Principles of Landscape Design
Good Landscape Design Should Be...
Design...Do we need it?

- Yes!
- Well designed and properly installed landscape can:
  - Increase your property value by 17%!
- Poorly conceived and executed landscape can:
  - Decrease property value
  - Waste time and money
  - Possibly present a liability risk
The Reality Principles
Rule #1 – Functionality

- Who will use it?
- How will they use it?
- How do you want them to use it?
- Accessible for maintenance?
- Functional and maintainable over time?
Functional

- Allows for easy movement
- Accessible for maintenance recreation, leisure
- Functional and maintainable over entire life.
Easy to Maintain

Reduces need for:

- Fertilizers
- Pesticides
- Equipment (mowers)
- Water
- Extra labor/expense
Environmentally Sound

- “Right plant right place" decreases:
  - Disease
  - Insect stress
  - Water needs
- Plants in stress = **more** maintenance.
- Stressed plants require **more**:
  - Labor
  - Fertilizer
  - Pesticides
  - Ultimately more $$. 
Cost Effective

- **Cost should not dictate whether the landscape is:**
  - Functional
  - Maintainable
  - Environmentally sound.

- Low cost can meet all these needs
- Take your time – let it grow
Visually Pleasing

Framework needed to create a visually pleasing landscape includes:

- Functionality, form follows function
- Maintainability, right plant, right place
- Consider the Cost
- Learn to understand
  - Enhance the positives – down-play the negatives
Fundamentally, good landscape design is a matter of “managing the viewer’s eye.”
The Artistic Principles
The artistic principles help us achieve a visually pleasing landscape.
Principles of Design

Universal design principles guide and enhance our creativity
Principles of Design

- **Six Main Principles**
  - Unity
  - Simplicity
  - Variety
  - Balance
  - Proportion
  - Sequence

- **How to apply to the landscape**
  - Using several design elements
Unity: The overriding principle

- Landscape elements should **tie together**
- Should provides good **blend** of simplicity and variety
- Features can still be treated **differently to match the theme**
  - Natural shapes for differing materials — or single color, many hues
  - Brick patio pavers plus a brick post or wall
- Topography can be used for unity
  - Berms, hills = unity. Create a union of parts
Unity: Tying the Landscape Together

- Repeat these to unify the landscape:
  - Color
  - Curvy lines
  - Straight lines
  - Construction materials
  - Textures

- Use similar backgrounds and foregrounds to establish connections.

- Same color/different plant.

- Focal points establish dominance and unify group
Repetition strengthens Unity:

Selected plant material should be repeated throughout landscape
Connections strengthen Unity: Interconnected parts allow the eye to move smoothly from one element to another appreciating the whole picture. Line
Focal points establish dominance to unify a variety of materials.

- Can draw attention to or away from something.
Unity of Three
Unity of Three Law: Whenever three elements of the same kind are grouped together there is a strong sense of unity.
Lines Affect Perception
Simplicity: Limiting Change

Achieved by repetition of ideas or materials.

- One of most common errors in landscapes is trying to do "too much"

- Less can be more. Too much variety in plant material becomes chaotic

- Reduce the number of themes

- Viewer should experience the landscape in parts as well as a whole

- Too much simplicity = Monotony
- Monotypic, simple planting = **Monotony**
Simple but still monotonous
- Simple but **not** monotonous
- Variety without looking cluttered
- Trailer, mounder, tower
**Variety** = Absence of Monotony

Gotta have it!

- Variety allows for a prominent element.
- Engages viewer with what's going on.
  - Important to have something unexpected.
- Variety adds spice and interest.....
- but, too much variety = Confusion
- Delicate relationship between Variety and Simplicity
• Too much variety causes **visual confusion**
• Variety and Simplicity work in a delicate balance
• Are you a collector? Be honest, now....
Too little variety causes monotony
Careful use of variety allows **emphasis** to be placed where desired. Imagine this near a front door.
Time for a break?
Balance: Symmetrical

- **Formal, static, classical design**
- The *same* thing on each side of a central axis, bilateral symmetry
- Distribution of visual weight - equal
Symmetrical - Problems

- Symmetry can be boring
- Plant loss on one side loses balance
- A symmetrical house may not allow asymmetrical landscape
Symmetrical - Effective
Balance: Asymmetrical

- Casual
- Indicates movement
- Achieved by using similar ideas but different things on either side
- Distribution of visual weight - equal
Asymmetrical - Problems

- Empty areas that make your eye uneasy
- Bottom left side feels heavy
- Top right feels light
- Floating, not grounded
Asymmetrical - Effective

- Eye feels a sense of **unity**
- **No uneasiness**
- **Calmness**
- Feel grounded and **enclosed**
Proportion, or Scale

How things relate to each other with respect to size

- Large elements and small elements need an intermediary to bring them together
- Large difference in size creates dissonance
- Very large material can be intimidating
- Generally don't want very large in residential design.
- Make people feel welcome
- Bring things down to human scale
• Disproportionate or proportionate?
Proportionate or disproportionate?
Sequence, or Rhythm

- From horizontal to rounded to vertical
- From low spreading plants to vertical plants.
- Here to there.
- Near to far.
- Turf-shrubs-trees.
- Sequence can help the eye move from one area to another – orderly progression
- **Sequence** (rhythm) can be achieved through the graduation in size and type of plants used.
Time for a break?
Principles of Design

- Six Main Principles
  - Unity
  - Simplicity
  - Variety
  - Balance
  - Proportion
  - Sequence

- How to apply to the landscape
Plants are Functional

- What is the function of that space?
- What plants can serve the needs of that space?
- Each plant serves a purpose, or function
Specimen Plant as Focal Point

Perfect form or shape
Accent Plants Draw Attention
Corner Plants

Used to soften sharp edge
Foundation Plants

Used to soften the horizontal line or mark a boundary
Border Plants

To create a visual boundary or background
Screen Plants

To hide or screen a view
Shade Plants

Pure function in the south – can you think of others?
Ornamental Elements from Plants

- Each plant has its own traits, characteristics, or artistic elements
- Their placement adds another layer to the design
- These elements create the design
Using Color, Form, Texture & Line

Color

Form

Let nature guide you
Using Color, Form, Texture & Line

Line

Texture
Putting it All Together

The Design Process
The Design Process

- **Base/Site Plan**
  - Start with a Base
  - Add the Site analysis
- **Conceptual diagram**
  - General use areas
- **Plant selection**
- **Final design**
  - Planting plan
  - A GUIDE
The base plan should consist of:

- Accurate house placement – legal document
- Accurate lot and house dimensions
- Existing hardscapes
- Any covenants?

How to begin?

- Obtain plot/plat from: builder, or county or city property records.
- Determine the scale & decide a scale
I. Base Plan

Stick to the Facts:

- **Obtain a survey**
  - Plat from the office of probate, courthouse.
  - Working copy for dimensions, scale not needed
  - Provides a base copy for the design process

- **Make preliminary decisions**
  - How much can you spend?
  - How much are you willing to spend?
Site analysis on Base Plan

- Evaluate the components of the site
  - Site physical characteristics
    - Exposure: macro and micro climates
    - Soil: pH, type, drainage, hardpans, etc.
    - Topography
  - Site aesthetic characteristics
    - Views: attractive and unattractive
    - Indoor/outdoor relationships including utility and views
Base plan (plat)
Adding the Site conditions
Existing Site Conditions

- EXISTING SITE CONDITIONS

- NOTE ON SOIL TYPE: SOIL IS MAINLY CLAY WITH SOME SAND IN IT, FAIR TO POOR DRAINAGE. CHECK WITH COUNTY EXTENSION OFFICE TO HAVE SOIL TESTED.
In summer the noon (1 P.M. Daylight Saving Time) sun is at 3 minutes after the hour.

Map the sun’s path in summer. Estimate the number of hours you will be able to see the sun.
Site conditions - Exposure:
Sun
Wind
Noise
Base Plan + Site Plan?
Time for a break?
II. Conceptual Diagram

*Form follows function*

Outdoor needs:

- **Recreation**
  - Kids, pets, entertainment
- **Storage**
  - Toys in the yard, lawn equipment, boat
- **Circulation**
  - Parking to kitchen, outdoor cooking to indoor

Aesthetic preferences:

- **Plant material**
- **Construction material:**
  - Stone, concrete, wood
  - Garden style (formal/informal)
  - Special elements – statuary, water features
Conceptual Diagram

Includes Base/Site Plan of property:
- house
- walks/drive
- terraces
- utilities
- trees
- shrubs
- outbuildings

Plus ...
- Desired usefulness in specific areas
- What are your needs and preferences?

  - Three general use areas:
    - Public
    - Private
    - Service
Conceptual Diagram – general use areas
Conceptual Diagram – general use areas
The Concept Plan adds creative ideas:

- **Defines spaces** – address functional areas with general plant material
- **Evolves from shapes** developed in the site analysis/base plan
- **Refine and experiment** with different concepts or materials
- **Remember, form follows function**
Conceptual Plan?
III. The Design

- **Planting Plan**
  communicates exactly what to use, where it will go, how it should look.
  - Drawn to scale
  - Labels plants and other components – key/legend
  - Provides a materials list
  - Provides additional notes

<table>
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<th>No.</th>
<th>Plant/Hardgood Type</th>
<th>Height x Width</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Seasonal Interest</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Latin Name</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Deciduous Tree</td>
<td>50' x 35'</td>
<td>Upright/oval</td>
<td>Patmore Ash</td>
<td>Fraxinus pennsylvanica ‘Patmore’</td>
<td>Canopy tree; disease and drought tolerant</td>
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The Final Design includes:

- Plant list
- Plant inventory
- Illustrations of structures & plants
- A complete picture explaining installation of the landscape
Harmony exists in the landscape when all 6 design principles work together.
All That Said

Remember Two Things
Create Something You Like
Start Small