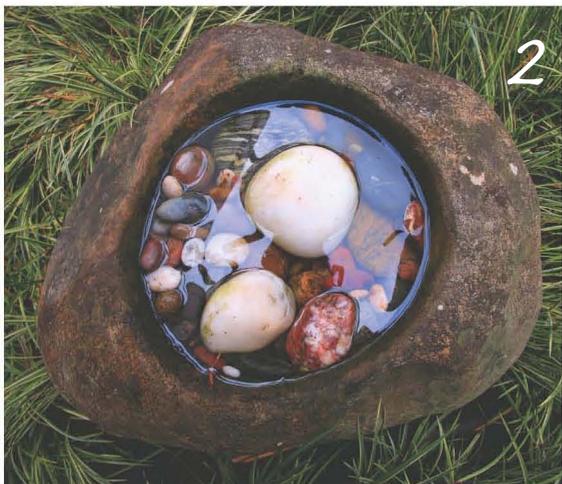


Beauty has a lot to do with form; think of the petals of a flower, a bird gliding through the air, clouds drifting in the sky or the human body — their shape is what inspires us to admire them. This is also the case when it comes to things that are designed — like a beautiful building, a sculpture, a landscape or a car. People are drawn to different forms just as they are drawn to different design styles.

In garden design, form refers to the visual and physical presence (and impact) of objects in the landscape, which can range from plants, pots and sculpture to walls, fences and water features. Form can encompass an object's shape, size, texture, placement, materials and colour.

Form is usually the first element you will notice in a designed space — particularly when a feature has been selected to stand out and attract the eye. It helps to create the mood of the landscape and influences the way people use the space.

Form contributes to the feel of an outdoor space by giving us cues about how that space might be used. Very symmetrical or geometrical shapes give a sense of formality, conjuring up images of elegant dinner parties, for example.



2



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IN FINE FORM

The shapes we use in our gardens not only affect how we feel, they help determine purpose

Story: Jacki Brown

More asymmetrical forms, which can be as bold as their symmetrical cousins, create an active, lively atmosphere with a modern and vibrant feel — the perfect atmosphere for casual entertaining. Smooth and rounded forms are ideal for creating places for relaxation and can give the impression of a resort or nature retreat.

To help you use form wisely and well when designing a garden, you need to consider the following points:

1. Design form

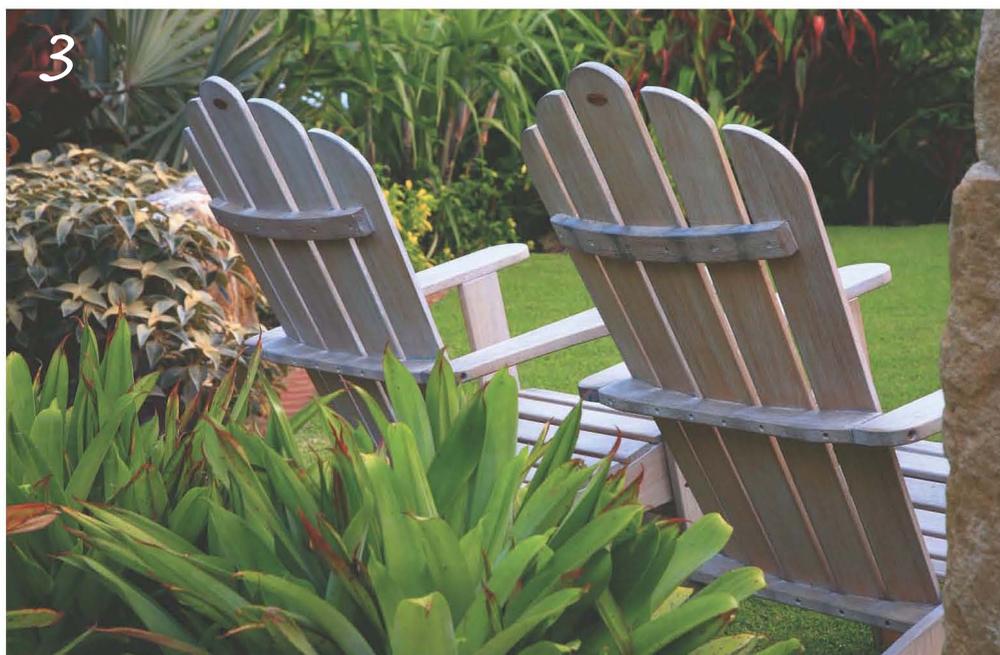
Good design is achieved by having an overall theme or style, which will in turn guide the selection of forms in your landscape. The form of one object can be used to frame or point to another form, adding emphasis and directing attention by virtue of its size, shape and configuration. So what type of form suits which landscape style?

2. Formal form

If you like the straight lines and symmetrical shapes of formal landscapes, use materials that easily create straight lines, such as brick walls and large-format pavers. Features like pots, urns or statues can be placed to form an axis of symmetry or used asymmetrically along an axis.

3. Natural form

If you tend to like a more natural feel, forms will be less rigid and more curvaceous. Objects in a natural-style garden can be irregular, random, asymmetrical or off-centre while still making the composition look balanced. Natural-style landscapes work on the principles of nature, including the dynamic condition of living things and natural materials. A “grounded” feeling can be created by having low solid objects and tall upright trees and structures to extend your view in all



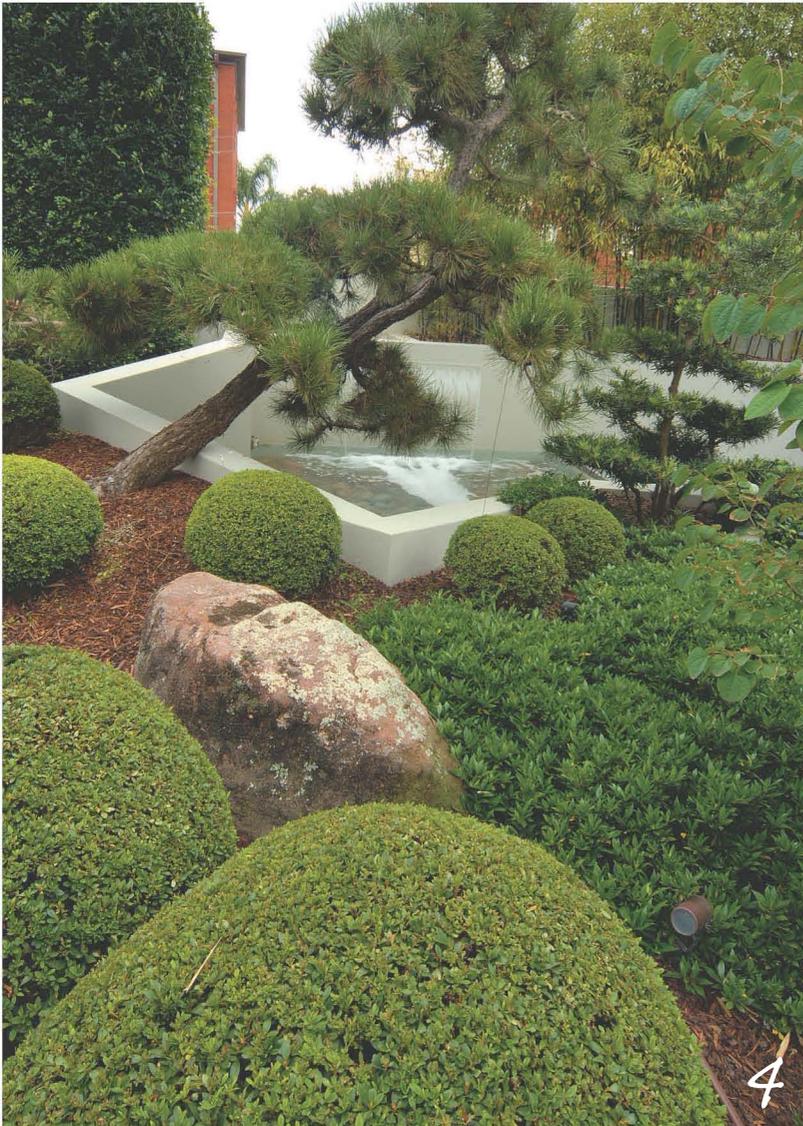
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1. Clean lines speak of formality but can be softened with the introduction of leafy well established plants. Garden design by Helen Young.

2. The organic form of this stone bowl mimics the random, somehow soothing shapes that occur in the natural world. Garden design by Helen Young.

3. Whether furniture or large foliage plants, there are many ways to add form and interest to a landscape. Garden design by Paradisus.

4. Solid forms, such as clipped shrub mounds, provide a feeling of stability and ground a garden. Garden design by Imperial Gardens Landscape.



directions, and create a relaxing feeling of increased space.

In nature we get “random” shapes formed over time, such as the twisted branches of gum trees, wind patterns in sand and the form of wild plants. This natural form creates interest and intrigue because of the lack of uniformity. Natural form in a landscape is created by using organic materials, a variety of plant species and solid natural materials like stone.

4. Solid form

Solid forms provide mass such as large rocks, stones, expanses of turf or massed plantings, structures, hard paved areas and water bodies, giving the impression of permanence, stability and strength. Solidity can be utilised in any landscape style. Plants can be given the appearance of solidity, particularly clipped hedges and topiaries like Buxus and lilly pilli, or a climber such as *Ficus pumila* or bougainvillea growing on a wall or fence.

5. Geometric form

Geometric and symmetrical forms such as circles, triangles and rectangles give a sense of purpose, order, design or intention, which differentiate a designed space from the natural world. This effect can be attractive when you want the landscape to stand out. Use geometric form in walls, garden edges, sculpture and water features to achieve this.

6. Architectural form

Architectural straight lines and built objects create impact, action and a dynamic mood. This can be achieved using hard landscaping, or with bold foliage plants such as strappy leafed cordylines, kangaroo paws and grasses or tropical-style plants with large leaves.

- **Formal:** Use geometric and solid forms. Rely heavily on straight lines and symmetry to establish structure, then smooth form features like urns and statues for contrast.
- **Contemporary:** Plants with architectural form are best. Use blocks of colour/texture, plain materials and straight or geometric lines mixed with curves and abstract features.
- **Bush garden:** Soft plants, twisted branches, bush rock, natural random shapes, solid forms at ground level with masses of shrubs and trees — these all create a natural bushland feel.

7. Use of patterns

Patterns and flowing forms create rhythm, interest and movement. Patterns can fill voids in an area and can be used to create an illusion of extended space. Patterns in a landscape can be created by the repetition of objects or by patterns of similar textures, colours and shape, as well as the shadows or silhouettes they create.

The rosette form which many plants exhibit can be utilised for effect, for example, tree ferns, succulents and cycads. Spiky form plants like yuccas, dracaenas and cordylines give a dramatic effect and draw the eye upwards, so they can be strategically placed as beacons that draw attention to other features. Hard-landscape elements like pavers, tiles and timber slats can all create rigid tessellated patterns which can look right at home in formal, geometric or architectural landscape designs. ■

This article was prepared by **Jacki Brown** and the team at *ecodesign* on behalf of the Australian Institute of Landscape Designers & Managers (AILDM). If you would like to find an AILDM member in your area, visit the website: www.aildm.com.au.



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