

The HOUSE *Makes the* GARDEN

The size and style of your home shape the look and feel of your landscape.

Stephen Anderton



A house is a massive three-dimensional anchor for the space that surrounds it. And because it is a place to live, a house lends its garden a look and feel of permanence. It gives a garden a *raison d'être*.

THE BEST GARDENS always have houses in them. Gardens without houses struggle to be much more than just good or bad horticulture. But a garden with a house acquires a focus and a serenity through having a dwelling at its core.

HANDLING A DOMINANT HOUSE

Some houses dominate their garden most powerfully, like lighthouses surveying their patch of coastal water. Wherever you are in the garden, the presence of a tall dominant house will be noticed. There will be no getting away from it, and its formalizing influence will stretch much further than that of a simple single-story house. Commanding upright houses need their own

space immediately about them, to set off and make sense of their importance. So you might find broad simple terracing or plain lawns far more comfortable under the walls of such a house than small compartments of fussy gardening.

Whenever someone moves into even a low house with huge open views, there is the temptation never to close off any of that panorama. Yet within five years most people find themselves planting trees and producing a garden that narrows the focus onto the most interesting parts of the prospect. It's because the best view in the world always needs a frame, and a comfortable, livable foreground. So let the garden's design work with the house to define those prospects from the start.

HANDLING A LESS DOMINANT HOUSE

In general, it is much easier to garden around houses that are not particularly tall and upright. Lower, broader houses are more easily woven into a garden because they do not rise above the trees. Sometimes a garden will contain other buildings—a garage perhaps, or outbuildings or a workshop—and when these buildings have stylistic similarity they can do wonders as a quiet, continuous theme to hold the garden together. They reinforce the sense of the whole garden being a place in which people live, and provide further excuses to create paving and seating areas, or even courtyards of different character. If you don't have any such outbuildings, perhaps your design should incorporate even a simple one.

ECHOING THE STYLE OF THE HOUSE

The house itself will always set the biggest stamp of period style on a garden, and your first principle, when making new hard landscaping anywhere in the garden, should be to find something that is sympathetic to the style of the house, but that also uses contemporary materials and is attractive to contemporary eyes. This is your own garden you are making, after all, so let it represent your own time. Only if the house has a strong and compelling period style should you create hard landscaping that copies absolutely the style of the house. Never think, either, that hard landscaping in a garden—the walls, paths, and ornaments—should be rustic and cozy just because a garden is green and “timeless.” That is to make nostalgia king.

So think about what materials in the house could sensibly be used in new hard landscaping, as a means of marrying old and new style. A modern house constructed in simple linear planes might call for more simple planes, of high-specification concrete, glass, decking, or steelwork. An easy-going clapboarded house might take painted fences, decking, and simple gravel paths.

To reuse or reinterpret the materials of the house in a new garden is not to be dully the same. It is to create a unity of materials that makes a garden peaceful and gives it a firm identity. Novelty, then, whether it comes in the form of vibrant, colorful planting or sculpture or modern hard landscaping design, is all the more telling a contrast. It can really sing. That homogeneity of basic materials can be the springboard for the most extravagant flights of contemporary imagination. ♡

The practical demands and opportunities of summer living—of sitting, eating, and reading outdoors—mean that a generous amount of hard surface close to a house will never be wrong.



TRANSITIONS FROM HOUSE TO GARDEN

The practical demands and opportunities of summer living—of sitting, eating, and reading outdoors—mean that a generous amount of hard surface close to a house will never be wrong. Don't forget, however, that the pleasure of stepping outside onto a level grass terrace is also enormous. Climate will dictate whether a lawn offers you an attractive and practical softness, or a prospect of mud for half the year. It may be that you still choose to create a generous area of paving around the house, but to enclose it in hedges, broken only to allow particular vistas from a door or picture window to the outer parts of the garden or landscape.

Not every garden enjoys a natural focus in the surrounding landscape, such as a river or pond, or a great view, or a tree-covered hillock. In flat country or in urban surroundings the house may be by far the best means of focusing the garden as a whole, and you may want to make it the start or finish of every axis within the garden, formally or informally. You might, for example, create a garden of radiating straight vistas in the French manner, with linear borders and plenty of architectural ornament. Symmetry would be king. Or you might make a meandering matrix of curving island beds and specimen trees, offering periodic well-planned glimpses along rivers of grass flowing to and from the house. You might decide to play it formal on one side of the house and informal on the other side, but still it will be a hard-working marriage.

