

ADD SOME ZEN TO YOUR LIFE

Sean Dowling – Bayon Gardens

In our busy lives, how can we create more balance, more Zen? For thousands of years, gardens have been used as a place for sanctuary, a place for retreat. How can using the natural elements bring us into equanimity?

There is no doubt we live in a busy world, and statistics are saying that stress is one of the major causes of illness... physical, mental or emotional. I most certainly have experienced stress, and when I raise the topic with friends and colleagues it seems to be more common than not. So what do we do to not let stress overtake our quality of life?

In my opinion, creating balance in our lives has never been so urgent.

If we are busy at work, with the kids, on the road, running a business, then when we get home, we need an opportunity to balance the business out by immersing ourselves in the opposite experience. Calm and tranquil... we need a retreat away from all the stress, where we can just be, where we can relax, breathe, spend time with our loved ones and truly be present for them.

SO HOW DO WE BRING MORE ZEN INTO OUR GARDEN?

What I learnt from looking at the 'Bayon' temple and later the Japanese Gardens, is to really use the elements to our advantage.

1. **Earth** – there's nothing quite like feeling the grass right under your feet. Make your garden barefoot friendly and instantly connect with nature as you feel the earth beneath your feet.
2. **Water** – use it either as a central feature or hidden in the garden for a relaxing soundscape. Create an experience where you can open your senses, listening to the soothing trickles (or the majestic waterfall gushing) rather than thinking, drawing you into the present moment.
3. **Fire** – A fire-pit to gather around with your loved ones creates special moments. Leave your phones inside and be hypnotised by the flame while toasting marshmallows.
4. **Air** – Breathe in the fresh air... plant your favourite trees and flowers, our oxygen producing friends. In those moments you're feeling flustered, walk outside, close your eyes and take a deep breath in, relaxing your facial muscles as you exhale. Let the simplicity of the breath wind you down after a big day.
5. **Space** – An essential part of any design is to not over complicate or overcrowd... leaving space for the features to shine, for plants to grow and for experiences to be created. If there's too much busyness, then where is the space for growth? Have an area in your garden for spaciousness, where you can find space in between your thoughts, a place for creativity.

The point is, create an area to relax, to let go. And there is nothing like nature to help you get there, whether that's the ocean, the mountains, the bush or in this case creating a garden sanctuary. Fresh air and nature's way of being perfectly imperfect, reflects blissful beauty, perhaps even brings us back to simplicity and clarity that is so easily lost in our busy lives.

As the quote says "the only Zen you find on top of mountains, is the Zen you bring up there."

Add some Zen into your garden, to bring more Zen into your life.

Sean Dowling | Bayon Gardens

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