

THE REAL ESTATE LANDSCAPE...

CREATING VALUE

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"When all else fails, plant a few trees, build a fountain and position a few spot lights." Don't laugh! That advice has helped to rent up or sell more than a few tired, dysfunctional commercial properties. But haven't you ever wondered when and where did the Art of Landscaping begin?

The following is a brief history of landscaping which I hope will motivate you to help green up our plant.....

Landscape design is as old as mankind...hunter gatherers planted tubers in fire scarred clearings, design purely following the functions of agricultural necessities.

The rise and eclipse of the classical cultures of Rome and Greece finds us in the Middle Ages where the Church and Feudal lords reigned and the Monasteries held what was left of the records of the almost forgotten classical cultures, and the Moors ruled much of Europe's Mediterranean basin.

The medieval Garden was heavily influenced by the need for medicinal plants and food stocks. Any design elements were the result of religious influence, primarily Islamic.

The 10th century witnessed the growing Middle Eastern and African influences as the Crusaders brought back to Europe new plants, such as the Pomegranate, and the Moors dominated Southern Europe. The gardens of Sicily and Spain of this time reflected the religious precepts of the Koran. The design and content elements of these gardens form the bedrock of all future design considerations, up to the present!

In Arabic, the words for garden and paradise are the same. The garden represented on earth the symbolic destination of the worthy after death. They therefore needed the proscribed elements of that Koranic heaven...those

being: a quadrant design, a quarter each for the elements of earth, air, water and fire; the horticultural components had to blend color, light, aroma, water and sound. The design had to have a heavy geometric design for the Koran prohibited representation of the human figure.

Even where the Islamic influence did not penetrate, the medieval garden contained design elements of a religious nature, specifically a reflection of the Garden of Eden concept, a return to a pure, unspoiled nature. East and west shared the one design element of the walled enclosure...most likely both a religious and practical necessity.

The important design elements of the Medieval Moorish gardens which are seen in the later, Renaissance gardens, are: Fountains and the use of channeled running water, (euripus) and the merging of Architectural elements with the use of the Patio and Portico. No doubt these elements were carry overs from classical influences adopted by the Moors. The last remaining Moorish garden is of 40 acres in the Alcazar Palace in Madrid, while there are no remaining Medieval Monastic European gardens in existence today.

Historically, garden landscapes reflect the cultural, economic and historical trends of their times. The renaissance, beginning in the 15th century, was a result of the growing influence of the secular over the religious throughout Europe, as well as relative economic growth through trade and lack of continuous wars. The Italian city state, the first to awake from the middle ages, set the pace for garden design, an influence which would be felt thru to the present.

Alberti's treatise of 1452 became the basic text for Renaissance design. It set forth the principles of the classic

ideals of Harmony and Unity, as well as elements of classic Roman design. Large, expansive sites with views, geometric pruning (topiary), terraces and the opening of the villa to the expanses of the garden were all proscribed elements. Quite a shift from the walled medieval garden usually set off from the main dwelling by a moat or high wall!

The Italian landscape artists were valued and spread their design concepts to France and England. The villa/garden concept became the status symbol among the ruling classes. The common element in these designs was: no single focal point, gardens radiated out from the residence along various axis's but always in a symmetrical pattern.

The underlying philosophy was man's ability to mold nature. The classical renaissance garden contained statuary and classical Greek and Roman themes. Its adoption by the French and English nobility eventual caused sophistication in content which would later be tagged as "mannerism". Garden design during this period was driven to exhibit personal wealth and power. The 17th century continued in this vein, with designers such as Henry and Achille Duchene setting the pace.

The French helped to assimilate a pure classic design with natural, unforced elements; as exemplified by the introduction of the curve and elliptical line rather than a ridged, geometrical design. Andre Le Notre as the designer of the Tuileries exemplified this style shift. The texts of D. D'argenville carefully recorded the French influence on the basic parterre with names and descriptions of the numerous one-off designs.

The 18th century witnessed the morphing of the renaissance garden into Baroque and Rococo designs; basically an embellishment or prettification of the basics. However, a new design crops up in England around mid 1700's with William Kent's Heroic Landscape School, which causes a shift from the ever prevalent Baroque style. His design is founded on the concept of the Harmony of Arcadia, a "mythical landscape of primitive simplicity." Its design elements include: use of perspective, no controlling symmetry, mimicking of the paintings of Lorrain and Poussin, and a design which incorporates a route of sequential scenes tied together with a central theme.

A good example would be the Stow House gardens of 840 acres containing

water vistas leading to obelisks and Greek temples enclosed in hedges which frame the scenes. The later 18th century basically saw a stultification of new design elements with the major conflicts centered over using rural rather than classic designs.

The 19th century was a time of turmoil. The first few decades was dominated by the debates centered on the concepts of garden vs. landscape vs. design. The definition of Picturesque and Sublime became guiding design criteria. The economic and cultural changes brought about by the growth of the cities caused the focus of designers to begin to shift from estate gardens to urban green spaces, parks and public gardens. Through-out the Victorian era designs styles became polluted, with vacillation between styles. The picturesque garden evolved from these stylistic and cultural trends as the arts and crafts movement took hold in England simultaneously with the beginning of the growth of a suburban population which embraced the "cottage garden" style.

The advent of Naturalism in garden design brought about by the demands of the cottage garden brought to the fore by landscapers such as Gertrude Jekyll who emphasized the importance of flowers, rock gardens, and the shape and color of a maturing garden. Her sense of using colors was unparalleled.

The 20th century saw the advent of the art nouveau garden with its emphasis on trellises, steps, geometric lines and sharp vertical elements such as cypress, Thuyas and Lombardy Poplars. Also, the influence of the impressionist artists created an Avant-Garde school of design which was characterized by tight areas with contained planted areas having rectangular or square designs. The Bauhaus school of architecture also had its influence on garden design with its emphasis on industrial functionality and sparse, clean lines.

So now you know how landscaping through history has always been tied to a value proposition. The next time you visit an office park look hard and you should see a little bit of Islam, the Roman Empire, or an English cottage garden hiding the utility boxes.

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