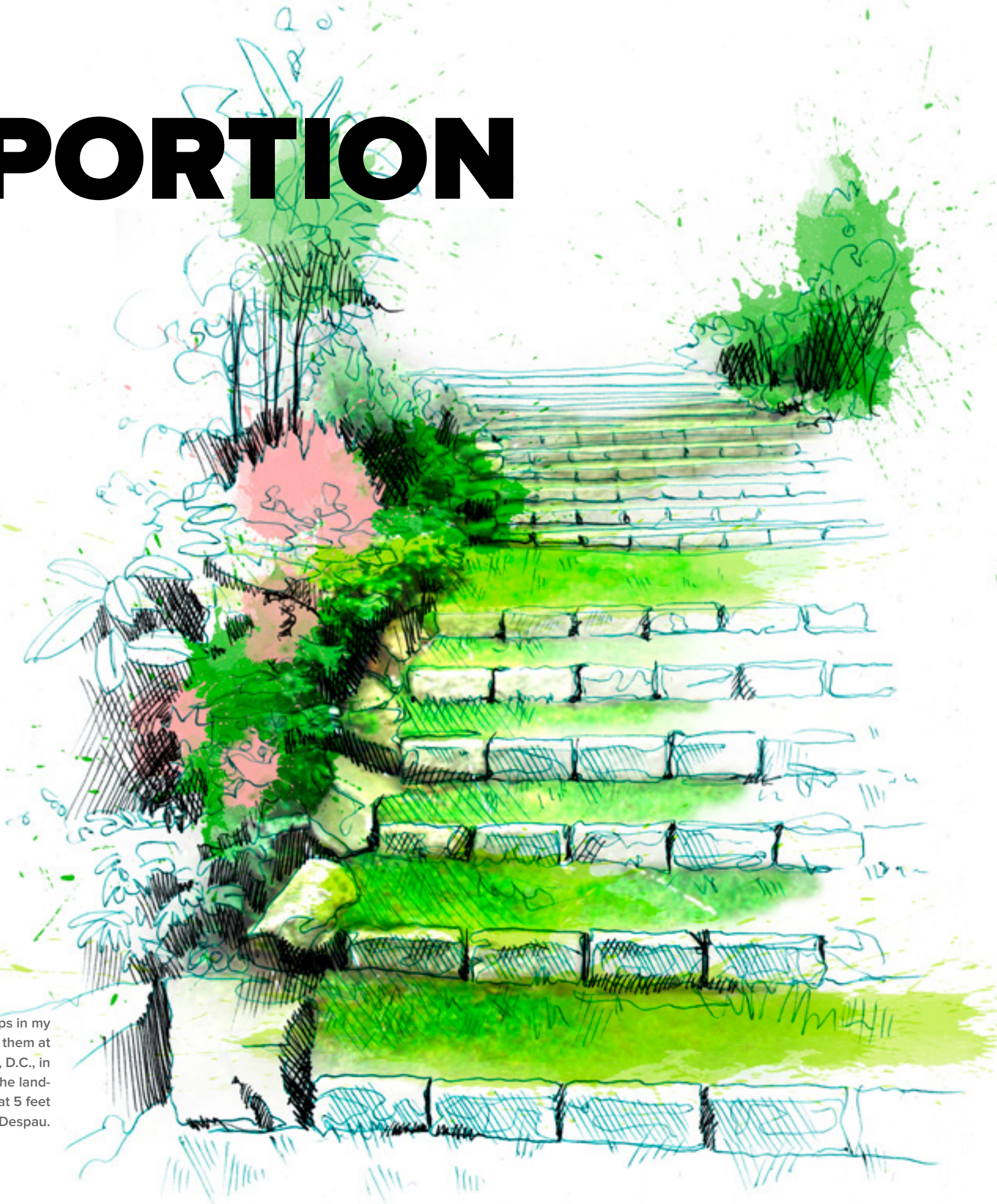
Be sustainable

This buzzword is still smart practice. Ahead of his time, Wolfgang Oehme counseled against using chemicals: "Wolfgang was green before there was even a word for it," notes Groft, principal. One Oehme, van Sweden & Associates mantra is, "if you can weed it, don't spray it." In other words, create a landscape that you can maintain without resorting to chemical input.



Afternoon sun shines through the leaves of a 300-year-old live oak tree. This cherished tree was a key element in the design of this house, hardscape, and gardens. The pool in front and the river alongside it were designed so as not to disturb its roots; and the plantings—all native or native-compatible—build a supportive woodland ecosystem. A path made of local Lueders limestone creates a rough-and-tumble terrain filled with Berkeley sedge. Design by: Christine Ten Eyck. Photo by: Richard Bloom.

PAY ATTENTION TO **PROPORTION**



“I’ve been incorporating grass steps in my landscapes ever since I first saw them at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C., in the early 1970s,” Johnsen says. The landing areas have natural proportions at 5 feet by 8 feet. Illustration by: David Despau.

Proportion refers to the comparative size and scale of the different features in a garden. When all the elements are in proportion, a garden feels comfortable and inviting.

Follow nature’s proportions

The golden proportion, represented by the Greek letter Phi, is the mathematical ratio 1:1.618 seen in natural forms. It’s found in the proportions of the human body, in the ratio between the forearm and the hand; it’s in the pattern of a sunflower’s seed head, the arrangement of petals on a rose, and in the spiral shape of a nautilus shell.

Our unspoken familiarity with this ratio instills a sense of harmony in outdoor spaces that contain it. For example, a rectangular space with the short and long sides in the proportion of Phi—say, 12 by 19.4 feet—just feels right. “Terraces and landings built in the shape of a golden rectangle and bordered with plant beds in the Phi proportion are immediately appealing,” says Johnsen.

Bigger isn’t always better

Proper proportion is key to a successful garden design, especially for patios and swimming pools, and they must relate well to the size of the house and other garden elements. For pools especially, Reynolds suggests, it’s better to err on the smaller side. Make it a design feature, not the dominant element. “When you look out, you want a sense of space,” not a yard jam-packed with wish-list items.

Strike a balance

Strike a balance between plantings, built elements, and nature. But a well-proportioned landscape doesn’t require a sweeping expanse of lawn. Groft remembers James Van Sweden advising, “You only need as much lawn as you can bear to mow on a 95-degree day in July.”



UNITE GARDEN & HOME

The most effective gardens create a relationship between the indoors and out. Think of your home and landscape as partners—one should complement the other.

1 Match garden to architecture.

“If you’ve got a traditional house, design a traditional garden,” Hollander says. “If you’ve got a contemporary house, design a contemporary garden.” If your home is a hybrid you can echo that mash-up in the garden. But settle on one style in each area.

2 Push your home’s entrance out into the garden.

“Take ownership of the outdoors,” says Flato. Extend the entry out into the landscape, perhaps by adding a courtyard garden at your home’s front door. Even a hedge with a gate creates an entry point in the landscape, bridging the gap between inside and out.

3 Marry inside views with the garden.

“Go inside your house and look out the windows,” Hollander advises, and design your garden to look good from the sofa or the breakfast table. Align a focal point—a fountain or shapely tree, for example—with a window view so you can enjoy it whether you’re indoors or outside.

4 Bounce light indoors.

“An important part of design is thinking about the quality of light,” Flato says. Bringing light inside helps connect indoors to outdoors, and there’s more to it than having lots of windows. Place a water feature or a light-colored wall near a window, he suggests, to bounce light inside.

Spiraling ‘Emerald Green’ thuja helps bring the home’s façade into scale with the landscape. Design by: Scott Shrader.
Photo by: Mark Adams.

OPT FOR CURVES

Curves can be used to add mystery to a garden, or encourage people to slow down and enjoy their surroundings.

Here is how the experts employ curves in their designs:

Create music for the eye

In nature we find graceful arcs: in flower petals, pine cones, leaves, seashells. Eighteenth-century English landscape designer Lancelot 'Capability' Brown referred to these curves as the "sinuous line of Grace." Johnsen calls it music for the eye.

Here are three reasons she uses curves:

- Curves lend a gracious air to a landscape
- Your eye cannot help but follow a curve
- Laying out a plant bed or walkway using curves invites people to explore

Curving walks and steps impart a lyrical, unhurried quality. An undulating walk imitates a meandering stream. A rounded plant bed reaches out to embrace a lawn.

When in doubt, choose a circle or a curve

Circles, spirals, and curves have become a unifying theme throughout Chanticleer. "If we have a choice between a straight line and a curve, we always choose a curve," says Thomas.

Curves can be used intentionally to unify garden spaces and seduce the visitor. "Winding or spiraling paths have a psychological benefit," Thomas notes. "They entice people to linger and take a meandering route. You don't have to get from point A to point B in a hurry."

How to make the perfect curve:

To establish the lines for an even, sweeping curve, use a radius and a tape measure (not a hose). Simply hold the end of the tape measure in place with a stick or screwdriver and make consistent, even curves by forming a radius and indicating it with marking paint.

Stone steps were built into the slope of this steep grassy hill. "The protruding rounded steps help connect the upper landscape to the hillside," Johnsen says. There's a cadence to the thin grass and stone steps that radiate from the walkway. Illustration by: David Despau.



EMPHASIZE TRANSITIONS

Transitions are passageways that lead to different areas of your garden. In a great garden, these changes are perceptible, but well integrated.

Here are a few creative ways to handle transitions:

Use visual gateways

Hollander suggests including a transitional element to signify that you've left behind the workday world for a serene retreat.

Here are two of his favorite ways to designate transitions:

Install a stone walk across a reflecting pool

Erect a vine-draped arbor or pretty gate

Whatever you choose, a transition should remind you to slow down and take notice of the beautiful surroundings as you enter.

Punctuate transitions

At Lotusland the passageways between one garden and the next are crowned with large plants. This approach produces transitions that accomplish the following:

- Create natural curtains
- Result in a brief pause
- Connect dramatically different spaces

Madame Ganna Walska, the garden's original creator, might have called these transition points liminal spaces—places between the end of one thing and the beginning of another where we can be open to change. Such spaces are considered sacred in cultures and religions all over the world. "It's very effective, and it's a magical, magical thing," says Gwen Stauffer, Lotusland's executive director. "It makes the garden just go on and on and on."

Make transitions exciting

Thomas, Chanticleer's executive director, has also mastered the art of using transitions to make entering a new space more memorable.

Here are some of his techniques:

- Contrast darker gardens (those covered by tree canopy) with light-filled spaces
- Use bridges, stairs, or narrow passages surrounded by container plantings
- Screen views with tall trees that hide other areas from sight and provide only a glimpse of what's beyond

A transition should remind you to slow down and take notice of the beautiful surroundings

Aloes and palms flank either side of this path at Lotusland, serving as a dramatic curtain between garden spaces. Phot by: Ngoc Minh Ngo.

WANT MORE DESIGN IDEAS FOR YOUR GARDEN?

We hope you enjoyed this collection of expert design tips. Each insight was garnered from an article featured in a previous issue of *Garden Design* magazine.

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