



Stephen & Kristin Pategas

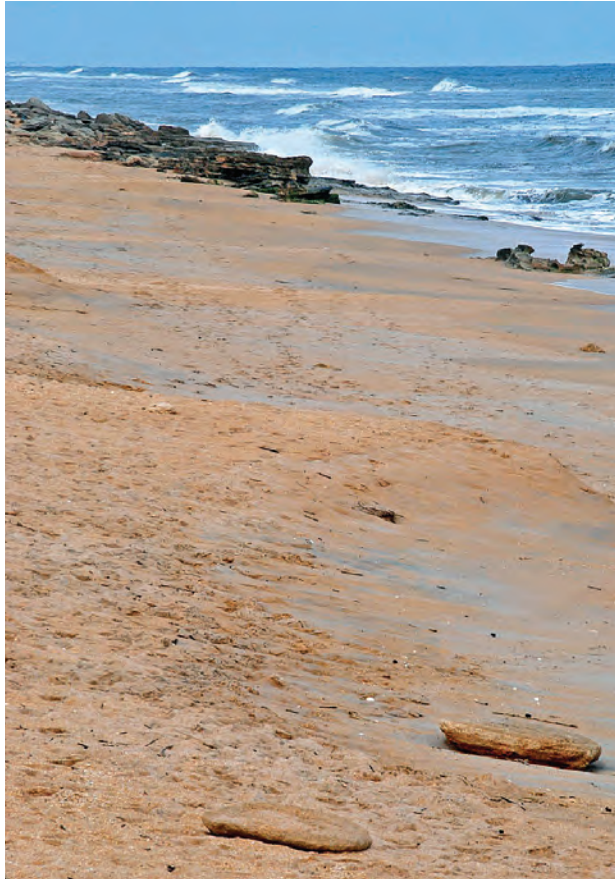
in the garden

by Stephen and Kristin Pategas

Stoned Gardens

We moved from oh-so-rocky New England (southeastern Connecticut specifically) to Central Florida in 1982 and sorely missed a number of items. Rhubarb, cooler temperatures in September, and stone were all near the top of the list. We both grew up with stone walls delineating pastures, hay fields and property lines. Many of these walls were so old that forests had matured around them. As a youth, Stephen used them as elevated walkways and found he could avoid the morning dew on the waist-high grasses. Once ensconced in Florida we wondered if the chunks of concrete we dug up were Florida's "native" rock. Then, thankfully we discovered coral stone from Miami, coquina from the east coast and Florida fieldstone from the Ocala region. But it was Pebble Junction in Sanford and later, Smokey Valley Stone in Clermont that really increased our heart rate. Spread over acres in piles and stacks, we saw a greater variety of stone than we had seen in New England and throughout our travels.

Stone looks natural when it is just lying about where the glaciers deposited it. But when it comes from a stone yard and is dropped onto Florida's flat sandy ground without much thought, it's another matter. In our designs we select stone carefully and use it judiciously. First, it is not a renewable



Coquina stone on the beach at Washington Oaks Gardens State Park.

resource and has a large carbon footprint; secondly on a pound for pound or square foot basis it is rather pricey. It is also heavy and awkward to move around. So, here is some of what we have learned about selecting stone for use in gardens.

Pay attention to the color of the stone and realize that using distinctive stone from some regions will make a strong statement. For example, stone from the southwestern United States gives a garden a southwestern and perhaps desert look that is a visual disconnect with most plantings. Note the different forms available in the type of stone you select. You will need flat and not too thin pieces for stepping stones, large bulky ones for boulders, and thin flat pieces or strips for facing columns or walls. Make sure all of the stone is sympathetic in look and color otherwise the scene will resemble a global village where every visitor brought suitcases of their native stones. Don't assume all pieces of stone will be usable, so purchase extra. Be prepared to take your stone immediately or have it delivered promptly. We have seen tagged stones sold to subsequent customers.

While we still miss seeing stone walls winding their way through the landscape and reminding us of the hard labor performed by those who came before us, we rejoice every time we effortlessly slide a shovel into the ground and don't hit a rock.



Pictured above left, stone selection at Pebble Junction. Middle photo, Tennessee fieldstone thick. Right photo, Tennessee fieldstone thin.

Photos by Stephen G. Pategas, Hortus, Oasis.