



The Psychology of Landscaping Part II

By Arthur Navarrette
Executive Care Landscaping

PAVERS | PATIOS & WALKWAYS | STAIRS & RETAINING WALLS | DRY RIVER BEDS & BOULDERS | WATERFALLS & FOUNTAINS

Welcome to our Fall edition. This project marks Part II of transforming this client's yard. Two years ago, we worked on Dave and Jan's backyard, and now we have the privilege of enhancing their front yard. Like many yards before our intervention, their front yard was neutral and unattractive—it neither invited you in nor kept you away. Many landscapes are like this, and as a society, we often subconsciously ignore them. An attractive landscape catches the eye, much like a blooming flower. Look at the before picture; it's just a standard landscape, and even today, many landscapers continue to design spaces this way. Currently, we are redoing a landscape from one of my competitors. They did well with the concrete, as many do, but when it comes to plants, they lack the necessary knowledge. Plants are much more complex than hardscape; you need to understand sun and shade requirements, which varieties thrive in specific environments, and their growth habits.

Do your homework: check reviews and landscapers' websites. Remember, it's easy to upload pictures from anywhere, so be cautious. I can spot "fake landscapes" when the plants in the pictures aren't suited for our climate. They may look lush and soft, fitting for Southern California or the Bay Area, where the climates are milder and don't experience freezes or the 110-degree heat we faced this summer.

I typically don't share such details, but I'm upset because my client, Noah, is paying for his landscape twice. We are literally removing almost every plant that was previously installed, and I want to prevent this from happening to anyone who reads my articles. We will feature Noah's job in the near future, but for now, let's focus on this landscape.

It was rewarding to return and work on Dave's front yard. He's not just a great client; he's also a good friend. Since I work so much, I don't have much time to make friends outside of work, so my clients often become friends too. For this project, our goal was to remove all the original plants while leaving the trees (though in the last project we featured, we did remove one tree). We then added a topsoil blend and tilled it into the ground. This

basic work wasn't done for Noah's landscape, which partly led to the demise of many plants. They were planted directly in the earth, without amendments or soil cultivation. I've mentioned this many times before, and while it does add cost to the job, I won't do a job without it. Healthy plants thrive when given the right environment, and nobody likes looking at sick plants. If you're going to spend money on landscaping, do it right. If it's too expensive this year, save up and tackle it next year, but at least you won't be throwing away your money.

After adding the topsoil blend, we followed up with mounding, especially since the planters were small and needed enhancement. Creating mounds allows the new plants to root out before competing with existing tree roots. We then added boulders—not moss rock boulders, which are less expensive and commonly used, but Sierra boulders, which are among the most expensive. Boulders are sold by weight; moss rocks, being lava-related, are much lighter than Sierra boulders, which are quartz. For size, the Sierra boulder weighs twice as much as the moss rock boulder, but its beauty lasts forever. The tans, creams, blues, and grays remain because the color is part of the boulder. In contrast, moss rocks lose their appeal once the moss is burned off, revealing an unattractive rock beneath.

So, what's our next step for Dave? Normally, we would proceed with planting, but since his home is at the top of a hill with a long driveway, all the planters are to the right. There are trees to the left and a narrow planter that runs alongside the driveway, creating an unbalanced landscape. While achieving perfect balance isn't always possible, we can certainly improve it. Therefore, we built a wall that created a much wider planter, bringing us closer to balancing the two sides. We've done this before, and while it does add cost, it lasts forever and greatly enhances curb appeal, making the home more saleable, and the landscape more enjoyable. Landscaping is about being creative with the canvas you're given. The blocks we used for the retaining wall were not particularly attractive, but they matched what was already there. I didn't want to introduce a different type of block. Furthermore, the block's face was not



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visible from the driveway, only the top. Once the planter was completed and planted, it allowed me to soften the entrance and make it more inviting. Landscaping is like getting dressed; you have limited space, and you must be creative to maximize it.

Gardeners, by now you should have pulled out your summer garden and prepared the soil for your fall and winter garden. This is my favorite gardening season. Hopefully, you've already planted it; however, if not, it's not too late—just act soon! Until next time, happy gardening! —Arthur

→ A narrow planter runs alongside the driveway, creating an unbalanced landscape. Therefore, from this tree towards the fence, we built a wall that created a much wider planter. Bringing us closer to balancing the two sides.

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