



Stephen & Kristin Pategas

in the garden by Stephen and Kristin Pategas

The Power Of Water In The Garden

Just what is it about water that causes the head to swivel, the pace to slow, and the pulse to quicken? Water has power. It's an element that is often left out when designing a garden, but never overlooked when it is present. Water has seduced us many times in both the most intimate, and the grandest of gardens.

Seduction by water is not a recent phenomenon. As early as the 26th century B.C., Egyptians grew reeds and papyrus around a central pool near their homes. Ornamental canals, cascading fountains, and streaming pools enlivened Roman gardens. Even during the Middle Ages, medieval gardens often contained a fountain or a pond. Moorish gardens of the 13th century were comprised of enclosed courtyards with overflowing basins and channels of running water. These inspirational water courses not only provided compelling focal points at each axis, they also symbolized water's sacredness to early garden makers.

Water stimulates all of our senses. Murmur, babble, drizzle, gurgle, crash,

roar, reverberate. These sounds pull us into the garden – then through it. We search around corners, beyond walls, down winding pathways for the source of such potent and primeval sounds. Visually, water is just as powerful. Dewy, glistening, mirror-like, luminous – the sight of it holds the eye and stills the feet. It serenely reflects the sky and tracery of branches in a still pool. A seat near water, or one with a view of it, allows us to linger and absorb these pleasures.

Sensed by our skin and the sensitive passages of the nose, water is atmospheric. The humid mist of fine droplets refreshes us on a hot day. Is it the sight, the sound, or the feel of water that rejuvenates the body and the mind?

While we humans are likely to groan about transporting loads down an incline, water never complains. It trickles, gurgles, and cascades down a slope. In a garden with elevation, gravity is a gardener's ally and water's driving force. Molecules of water spout, gush, and drip from water features, moving

on an endless journey. Resting serenely at the bottom in a pool, they are always ready to be pumped uphill for yet another liquid run downhill.

Water features have the uncanny ability to create a mood in the garden – mysterious, meditative, playful, ethereal, ominous, lethargic, mesmerizing, invigorating. Surely, a garden without water is a garden without a smile.

In our own garden, we longed for those relaxing sounds of water and the visual and auditory stimulation of water's fluidity. We also needed focal points that could hold their own in a garden of lush plantings and ornaments. Now, two water features grace our gardens. A fish fashioned from volcanic stone recirculates water into a carved stone bowl purchased in Bali. Around the corner, a dribbling birdbath attracts hosts of birds and at night, with our heads resting on pillows just a few feet away, lulls us to sleep.



Left: A carved stone fish and bowl pair up at Hortus Oasis. Center: A birdbath at Hortus Oasis also attracts real birds. Right: Ramp up the sound with multiple streams of water. At top: A bubbling glazed urn from Campania glistens. Photos by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis.