



URBAN LANDSCAPE | VOLUME TWO



designing THE future

making visionary landscape design a reality *by Jan Lynn*

You wouldn't know by looking at him that Dan Stewart is a seer. Tall, with a ready grin and bone-crushing handshake, he exudes infectious enthusiasm in discussing his work: creating custom environments for exterior spaces. With a trained eye for design, Dan sees individual elements such as soil, structures, plants and water features arranged together in a completely personalized outdoor living space for each of his clients.

SEEING WHAT CAN BE


As a licensed landscape architect, Stewart's gift of seeing the future plays out in his unique style of collaboration with every client. "I just try to listen well," he says. "I try to extract information from the client about how they live, whether the pool is for exercise or fun, do they entertain formally or have kids playing. I try to find out what they want. Some clients don't know what they want, or they have very specific needs or conflicting needs. You have to filter and figure out what they're really looking for, and then fit the pieces into a cohesive design. I do a lot of listening."

This cheerful philosophy defines Dan's entire approach. "I present everything I think and see and understand about the site. I verbally paint a picture in each proposal of how I would design their property and see them living in it – before I ever get the job. It helps them see the creative possibilities and they get excited about it." >>

AN ARTFUL LIFE

The ability to “paint a picture” comes naturally – his father was an artist, painting and throwing pottery. The family lived outside San Diego in a small town of 400 people, and Dan actually attended the last one-room school house in California. He and his two sisters mostly did artwork, painting and learning to make pottery. It wasn’t until high school when he saw a pamphlet in the library on landscape architecture that he knew how he wanted to use his artistic talents.

Stewart’s ability to achieve a desired future can be traced back to his application to Cal Poly Pomona where he’d decided to study. Receiving a letter indicating his application had been denied, he took matters into his own hands, calling the Dean of Landscape Architecture to plead his case. The Dean agreed to review his application, and Dan waited on pins and needles over a weekend while his career goals hung in the balance. That Monday, the Dean called to personally inform him that the decision, based primarily on impacted numbers for the major, had been reversed and he was now accepted for enrollment. After graduating with honors, Dan continues to demonstrate his ability to make a desired future a reality. >>



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An aesthetic design sense creates continuity.

HUMILITY AND HUMOR

With impressive projects in Newport Coast, Pelican Hill, Crystal Cove and Shady Canyon, perhaps Dan's most disarming quality is his unexpected humility. Asked to name-drop about celebrity projects he's created, he's hard pressed to remember any, though former Angels pitcher Chuck Finley and bestselling author Dean Koontz finally come to mind.

Awards are another topic he brushes off as political and "silly." Though his face lights up with a huge grin as he recalls, "We did get an award for Project Playhouse. We did the landscape design for a Balinese-style playhouse with an authentic Balinese garden." Project Playhouse is an annual opportunity for design professionals like Stewart in Southern California's building industry to collaborate in creating elaborate playhouses that are auctioned off to benefit HomeAid Orange County, a local nonprofit focused on ending homelessness. Dan admits, "I'm not too into awards, but that was kind of fun."

His most unusual design challenge was a sheik's 50,000 square-foot house in Saudi Arabia. The sheik was married to an independent woman from Texas, who wanted a western-style garden in the backyard with a pool and water slides, as well as a large lawn area for their children. But in the front, culture required a formal design, a traditional palace-style strictly ordered, yet very luxurious. Dan tells the story with laughter, modestly diverting attention from the remarkable scope of the project to its incongruous quirkiness. In finding a solution to blend elegant formal with loose western style, it's obvious that he's pleased his design worked. >>



Stewart's authentic Balinese garden design won a Project Playhouse award.



Stewart combines raw elements and innovative ideas into uncommon environments that complement architectural style.







Turning plans, sketches and disparate materials into beautifully cohesive landscapes, Dan has made vision a reality for hundreds of clients. Now, as properties are bought and sold, new owners track him down to request additional work, expressing appreciation for the beautiful space they inherited. This is an outcome even Dan didn't foresee – his designs transcend today and may be admired for generations. And that is a beautiful vision for the future.



for more information, see the 411 on page 106.