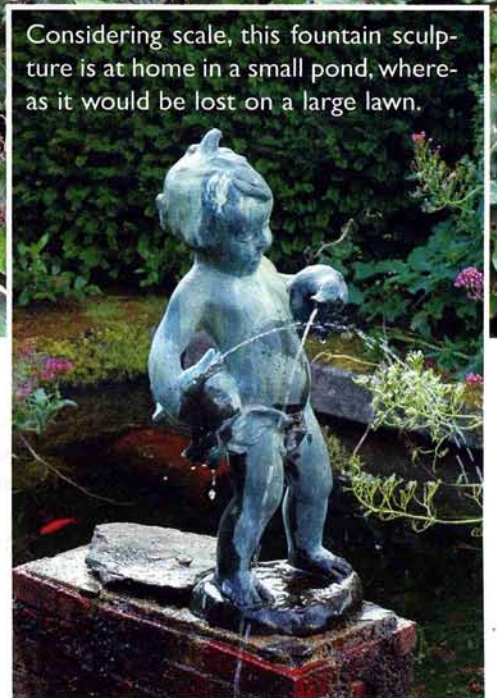


A carved stone face is an interesting surprise when nestled into a cubby hole of a hedge.



Considering scale, this fountain sculpture is at home in a small pond, whereas it would be lost on a large lawn.



Garden Gallery

Art is in the eye of the beholder

Story and photos by Garry Menendez, ASLA

Can I use this in my garden? That is a question that should pop into your head every time you browse through a gallery, antique shop or flea market. Collecting and displaying pieces of art in the landscape is an extremely personal endeavor. You may have heard the phrase “I don’t know much about art but I know what I like.” Regardless of whether you search the globe for fine, French pottery or rescue that old wagon wheel from the neighbors’ curbside junk pile, there are a few things to keep in mind when selecting and displaying art in the landscape.

GO THE DISTANCE

Just as it becomes chaotic to have too many specimen plants in close proximity to

one another, the same holds true when displaying pieces of art in the landscape. This doesn’t mean you can’t tuck small discoveries into niches and cubby holes. It’s kind of fun to hear a visitor to your garden say, “I’ve been here many times and I’ve never noticed that before,” as they point to a carved stone face tucked into a void in the stack stone wall.

There’s no magic rule, but if there are only a few yards between two equally important pieces in your garden they will indeed compete for attention. Think about visual vantage points. As you walk down a small garden path there should be something of interest (plant or object) that pulls you further along. As you make a turn and experience a new perspective, something

else may say “come check me out.”

You may also have strong visual axis from inside your home. Whether it’s a line of sight through a window from your favorite couch-potato position or a view that your entire family enjoys from the dinner table (you do eat dinner together, right?) having a focal point in the garden makes great conversation.

Be mindful of scale when choosing pieces of art for your garden. Scale is one of those terms that should be used when speaking of anything related to design. An enormous urn on a small brick patio will make that space appear even smaller. Conversely, a dinky little statue sitting on a large expanse of lawn will never be seen until you run into it with the mower.

STAND UP AND BE LIGHTED

Ok, I'm addressing two different but yet related principles here. Imagine the Statue of Liberty with no pedestal. Also imagine her with no lighting at night. Giving a truly unique piece of art a proper base (or plinth) is similar to choosing the right frame for a painting. There are many pieces of art which have no problem standing on their own but others (some with much detail but smaller in stature) may need a bit of help which may be gained from a nice pedestal.

Night lighting is a whole other topic in itself but suffice it to say that there are things in your garden that deserve to be appreciated after the sun goes down. If you do choose to spotlight an object or two, experiment with a flashlight first to see where a well-placed beam of light might create some interesting shadows to add depth and accentuate texture on the object.



▲ This sundial atop an aged pedestal creates a focal point.



▲ One man's trash can be another's treasure as art in the garden.

DON'T RUSH

Often I will show a symbol on my landscape designs to illustrate a piece of sculpture, art or focal point. When I get to that part of my presentation, a client may ask "what should I put there?" I tell them that this is where they can have some fun. It becomes somewhat of a scavenger hunt when they start shopping for this something special.

Some of my clients view their landscape designs as a check list and just want to check off this focal point as installed and be done with it, but the majority relish the opportunity to travel, browse and shop for that unique item that displays their tastes and personality which in turn may start a conversation with visitors. Be patient on your search and remember to think original.

ONE OF A KIND

To me a great garden is comprised of both living (plants) and non-living (architecture and art) elements. One without the other is incomplete. In my home, it's hard to find a wall on which there isn't a framed scene which brings back some great travel memories. Likewise, when I go outside, I want the same recollection to occur. No I don't drag visitors through my garden flaunting objects I've purchased or found, but often I am asked where something came from. At this cue, I love to share stories and experiences with others with the hope that it might inspire them to venture beyond their own yards and towns to see what's out there.

Mass-produced concrete statues or wooden profiles of geese manufactured in China don't do much for me. Actually, shiny

Garden elements are limited only by imagination. Unusual containers on wooden stands can be unique displays. Be original in your decorating. ▼



and new are things I try to avoid. People pay big bucks for aged boulders that have moss and lichens growing on them (these are also pieces of art by the way). Allow art in your garden to grow old gracefully. Copper is a beautiful metal but I think it becomes even more beautiful when that aged patina starts to show and gives the appearance that this piece has stories to tell. Don't be too quick to sanitize or pressure wash something just because it looks different than when you acquired it.

Objects of art should tell a story. No matter what your style or budget, maybe the most important thing is that this is your garden. What you say goes. Have fun moving pieces around. Be original and get a reaction. That is, after all, what art is all about. ✂

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