

OUTDOORS

Meditative Spaces: Create a peaceful oasis right outside your door. Landscape Details founder Michael Derrig shares the sublime secrets of his Zen palette.

By Jamie Bufalino



When it's high season and you're the owner of one of the East End's leading landscape companies, every workday—overseeing the logistics of planting trees, designing gardens, building pathways and walls—has the potential to thrust you into a thicket of anxiety. "But people always tell me I'm so calm," says Landscape Details founder Michael Derrig, who credits a meditation practice for helping him coolly tackle each day's challenges. "When I design, I try to pass that meditative quality on to my clients."

For Derrig, creating a serene outdoor space starts with simplicity. "When I go to properties and if there's no order or if I find them overdesigned, it gives me the heebie-jeebies," he says. "The less clutter of plants, the simpler the color palette and the simpler the lines, the better you'll feel without even realizing it."

Derrig cites a recent project in Bridgehampton—for which he created a long allée of trees against the backdrop of a stone wall, plus a water feature that looks out onto a Sol LeWitt sculpture—as one of his quintessentially Zen-like designs. "The trees create a canopy, the water provides the tranquility, the stones emphasize the natural aesthetic, so at that point there's a real feeling of simplicity," he says.

Don't worry if you don't have a sprawling estate because "meditative places are better when they're more

intimate," says Derrig. It also helps if you create "destinations" in your yard. At Derrig's own East Hampton home (where he lives with his wife and two children), "I've taken all my flowers and put them in certain, specific places on the property, so you have to go to that spot to see them. That provides another opportunity for meditation." Water features—even a small bubbling fountain—are another key element to creating an outdoor escape. "It absolutely gives you the instant feeling of tranquility," he says. And "I am obsessed with Buddha statues," adds Derrig, "One of my clients has five substantially sized Buddha statues on his property. One's the elephant one—and he goes out and lights a candle for each one." (If you want to emulate Buddha by planting a beautiful tree to ponder life under, Derrig recommends opting for either the classic Japanese maple or a Yoshino cherry.)

Once you've transformed your space into a peaceful oasis, if one of your noisy neighbors is harshing the mellow atmosphere you've created, Derrig says "it's amazing what a wood privacy fence does when combined with two outdoor speakers playing meditative music." But if all else fails, just keep focused on your relationship to your garden. Sums up Derrig: "Life's too short to get all wiggled out over stuff you can't control. With plants, it's simple—you give them love, they grow and they give you happiness."