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NATURAL BEAUTY: DESIGNING THE OUTDOOR SPACE

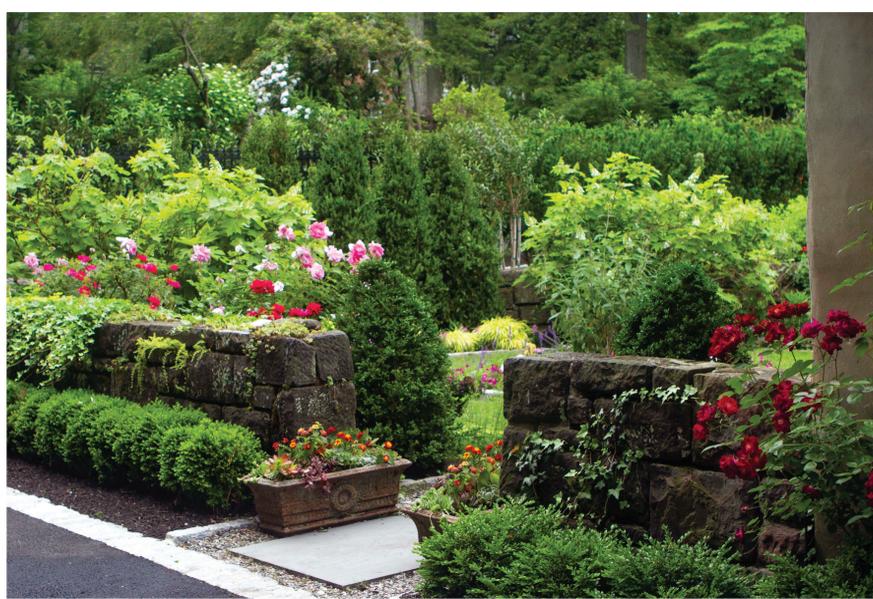
by Ariana Baio | October 5, 2019



(Credit: Mierop Design)

A well thought out and well maintained garden encourages families to spend time outdoors, and increases curb appeal and property value. Much more than a collection of good design and good plants, designing an outdoor space is ultimately about creating an experience. To help us understand a bit about the outdoor design process we asked Lisa Mierop, owner of the Montclair-based landscape design firm MIEROP DESIGN, to weigh in.

"I am often asked about how the design process works," Mierop says. Working to balance the challenges and assets of each home, Mierop focuses on marrying form with function. "In the end, the result should look natural and uncontrived - like it was meant to be that way all along."



(Credit: Mierop Design)

Mierop begins all of her projects with an on-site consultation. This is the time to create a "wish list" of things clients may want in their new outdoor space: more privacy, a place to entertain, a pool, space for kids' sports activities.

"Landscape possibilities can be overwhelming. My job is to help the client edit choices to arrive at not only what is beautiful, but what is needed to make the space work to its potential." This is also when Mierop can see what the out-of-control factors are; "Lifestyle, architecture and budget will inform the process, but the landform, views and available sunlight largely direct the shape things take."



(Credit: Mierop Design)

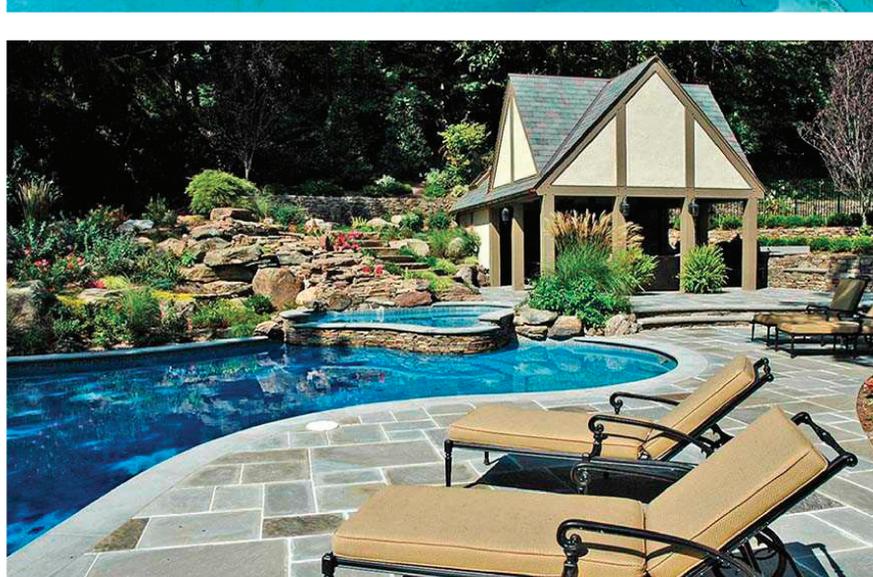
After the initial consultation, a customized proposal is created to outline specific notes about the property and explain what services are needed to create the final project. Once the proposal is accepted, a master plan is developed considering the wish-list items and existing conditions. "The goal is to create beautiful outdoor rooms that find a perfect balance between the demands of wishes, personal taste, and site conditions," says Mierop.



(Credit: Mierop Design)

Once the itemized construction and installation estimates are created, the construction process can begin. Through the initial construction process, "hard elements" such as drainage, utility lines, patios, and retaining walls are incorporated. This is the most difficult part of the process since it takes time to literally move earth to reshape the landform. But once it is over, soft elements are added - bed preparations, plantings, lawn and irrigation - and this is where the fun begins. "It's always a relief, after seeing rocks and dirt for long periods of time, to finally see color!" says Mierop.

Mierop Design has the unique feature of operating a nursery that supplies many shrubs and perennials for their designs and the nursery strictly accommodates Mierop clientele. Final touches complete the transition from indoors to outdoor: all-weather furnishings, fire tables, containers, pillows. Mierop Design typically includes lighting, furnishing and ornament proposals in the master plan and assists in the selection, purchase and installation of these through their PAVILLION OUTDOOR FURNISHINGS division.



(Credit: Mierop Design)

When the installation is complete, the final, and perhaps most important step toward protecting your investment, is maintenance. The master gardeners at Mierop's LANDSCAPE GUILD understand proper pruning, staking, and plant care, and they also know how to troubleshoot disease and insect issues before they become serious.

Landscape is not an off-the-shelf purchase - it is about the time spent waiting, watching, and experiencing the process of life. "You wouldn't expect your children to arrive as fully formed adults, and it's the same with landscape," says Mierop. "The place where you buy plants is called a 'nursery' for good reason. Watching change and growth, failures and successes is the joy of having outdoor rooms." In other words, don't look for short cuts when designing your outdoor space, nature is in no rush.