



Sacred Landscapes: A New Approach to Design

By Calen Rayne

During an initial meeting with a client recently, landscape designer and ornamental horticulturalist Ted Carter was given a simple directive, “give me a design with soul.” In our increasingly fast-paced, digital, mobile world, it appears that developers, architects, interior designers and landscape professionals now sense that arriving home to a more tranquil, grounded, and minimalist energy field is proving to be a welcome respite for homeowners. The days of clear-cutting potential developments to install sterile houses with new “same old look” landscapes that may not be energetically compatible with an existing underlying eco-field are fading quickly.

Carter is among a handful of landscape designers and developers who have already turned that corner and seek to engage with their clients and homeowners to work with existing landscapes when possible with minimal intrusion. They are also seeking ways to enter

into a conversation with the land on new projects, and if need be, to first subtly modify existing features and, when necessary, then introduce new landscape components that will continue to maintain the overall energetic integrity of an already established eco-field.

In ancient times, people were more concerned about the intimate relationship of human societies to their natural surroundings. Perhaps if our approach to our land and design elements is birthed from that level of intention, a message and a story unfold. This message and story nourishes the inhabitants of a home and fills them with a sense of pride and discovery. .

There is a reason people find the gardens of Kyoto in Japan and the centuries old English Gardens of Europe so peaceful. The thought and sense of purpose that went into this ancient art of placement is both calming and beautiful. Many people find themselves

at a loss for why these gardens and landscapes are so moving. These gardens continue to serve as subtle, yet very powerful artistic expressions centuries after they were first designed by individuals who paid particular attention to how best to bring their design into harmony with the land they worked on.

Some designs, even smaller back yard installations, now incorporate various design elements from both permaculture and bio-dynamics traditions. Permaculture is a term first used by Bill Mollison in 1978, and one focus is "...the harmonious integration of the landscape with people providing their food, energy, shelter and other material and non-material needs in a sustainable way." Bio-dynamics is "a holistic, ecological, and ethical approach to farming, gardening, food, and nutrition." Both of these practices can contribute to a more balanced and nuanced landscape, one that is able to build on and remain consistent with an already existing eco-field while introducing a new source of nourishment for a homeowner.

A recent issue of Smithsonian magazine featured German forester and author Peter Wohlleben, known

as a "tree-whisperer." His book, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate*, has reached best seller lists in a dozen countries, including the United States and Canada. Wohlleben believes that trees communicate with each other, but there are others who believe the entire plant kingdom is involved in an ongoing conversation. Therefore it is important that a home is surrounded by a landscape that speaks to, informs, and nourishes its various components, and the home's occupants.

We know we can positively heal and transform our landscapes, each other, and our planet by the thoughts we choose to think and the ways in which we put those thoughts into action. In 1957, Hugh Everett III discussed parallel universes and something he called "choice points". A "choice-point" is a moment in time that offers an opportunity to change the course of events. Conditions arise that create a path between "business as usual" along our current path, and a new path leading to new outcomes. A choice point is like a bridge making it possible to be on one path, and then change course completely to embrace a new path leading to a different outcome. A choice point





presents itself when one becomes aware of a spiritual imbalance and visualizes a path to bring harmony to the dissonance. We are at a choice-point with regard to landscape design.

Increasingly we want to commune with nature, to restore a sense of connection and balance in our lives. We want our children to again feel a connection to a larger energetic presence in nature. Therefore many homeowners are looking for more interactive landscapes around their home, and seem less likely to accept a bland design with the same old plants dropped into generic templates. In his 1873 book, *Feng-Shui-The Science of Sacred Landscapes in Old China*, Ernest Eitel explains that “feng-shui, in its wider sense, stands for the relations to the surrounding nature, the influence of the landscape on the beauty of the buildings, and the happiness of the occupants.”

And noted author Thomas Berry offers this advice: “Our best procedure might be to consider that we need not a human answer to an earth problem, but an earth answer to an earth problem. The earth will solve its problems, and possibly our own, if we let the earth function in its own ways. We need only listen to what the earth is telling us.” By listening to the earth, we can bring balance and harmony to our landscape designs, and in doing so, provide a foundation for a more balanced and harmonious lifestyle.

As our world becomes over-stimulated by an endless frenzy of social media and technology, in essence, the future of landscape design might lean toward a minimalist look and feel. Powerful, yet clean and uncomplicated. This might bring about a creative point of difference, and open new avenues of conversation, between you and your neighbors. Elements of this new energetic expression, which include a focus on the simplicity and beauty of our existing natural environment, are included in what Ted and his team refer to as Sacred Landscapes.

For more about ted Carter and his work visit: www.tedcarterlandscapes.com

