



Beyond the Basics: Designing an enchanting garden

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A memorable, enchanting garden leaves something to the imagination. It unfolds slowly through time and space, with new discoveries waiting at each turn. Far from being predictable, such a garden has mystery, intrigue and depth.

Using examples gleaned from my recent coast to coast travels, we will explore a plethora of ideas for injecting a little magic into the landscape.

Light and Shadow

Childhood memories of light-bending mirrors at the fairground and making shadow puppets against a wall remind us of the power of light to create or manipulate imagery. We can interpret those ideas in the garden to explore

- Reflections (mirrors, water, glass, leaves)
- Backlighting (to reveal hidden colors or change their intensity)
- Shadows (cast by structures, materials, and plants using sunlight or lighting fixtures), and
- Mimicking light and shadow using plants.

Movement and Sound

Harness the wind to create movement and sound using

- Grasses
- Seedheads
- Windchimes
- Kinetic sculptures

Or explore the movement of water and vary the sound depending on the flow rate and design.

Do you want to reveal the source of the sound or create more intrigue by having it partially hidden from view?

Portals (the Narnia effect)

Create windows in your garden. Limiting a view can add mystery and intrigue because it piques curiosity, while framing a view (and hiding the peripherals) can manipulate the experience of the visitor to focus on a particular feature. Portals can be created from -

- Archways
- Windows, gates and doors
- Art
- Foliage

Scrim

Scrim is a light, gauzy fabric that is opaque until lit from behind. Think of looking through sheer curtains from the interior of a house. Sheers add instant dimension to a scene because your eye acknowledges its presence while noticing the vignette beyond.

In the landscape, scrim can be anything opaque or loose enough in texture to be seen through. Like those sheer curtains, landscape scrim adds instant dimensionality or depth. It can even add a voyeuristic sense to the garden, because the viewer is looking through something to see something else.

In addition to the use of gauzy fabrics, airy grasses, tall verbena (*Verbena bonariensis*), fennel (watch for self-seeding!), dill, gaura, and burnet can all be used to create mystery and add a layer of romance.

Garden Moments

The smallest garden can pay attention to artistic details.

- Architectural fragments. From timeworn gargoyles to ancient temple ruins, appropriately chosen and placed architectural pieces can transport our minds to another time and place. A visit to a salvage yard can yield a plethora of soon-to-be garden treasures. Just don't overdo it! When placing these pieces, you'll achieve a less contrived and more antiquated look if you place them where they are partially hidden. This also engages the mind by causing viewers to mentally complete the piece for themselves.
- Magical moments – surreal twists on familiar objects
- Double take – “gotcha” moments!

Inspiration brought to you from the Lurie Garden, City of Chicago, Atlanta Botanical Garden, Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden, Biltmore Estate, Chanticleer Garden, Longwood Gardens, Winterthur, Portland Japanese Garden, Mission San Juan Capistrano, Kubota Garden, Tucson Botanical Garden, Huntingdon Botanical Garden, Denver Botanic Garden, Gibbs Gardens, Meijer Sculpture Garden, and Fiskardo on the Greek island of Kefalonia, as well as private gardens in Oregon, North Carolina, Indianapolis, California, Texas, Michigan, New York, British Columbia, and Washington.

Keep in Touch:

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I love to share news & ideas with fellow gardeners and colleagues. Get details of all my garden tours, online courses, live workshops, and other events plus receive a free gift when you sign up for my newsletter.

