

# gardenvariety

**What's hot now** This year, eco-friendly trumps over-the-top, grasses and perennials beat short-term blooms. As growing season starts, **Danny Sinopoli** canvasses top landscape designers for their take on the coolest outdoor spaces Page 5 ➔



Enviro-conscious green roofs are among this season's biggest garden trends. This one was designed by Plant Specialists Inc., a New York firm co-owned by a former Torontoan.

## What's in (and out) in landscape design

### GARDENING INS

- ▮ Strong, architectural designs such as square or rectangular courtyards, circular patches of grass and classic checkerboard patterns.
- ▮ Eco-friendly elements such as green roofs, water-wise designs, recycled fixtures and vintage furnishings and accents.
- ▮ Ornamental grasses and shrubs, small trees that can be easily manipulated and flowers that provide all-season bloom (such as Endless Summer hydrangeas)
- ▮ Interesting colour combinations such as lime green with blue or burgundy.

### GARDENING OUTS

- ▮ Garden "rooms"
- ▮ Over-the-top elements such as boulders, stone bridges and reflecting pools
- ▮ Monochromatic plantings
- ▮ Gardens full of annuals that need to be replaced every year
- ▮ D.S.



BY DANNY SINOPOLI

When Toronto garden designer Meredyth Hilton visits her clients these days, she hears fewer demands for reflecting pools, giant boulders and those interconnecting "outdoor rooms" that all the gardening magazines were abuzz about over the past 10 years.

Instead, she says, recession-conscious clients are looking for "simple, strong design shapes" and "long-lasting plants" that won't seem dated next year. She is also being asked to make even small gardens look "as vast as possible."

"We used to hear homeowners saying that they would move up in five years, but I think people are really trying to make what they have as great as possible. A lot of my clients have been telling us that they will stay in their houses for a long time," says the designer, who runs her landscaping firm, Artistic Gardens Inc. ([www.artisticgardens.ca](http://www.artisticgardens.ca)), with her husband, Brad.

As the first full gardening

season since the economic downturn kicks off, landscape designers are reporting both a constricting and a reenergizing of their work. To be sure, fewer homeowners are ordering up those expensive limestone slabs to serve as footbridges across their koi ponds, but the fact that more people are nesting in their present homes means that spending on gardens continues apace — it's just more strategic and longer-term in nature.

The Hiltons see this climate as a welcome opportunity.

"It feels amazing as a designer to build something that I know a family will live with for a long time," says Meredyth. "Maybe the little kids they have now will one day get married in this same garden."

Kent Ford of Toronto-based Kent Ford Design Group ([www.kentforddesign.com](http://www.kentforddesign.com)) holds a similarly positive view.

"The recession may be keeping the hands of potential clients in their pockets, but the larger demographic of baby boomers renovating inside and out will ultimately prevail,"

Ford says, adding that he also sees "the trend toward clean, architectural spaces continuing to expand. This is a function of designing for smaller spaces that are attached to both townhouses and highrise condos."

For Grahame Hubbard of New York-based Plant Specialists Inc. ([www.plantspecialists.com](http://www.plantspecialists.com)), one of the most exciting aspects of this refocusing on the long term is a heightened interest in eco-friendly gardens.

Green roofs, the former Torontonians turned Brooklynite says, are especially popular in vertically inclined New York, where the city government is offering tax incentives for buildings with roof gardens.

He is also finding "that a lot of our clients are going for recycled building parts, whether it be cement fixtures from demolished buildings, salvaged columns or marble mantels from old fireplaces."

One client, Hubbard notes, "salvaged the copper waves from an amusement-park fun ride and has used them as the front of his planter boxes; they



have aged beautifully and really give the garden a unique edge.”

Hilton, too, predicts a renewed interest in vintage garden furniture, which she acquires through antique markets and garage sales. “It is a great way to personalize your garden with something special that you won’t find everywhere,” she says. “I also love faux bois items, which are not so easy to find, but new pieces are for sale.”

Even in recessionary times, however, landscaping is, like other luxury categories, still susceptible to provisional trends. So what are some of the hottest picks of the coming season?

Both Ford and Hilton are fond of wall fountains. “I really try to encourage my clients to use water in some form,” Hilton says. “Wall fountains are so easy [to install and maintain] and work in every garden.”

In terms of plantings, Hubbard likes Jacquemontii birch trees for their “spectacular trunks,” hornbeam trees for their ability to be “cut and

shaped” and hydrangeas such as the Endless Summer variety for their “all-season beauty.”

Hilton, meanwhile, is “all about foliage colour” this year, especially the combination of “lime green foliage with silvery blues and the deepest burgundy-black.”

And Jeff Cutler of space2place design in Vancouver ([www.space2place.com](http://www.space2place.com)) can’t get enough of ornamental grasses and shrubs, from Mexican feather grass to Russian sage. “Some of the benefits of these,” says the landscape architect, whose firm was among Western Living magazine’s Designers of the Year last year, “are lower water requirements, year-round interest, they establish quickly and they are readily available.”

But even when it comes to plants, which are the most flexible garden elements of all, long-term value is a top priority right now. “Perennials are in,” according to Hubbard. “People are planting what will come back next year, which eliminates the expense of replacing annuals every season.”

### DIY garden design

According to Meredyth Hilton of Artistic Gardens Inc., consumers are becoming more and more fluent in the language of garden design, which allows them to communicate with their landscapers more efficiently.

To help them along, the designer is leading a series of “fun, hands-on” gardening seminars at Grano restaurant in Toronto this summer.

Over wine and food, participants will undergo a five-week design primer that results in a detailed master plan for their own spaces.

The cost of the series is \$600. (By comparison, the minimum cost of a professionally drawn landscape plan is \$1,200.) To sign up, call 416-488-2174.

» D.S.

