

OUT ON A LIMB

‘Bones of the garden’

By: Roger Davis, Landscape Architect

So, what makes up the bones of the garden? In my view, the hardscape design and the shape of outdoor spaces (garden rooms) make up the ‘bones of the garden’. Design is not temporal and whether how well or how poorly designed, it is permanent. Everything else builds from there. It’s sort of like the body builder who doesn’t have the basic genetic make-up for a great body to begin with, like Barney Fife, who could never have even been a contestant in the Mr. America contest. Many gardens just emerge with little forethought or planning and without relating to the other features of the site. They have Barney Fife bones.

The driveway, if possible, should not be a straight shot from the street to the garage but should take on a pleasing shape. Where our guests will park and how that parking relates to the front door is important. The site should not be designed so that visitors are forced into the back or side door. Wouldn’t you like for them to see the nice expensive living and dining room furniture? Someone told me once, that the only people who come to their front door where salesmen and everyone else came in the back. The front was just not convenient and didn’t even have a walk to the front door. Walks should be in a pleasing shape and a warm material. This sets the scene for what is to come. Disney says the experience begins in the parking lot. Who knows better than Disney?

Oftentimes, swimming pools are added without relating to the rest of the landscape. Many times they are located where it is the most convenient place to build rather than being in the best location as it relates to the rest of the house and garden. Look at a pool as a garden feature in which you just happen to swim. My thought is that you can only have the use of a pool for four or five months but you can have the view all year long if properly located.

Design outdoor structures that are in keeping with the other architecture. Outdoor kitchens, pool houses, arbors and the like should look like all structures were designed in the same style. A metal storage building is fine if it can be hidden from view.

Last comes the planting after the ‘bones’ have been properly planned. If one was asked the question, what plant trait is the most important? Many would say a plant that flowers. Things to be considered when selecting plant material are: ultimate size, form, texture, exposure, soil requirements, evergreen or deciduous, leaf color, fall color, fragrance, and flower. I listed flower last because it is one of the last traits to be considered because the flower is temporary as is fragrance and fall color and is not a part of the ‘bones’ of the garden’, not to say they are not important. Always the planting should compliment the structures, enhancing the strong points and diminishing the weak ones. Form, size, texture and cultural requirements are the first things I consider when choosing a plant. They become the smaller ‘bones’ although, they are less permanent. The ‘wow’ factor is the color. If the design is bad, when the color fades the ‘wow’ becomes the ‘bow wow’ the rest of the year.

Nobody wants a garden based on Barney Fife bones. Arnold Schwarzenegger bones would be much.