

LANDSCAPE DESIGNER LISA MIEROP ON KEEPING THINGS SIMPLE, CURRENT TRENDS, AND CREATING THE ULTIMATE OUTDOOR OASIS

BY THE SCOUT GUIDE *July 31, 2020*



A project by

Mierop Design. Photograph courtesy of Mierop Design.

THE BACKSTORY // While she's won awards and accolades for her work, Lisa Mierop was perhaps an unlikely candidate for a career in landscape design. "I grew up in Manhattan, so no one expected I would ever be touching dirt," she shared during a chat earlier this spring. "I grew up on concrete." Raised in a family of artists, Mierop studied art history in college, then embarked on a career in design that spanned advertising, fashion, and home textiles.

When her personal life led her from New York City to Montclair, New Jersey, Mierop found herself in need of both a driver's license—as a Manhattan resident, she'd never learned to drive—and a new hobby suited to the suburbs. It was then that she discovered her love of gardening. She planted a flower bed, then transformed her backyard into what she describes as "A place of calm and color." When it was complete, she entered it in an

amateur design competition sponsored by *Garden Design Magazine*, and won the grand prize. When photos of the garden were published in 1995, commissions for her work began trickling in, and Mierop Design was born.

“I started getting calls after that from people locally. I was written up by the newspaper in my town. I got calls from British garden writers, including a very famous one who featured me as the ‘best woodland style garden designer.’ He put me in his book, and then *Garden Design* did a coffee table book and I was in that. It just exploded,” Mierop says of the reaction to her feature. Today, with her husband and partner, she runs a full-service landscape design/build firm; Pavillion Outdoor Furnishings, an outdoor decorating resource for furnishings and ornaments; and The Landscape Guild, a customized maintenance service. She also holds numerous professional certifications and has taught classes for The New York Botanical Garden.



and her husband. Photograph courtesy of Audrey Blake.

THE PHILOSOPHY // Mierop’s guiding philosophy is that a landscape should look beautifully natural, as if it were always there. To that end, her artistic background has served her well through the years, deeply informing her approach to design. “I would say I’m sort of a classically trained artist. I am very much about balance, proportion, scale, and editing, and I like a very painted artistic feeling,” she says. “Editing is probably the biggest factor. The mistakes you make when you’re young are you overthink and overdo. As you get older,

it's more about what you leave out rather than what you put in." To keep things simple, natural, and free of visual chaos, she advises, "Take out, take out, take out," noting that, "By stripping a project down to its true essentials, you find what truly matters."

Individuality is important to her work as well. "You want to have a very unique stamp on it that reflects the architecture of the home and the personality of the client," she says. Mierop also makes sure to create year-round interest for her clients by ensuring that their yards have color, texture, and movement throughout all four seasons.

THE PRESENT // With people spending so much time at home lately, many are looking at their landscapes with fresh eyes. When we spoke in the spring, less than two months into the pandemic, Mierop mused that people would come to consider their outdoor spaces to be much more important. In addition to re-examining and re-emphasizing their outdoor rooms, more people would come to recognize the act of gardening as a form of physical, mental, and spiritual therapy. She touched on the functional aspects of gardens as well—while kitchen gardens had been increasing in popularity for the past couple of years, clients are suddenly interested in installing extensive versions with enclosures and raised beds that go far beyond the small patch of herbs or a few tomatoes.

The idea of gardens serving as a place of calm and quiet seems especially timely. To create an outdoor oasis, Mierop once again emphasizes the importance of simplicity—avoiding overcrowding a space, and remembering that less is more, reduces the visual noise. A controlled palette of plants in bigger masses is more pleasing than masses using many different plants because it's less the eye has to take in. "It is better to select a few key plants and really focus on their impact," she notes.

Privacy and comfort contribute to a sense of serenity as well. Fencing and screening are always key considerations in Mierop's projects, and completing the outdoor environment with furniture that looks and feels inviting and can accommodate the entire family is part of the overall vision. "It's important, I think, if you're doing landscape work, to really think of it as a working room, working for the family," she says.



A project by

Mierop Design. Photograph courtesy of Mierop Design.

THE FUTURE // It's been an unprecedented spring and summer for all industries, including landscape design. And while some of Mierop's projects were put on hold and disrupted in a variety of ways, and adapting to the current moment has been necessary, she's found some positives in the experience. For example, Zoom has become a tool that she anticipates using even post-COVID-19. "I am meeting people virtually without going to their homes now; I have them send me pictures, and we share a screen, and we talk through everything," she explains. When social distancing requirements are relaxed, she sees continuing to conduct quick meetings over the platform rather than bringing people together from multiple locations to one destination. "It may be half an hour for one person, 40 minutes for another; instead you can just get everybody on a call and bring a picture up on the screen and you can get so much done so efficiently," she says. "We do these extensive design meetings on screen, and I bring my whole PDF up on a shared screen and I can mouse over anything that we're talking about, zooming in and out. It's been quite a learning experience that I'm really happy about."

THE PRACTICAL ADVICE // While there is no substitute for hiring a professional with years of experience, there are small changes that you can implement to improve your landscape and create a personal outdoor oasis almost immediately. Here are Mierop's quick tips for transforming your environment:

- *Remember that editing is always important.* “Prune and remove the elements you don’t like.”
- *Plant annuals.* “Annuals are an incredible way to bring a tremendous amount of pleasure to any season, whether it’s in grounded in planting beds or in containers. They flower all season through, sometimes past Thanksgiving, so it’s a small amount of money and you’re going to get a big return from it for many, many months.”
- *Add furniture.* “Get some furnishings, and really find a way to be outside in your space.”
- *Think about growing food.* “Start with some herbs in a container. It becomes an interactive relationship—you’re participating in the garden when you grow food for yourself, and it’s a great activity to do with your kids.”
- *Invest in a fire table or fire bowl.* “You can get a real fire bowl and put wood in it, or you can buy fire tables that either have a gas line running to them or run on propane, and you just turn a switch and they have a gas lit or they burn wood. They’re not a major investment but very gratifying, and they’ll keep you outside on cooler nights.”
- *Address your lighting.* “Nighttime lighting will extend your time outside as well. If you were to invest a little into low-voltage landscape lighting, you could be out later into the evening. It is easy to install, and it’s also easy to move, so if you did something big later, you could keep your fixtures and just move them somewhere else.”

Mireop Design is featured in [The Scout Guide Northern New Jersey](#).

DESIGN AND DECOR, GARDENS AND LANDSCAPE