

# Mystical Landscapes

## *Landscape Questions to Consider*

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*Congratulations! You are about to avoid a number of misunderstandings and mistakes that commonly result when clients and designers fail to communicate at the level of detail needed for a designer to know enough to make educated recommendations.*

*I'm giving this questionnaire to you so that you can come to our first meeting clear on the answers I need to advise you effectively. It can also be a great focal point for communicating with a partner so that everyone involved is on the same page. Please be thorough, knowing that every change order that is avoided at the design stage can save thousands of dollars later. We will go over your answers together as part of your first billable hour on site.*

**Summarize what is most important to you about your Landscape:**

### **Site/house Data:**

- 1) If you are on a Septic System do you have a map showing the location of the septic tank and drain-field? (Note: There are special landscape techniques required to avoid damaging your drain-field.)
- 2) If you are on a sewer line, do you know if the pipe is sound? It can be easier to replace some sewer lines that need regular cleanings to remove roots as part of or BEFORE your landscape project.

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- 3) Are you aware of zoning restrictions, setbacks or other legal restrictions which might affect your landscape?
- 4) Do you know where all utility cables are located?
  - a) Gas line
  - b) Water lines
  - c) Sewer/Septic transfer line
  - d) Power main and any auxiliary
  - e) Phone
- 5) Do you have plans drawn to scale of the property and where the house sits on it (if so, please bring a copy to our meeting)?
- 6) Do accurate stakes mark all property corners?
- 7) Do you have good relations with all of your neighbors?
- 8) May I contact them to communicate what we are doing and explore cooperation in areas of joint interest such as joint boundary plans?
- 9) Are there hidden things not apparent? (Such as buried stumps in areas, drainage problems in the winter, hard pan just below the surface in areas etc.)
- 10) Which animals frequent the property: (Ask your neighbors if you are new to your home.)
  - a) Deer
  - b) Rabbits

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c) Other

11) Are there any existing features to the landscape you would like left unchanged? (A tree you really like etc.)

12) Are you planning structural changes to the house?

- a) Decks or patios
- b) Garage/ Remodel
- c) Other

13) Will the house be repainted the same colors? If not, which colors?

14) What is your water set up?

- a) Do you pay for it per unit?
- b) Is the hose water filtered also if you have a in house filter system?
- c) Do you have good pressure?
- d) Are you on a community well?

## **Your Preferences:**

1) Who in your family will be actively participating in the design process?

2) What atmosphere or style do you want your garden to have?

3) Do you prefer informal, semi-formal or very formal?

4) Would you like to attract any form of wildlife?

- a) Deer

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- b) Rabbits
  - c) Birds
  - d) Butterflies
- 5) Would you like a water feature?
- 6) Is fragrance important to you?
- 7) Options for seasonal interest:
- a) The whole garden could be geared to be spectacular in 1-2 seasons
  - b) Separate beds could be geared to be spectacular in different seasons
  - c) Each area in the landscape could be quieter with something happening year round
- 8) Do you have favorite plants you want to include?
- 9) Are there plants you dislike?
- 10) Do you have color preferences:
- a) Colors you Dislike:
  - b) Favorite Colors:
- 11) Do you have pictures that capture pieces of what you want in your garden? Please bring a few to our meeting if you have them.
- 12) Are there particular areas in the garden you want to make special?

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13) How many years before you want your landscape to feel mature (this question refers to plant size mainly)?

14) Circle the materials and techniques you like and might want:

- a) Stone walls (local fieldstone or more expensive decorative rock)
- b) Natural stone Groupings
- c) Bark/ Chips (A 2-3" cover helps protect the soil from
- d) Groundcover
- e) Wood, Brick, Concrete, Pavers
- f) Gazebo
- g) Outside speakers and/or TV (where and controlled from where)
- h) Other:

15) Are there materials or techniques you want to avoid?

16) Would you like to create a designated space in your garden or home for meditation, relaxation and/or spiritual renewal?

17) Would you like Landscape Lighting? *Many clients work until dark or entertain in the evening. Lighting can double the minutes of the day that your landscape is enjoyed without doubling the cost of the project, making it a great investment.*

- LED is now as cheap as halogen lights in many cases and comes in warm white. It is not as colorful as halogen but will save you 90% in bulb and electrical costs over time:

a. I want LED

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- b. I want Halogen
- c. I want to learn more.
- Would you prefer lower cost largely invisible fixtures with the focus being on the light or more expensive decorative features as a visual feature?
- Lights can be controlled at no extra charge by the timer that comes with the low voltage power supply or with an optional wireless switch or hardwired switch inside the house. What is your preferred switch method?

## **Our Relationship:**

- 1) Do you want to be actively included in smaller daily design revisions as we install?
- 2) Is there anything important to you that would make the process of designing or installing more comfortable for you?
- 3) Is this your first landscape project?
- 4) Have you worked with a landscaper before?
- 5) What did you like and dislike about the experience?
- 6) Several areas of landscaping fall under county or city jurisdiction, such as height of retaining wall, road access, wetlands, grading, electrical. These are your responsibility as a client to obtain or not as you prefer. Would you like me to act on your behalf to obtain any needed permits?

## **Your Practical Needs:**

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- 1) Storage place for tools and bicycles?
- 2) A place to conceal the garbage cans?
- 3) Screening to block a particular view or create privacy from neighbors in areas?
  
- 4) A flat play area for games?
- 5) A wind screen?
- 6) An area you want to add more shade?
- 7) Space for vegetables or herbs?
- 8) A composting area for a heap or worm bin?
- 9) Site for a hot tub?
- 10) Easy wheel chair access? (If so, where to?)
  
- 11) How many cars do you want to comfortably park?
- 12) Are there other things (boats etc.) you plan to store on the site?
- 13) dog run/ animal shelter?
- 14) Do you want a fire pit?
- 15) Do have/ have plans for cat, dog or outside pets?
- 16) Will young children have unattended access to the landscape?
- 17) Do you need water, phone, propane, cable, a security system, intercoms, or electricity anywhere else on the site?
- 18) Do you want to install solar panels now or allocate a space for future solar panels? (An area of approximately 400 square feet of panels can create a net power surplus for many Marin homes).
  - a) On the roof of existing buildings.
  - b) As part of the roof of a new structure.
  - c) On the ground.

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- 19) Do you want an automatic irrigation system?
- a) Drip or spray in bed areas?
  - b) An onsite weather station linked to your irrigation controller?  
(This costs \$500.-\$2,000. and has been estimated to save about 30% of water and reduces maintenance. Marin municipal water district may offer you a rebate to partially pay for this as part of their program to encourage “smart timers” and save water.
  - c) An optional remote for your irrigation controller.

## **Landscape Costs/Investments:**

*This includes anything outside the foundation footprint including garden sheds, driveway paving, drainage systems, outdoor lighting, forestry, trails etc.*

- 1) Do you want a dollar for dollar return on investment in your landscape when you sell?
- 2) What do you want to pay for yearly maintenance once established:
  - a) All landscape related materials (includes annuals, bark etc.)\$
  - b) Paid help (if any): \$
- 3) How many hours do you want to spend maintaining your landscape each week? *(You will need to spend double this time for the first two years to establish the garden. If more than one person will be doing maintenance give a break down for each person per week.)*
- 4) Total you are comfortable investing in the installation of your landscape over time *(Landscape is defined here as anything outside the foundation footprint, including sheds, driveways, lighting, swimming pools and hot tubs): \$*

**Note about this question:** *”I don’t know what things cost so I don’t know what to put down.” is something I hear from about 20% of my clients. That is OK. However, you will save an average of \$500. in re-design fees if you are able to give me clear guidance about your budget prior to my making my recommendations. So here are a few work-arounds to help you:*

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- *Regardless of how much money you have, if spending more than a certain amount will bring you stress, give a number that is before your stress point. Since almost all projects cost more than almost all clients want this will almost certainly not be enough to do all that you want to do. But the important thing is that you are listening to your stress point and will not be sucked into a project that stresses you out. Your well-being is more important than a garden!*
- *If you are not stressed, have the money, but don't want to go overboard, just know that most Realtors consider 5-15% of the total value of land/home to be an appropriate budget for landscaping that you will easily get back when you sell. Just take the appraised value of your home at this time, calculate 5-15% of this number, estimate how much of your home is already landscaped, and that will give you a remaining number that would be normal to invest.*
- *If your primary goal is to maximize net profit when you sell, just tell me and I can show you the things that will really make a difference in your sale on your home and tell you what those cost.*
- *A final thought exercise is all about what makes you and your family happy. This is your money! You can do anything you want to do with it: Take a year off, go travelling, buy a new car, or send flowers to your loved one twice a day for a year. What will give you the most pleasure over time? I love it when that is the landscape. But if it is not, spend your money on what makes you happy.*

***The total budget is what I design to. It does not matter if you want to do everything at one time or want to break the project into stages.***

- 5) If doing this work in stages how do you see it breaking down:
- a) Now:\$
  - b) Year Two:\$
  - c) Year Three: \$
  - d) Yearly thereafter: \$

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**Note about stages:** *Anything can be broken into stages, based either on the sequence that will be the most efficient to install (this saves you money) or the order of priority that is most important for you functionally or visually. That being said, there is often a 10% savings associated with the efficiency of doing things all at once. In addition material inflation costs and the cost of complying with ongoing additions to new building and landscape codes often results in a 3% increase in any given item per year. In some cases, particularly in smaller gardens, the cost of doing things in stages can be as much as 30% higher.*

- 6) Are you interested in doing any aspects of the installation yourself? If so, what:
  
- 7) Are there specific dates for beginning/completion you wish to work around ?

*Please gather photos of things you like and don't like. I've created a library of over 1,000 Marin landscape photos grouped by category to help you find things you like at: <http://www.marinlandscapearchitect.com/Marin-Landscape-Design-Images.html>*

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## *Your Values:*

*This portion of the questionnaire will help me understand not just what is important to you, but how important it is to you. As a consultant my goal is to suggest things that reflect **your** values. And in many instances your values will be in a natural tension with one another. You want to save money and you want to benefit the environment but the environmental option costs more money: What do you choose? Based on how you answer these questions I will make appropriate recommendations. If more than one person is involved in the project please both fill in this form.*

Using a 1-10 scale, let me know your priorities by ranking each of the following between 1-10, with 10 being the most value you can imagine and 0 being no value. It's important not to give more than three or four of these a 10 as what I'm looking for is the choice you want to make when two values are in conflict:

<b>Name 1</b>	<b>Name 2</b>	<b>Values:</b>
		Saving Money Now.
		Increasing resale value.
		Lowering maintenance.
		Keeping overall cost to a certain budget.
		Actively participating in the project.
		Providing wildlife habitat.
		Looking cool by contemporary standards.
		Pleasing to my personal taste.
		Exceptional workmanship.
		Good rapport with contractor.
		Maintaining neighbor good will.
		Personal health.
		Privacy.
		Safety/Security in the Landscape.
		Pleasing my partner/spouse.
		Learning and building landscape skills.
		Work completed by a deadline.
		Minimizing intrusion on daily life.

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		Spontaneity and fun with the project.
		Following the letter of the law/permits.
		Consideration for neighbors.
		Creating a sacred space.
		Saving money long-term.
		Environmental sensitivity.
		Other:

*Note anything else important to you here:*

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## *A Successful Project*

Winning is a team sport. When it comes to working with a professional, the most important thing to remember is that they cannot effectively partner with you to give you what you want unless you educate them about who you are. That makes ongoing communication about how you feel and your values the most important role you play. If you don't feel comfortable parking on the street while we move deliveries, communicate your discomfort. If you have a party on a certain Saturday tell us the date (we sometimes work Saturdays).

Remember that everything exists in tension with everything else. Every special request has impact on how easily and quickly we are able to work. In an ideal world, you tell us a list of things that are important to you such as:

- “My husband likes to park his car comfortably here by 5pm.
- “My child needs silence for his nap from 2-4pm every day.
- “Don't knock on the door if you need something – text me.
- “You can use this bathroom as long as you take off your shoes.
- “I have a party and want things nice by the 5<sup>th</sup> in this area and I'm willing to spend more money to have it be inefficient.
- “I'm really picky about any signs of mud around our walkways and driveway at the end of the day and want extra cleaning duty.”

If this will leave you happy and you can tell us before we bid the project, we can factor all of this in our bid. Or perhaps you want to ask how these requests affect our labor costs prior to confirming them? On one job that needs a lot of equipment the nap could cost us \$50-150 per day to accommodate because work has to shut down. On another job it won't cost anything at all. What keeps the relationship warm is not pushing strongly for a new request half-way through the project without notice, asking about its impact on the completion date etc. or wanting to share in the possible cost of the request.

Thanks for inviting me to join you on your winning team.

Sincerely,

*Dane Rose*

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