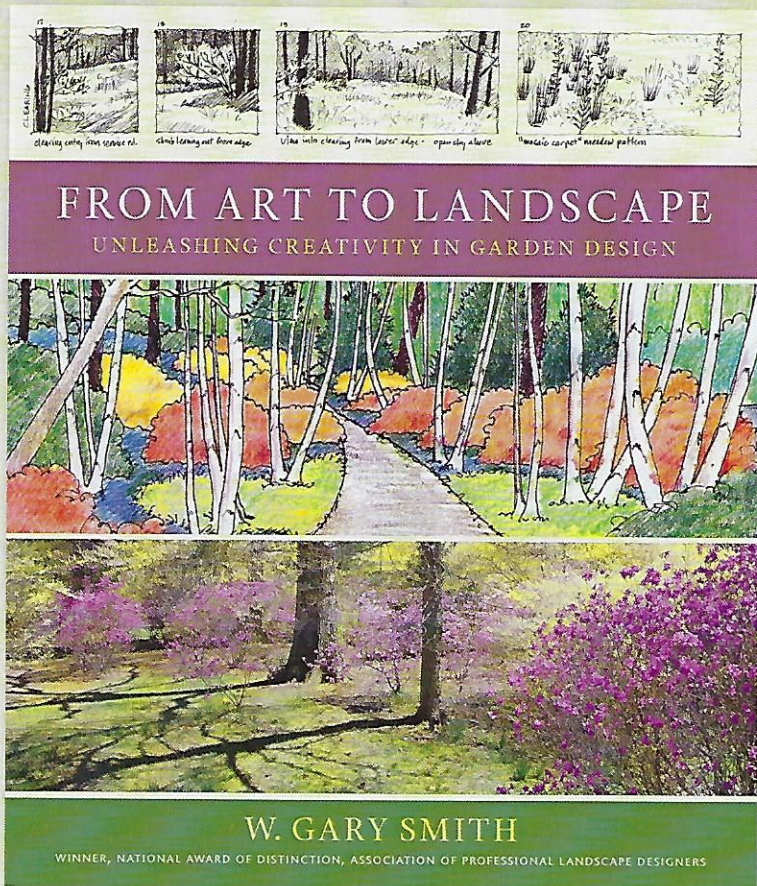


# From Art to Landscape: Unleashing Creativity in Garden Design

By W. Gary Smith (Timber Press, 2010)

Review by Judy Nauseef, APLD, ICNP



If you are looking for inspiration, *From Art to Landscape: Unleashing Creativity in Garden Design* by W. Gary Smith will provide you with enough to last through many landscape design seasons. Smith clearly explains his creative process through descriptions of design vocabulary and elements in the first half of the book and through detailed explanations of five of his projects in the second half. Smith spoke at an APLD conference about some of these projects so I knew of his work and looked forward to reading his book. He also led a design workshop at a conference. Smith is an APLD Award of Distinction recipient.

In the first chapter, Smith links his activities as a youth and the study of horticulture, landscape architecture, landscape design and art together to illustrate how becoming an artist gave him the power to create the large collaborative gardens described in the book. Dare to think and act as an artist during investigations of site and in the development of design concepts. He writes, "How do artists just seem to know what to do? I think it comes with practice. You practice the art of careful intuition, of trusting what's in front of you, and you suspend your analytical mind."

In chapter two, Smith discusses at length the shapes, forms and patterns that exist in nature and which he incorporates in his designs. He uses a visual vocabulary to make sense of what he is seeing and encourages his students to use one that "helps them make their own visual connections to the natural world." Smith includes drawings and photographs to clearly illustrate his ideas.

Chapter three is the most exciting part of the book. Smith introduces us to his method of exploring a site with sketches, drawings, paintings and collages. He tells us the size of the paper or other surface, the media used and the time spent on the works. On many of them there are notes about the site, the image or the ideas that are developing. These works are integral to his design process and serve as a reference. He calls it visual note taking. There is a real freedom to this kind of art because the purpose is not to exhibit and sell it, but for his own use. He makes the point that anyone can do this kind of art the same way that anyone can take written notes, even if not a skilled writer. In order to keep oneself from attempting to reproduce the scene exactly, Smith uses colors that are not in the landscape. This allows a closer study of the shapes, forms and patterns.

Chapter four expands on the connection between art and landscape design and the opportunities this relationship has brought to Smith. He describes inspiration arising from the knowledge of particular artists and works of art. These examples give us a reason to look more closely and more often at art, not only in museums but other public places.

Some of Smith's studies are truly beautiful as works of art themselves which makes the book stunning. The chapters on projects include many garden photographs and reproductions of Smith's paintings to illustrate the design process. Particularly interesting are the descriptions of his collaborations with others involved in the projects. This includes arboretum and garden directors and staff, growers, horticulturists and artists. Many readers will have visited these public gardens or will have the opportunity to do so. This book will make those visits even more enjoyable, particularly for a landscape designer.

I know that Smith's book will encourage me to look more closely at project sites for now I have another way to grasp the existing qualities of the site as well as to see the possibilities of what can be developed there.