

Soul

The best ponds and streams not only dazzle the eyes, but also touch the soul. Experts achieve both through top-notch craftsmanship — and an understanding of the human psyche.

By Rebecca Robledo
Design/Construction Editor

When landscape designer Rick Driemeyer explains how the subconscious affects people's ideas of what they want in their backyards, he tells this story:

Another designer he knew was struggling with a client's backyard. She and the client went through books and magazines and decided she wanted a Pacific Northwest theme in her backyard. But once the work actually started, she got difficult: No matter what the designer did, it wasn't right for the client. ▶

FOOD



Extreme Ponds

BACKYARD SYMPHONY

This stream offers strollers a mixture of sounds. Rather than a single gushing waterfall, it is broken into three smaller cascades that enhance the area's peacefulness and creates a "three-part harmony." Steppingstones provide multiple viewing opportunities.

○ *Bob Dews, Extreme Ponds, Asheville, N.C.*

DB Duensing & Co.



LEISURELY STROLL

This series of ponds was conceived to engage viewers from any vantage point. Incorporating different elements on all planes — above, below, left, right, front and back — the design even lures strollers to glance back, so they don't miss a snapshot.
 ○ Duensing, DB Duensing & Co., Vista, Calif.

Doug Roth, the Journal of Japanese Gardening



NATURAL HEALER

This pond is set next to a hospital to help patients heal. Although the stepping-stones are mostly for show, they lead the eye through the pond. Frothy-leaved overhanging trees provide a feeling of shelter. Moss-covered stones and generous plantings connect patients with nature.
 ○ Unknown, Kyoto, Japan

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The designer was also working on a tropical garden for a client down the street. Because that client didn't have much space in the yard, she decided to temporarily store the tropical

plants at the site of the Northwestern garden.

"The lady said, 'I just love all these things,'" says Driemeyer, whose firm, Both Sides of the Door, is located in Oakland, Calif. "When they started

shifting the plant material around, the yard started working."

As it turns out, the finicky client wasn't finicky at all. She just grew up in the tropics. While she favored the Pacific Northwest aesthetic from an

objective point of view, it took the tropics to evoke an emotional response, to touch her at a deeper level and make her feel like part of the space. As much as she thought she knew what she wanted, she need- ▶



Ron Herman, Landscape Architect

SHROUDED in MYSTERY

This pond is a study in optical illusion. Its twists and turns, as well as the use of reflection and mounds, makes it seem larger. The simple plant palette, well-placed rocks and soft transitions create a sense of serenity.
 ○ Ron Herman, Landscape Architect, San Leandro, Calif.



A SAFE HAVEN

This meditation garden puts people at ease in a variety of ways. A small entryway creates an enclosed, plant-filled space. Instead of leading directly into the garden, the entryway turns so that viewers from outside can't see in. A large, canopied tree adds to this feeling. Fragrant plants such as ginger, mint and lemon verbena greet visitors, while the Connecticut bluestone walkways and redwood bridge lead them around the space.

○ Rick Driemeyer, *Both Sides of the Door*, Oakland, Calif.

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ed to feel the comfort that only comes by touching on the familiar.

The power of memory

Finding that place with your own clients requires first figuring out what in their recent past triggers a sense of safety and nostalgia. Often that sense rests with the familiar. That's why the client in Driemeyer's story was never happy with her garden until it incorporated elements that reminded her of where she grew up.

"Most of us have some place in our history that is representational of safety and peace," Driemeyer says. "In design, you're trying to get to that place where people identify somehow in their minds with something that makes them feel that everything is OK."

To give his clients this sense of security, Driemeyer always asks where they grew up. In many cases, he will incorporate something that harkens back to that time, whether it's the type of plants, rocks, water activity or quality of light.

"We process images and see the things that are actually there, but we actually associate them with what we know," Driemeyer says. "So I can go someplace and see something and say, 'That looks like so and so.' But somebody from the East will say, 'No, that looks like so and so.' There's a difference between how we perceive what we see. And what we're looking for is a connection to the perception of safety, peace, harmony or joy that each individual has.

"The idea is to try to bring that out even though it's very difficult to approach a client and say, 'What gives you peace and harmony?'"

To really make this technique work, though, the natural environment ►



NATURE HIKE

Natural surface, worn rock and plentiful plants take visitors back to nature here. The framing of key specimens in the foreground visually organizes the space.

○ Jim Lampl, *Lampl Landscape Service*, Allison Park, Pa.



STUDY in MOTION

A ballet-like dance between the pine and the peninsula draws viewers to this pond at Keishu-en garden in Kyushu. The diagonal lines of the branches move in the same direction as the peninsula's placement, stirring the senses and inviting participation. Straighter branches wouldn't garner as much attention, and placing the peninsula at a straight perpendicular angle to viewers would be more jarring.

○ Kinsaku Nakane, *Kyoto, Japan*

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must be believable. This requires the use of authentic-looking materials and placement choices, as well as realistic scale. Without the right scale, clients will feel awkward in the space, says Dave Duensing, president of DB Duensing & Co., a consulting firm in Vista, Calif.

An engaging proposition

But people's psychological needs aren't completely met with a comfortable space. They also need to be engaged, included in the space. They don't want to just feel like viewers, but rather, participants.

Establishing a comfort level puts



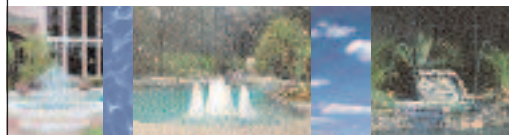
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Both Sides of the Door

people at ease and helps bring their guard down. Engaging them transports them into a new place.

Focusing in

The idea of using focal points begins to answer this need, but to really engage participants, designers must go to a deeper level, says David Slawson, a Cleveland landscape designer who works in the Japanese tradition.

A design should both consciously draw people to extraordinary sights, sounds and smells, and subconsciously lead them through the space.

"This type of art should make for very little work on the part of the viewer," Slawson says. "Without thinking about it, we should feel an invitation into the garden, like we're part of it."

An added sense of dimension also is essential to engaging visitors, says Duensing. Designers can build in this sense with several viewpoints that create an air of mystery about a space. "That keeps people interested," he says. "You want to create a little bit of mystery so the view of the pond changes in the different qualities of light or throughout the season."

Part of the mystery lies in not spoiling the surprise, says Ron Herman, a landscape architect based in San Leandro, Calif. You can use plants and corners to hide things so people can discover something at every turn. "They should never see everything at once," he says. "It makes the space seem smaller and takes away the mystery."