



Stephen & Kristin Pategas

in the garden *by Stephen and Kristin Pategas*

A Natural Looking Water Feature

Look to nature for inspiration when trying to emulate naturally flowing water features. This sounds obvious, but unfortunately

it is relatively rare to find a manmade one that truly looks natural. Where does the water in a waterfall in nature come from? Except for geysers when they first erupt from the earth, water in nature follows the rules of gravity. Water flows downhill as it travels from a watershed area and upon reaching a sharp drop in elevation - plummets. This creates a waterfall, whether with the grandeur of Niagara's Horseshoe Falls at 167 feet in height or the much more subtle but highest in Florida, 73 foot waterfall in Falling Waters State Park in Chipley in Florida's panhandle.

Most homes in Central Florida, unless around a lake where there may be substantial elevation change, are on relatively flat land. This creates a challenge for creating the illusion that water is running downhill from a higher elevation. Provide a mound

of earth and use vegetation to cover the slopes or retaining walls. This hides the water source and creates the illusion that the water is emerging from "somewhere" upstream. A bit of mystery goes a long way for stimulating the imagination.

Water has amazing erosive powers. Natural areas where water has flowed for a long time exhibit well-worn rocks with smooth and rounded edges. Smaller stones residing in a streambed are tossed about and wear even faster. The stone in newly constructed waterfalls and stream beds where water passes over them should not have sharp angular edges.

All of the stone should be relatively similar in character. Stone yards have a wide diversity of stone from various part of the country and water features with stone from the Southwest mixed with stone from North Carolina is a visual disconnect. Refer to im-

ages of a favorite waterfall found in nature and if possible, help select stones that are sympathetic in look. Provide a variety of stone sizes ranging from the size of a golf ball to - if the space allows and the scale is appropriate - the size of a convection oven.

To maximize the sound of the water falling, raise the height of the spillway. When space is restricted and limits the ability to hide the source, instead of adding height, increase the width of the waterfall so water hits the surface over a wider area.

If conditions do not allow the water feature to look natural, then go another direction and make it structured in appearance and remove natural-looking stone from the equation. When it comes to water features, deceiving the human eye is as difficult as fooling Mother Nature.



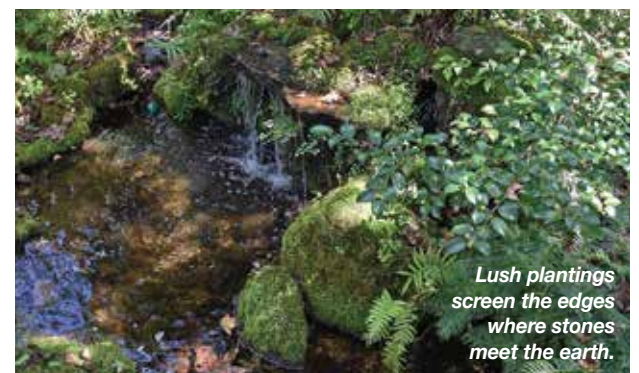
At left: A well-hidden water source adds to the mystery.



A range of stone sizes creates a believable water feature at the Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Tucked into a slight slope, this recent water feature designed by Hortus Oasis mimics nature.



Lush plantings screen the edges where stones meet the earth.

Photos by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis