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FEATURES

Take a Page from These Landscapers

by Tom Crain

Books offer inspiration and insight

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SCOTT AND LAUREN OGDEN



A watersmart garden in the fall



A Bismarck palm.



Watersmart plantings

A select group of landscapers are adding the title "author" to their résumé, while remaining dedicated to their landscaping work. If you need help designing your next project, check out these books for some inspiration and wisdom.

Tracy DiSabato-Aust

For the past 30 years, Tracy DiSabato-Aust has been an accomplished and untraditional landscaper. She has earned international acclaim as one of America's most entertaining professional speakers and contributing garden writers. She's a media darling for the home and garden broadcast genre. She's a top-ranking, globetrotting tri-athlete who also appears in fitness training DVDs.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TRACY DISABATO-AUST



Tracy DiSabato-Aust is a landscaper, author and a tri-athlete.

To top it all off, she's an author with two of the gardening world's best-selling books, and a third one, "50 High-Impact, Low Care Garden Plants," published by Timber Press, Inc.

Her first book, "The Well-Tended Perennial Garden," referred to by many as "the bible for perennial maintenance," has become Timber Press' best-selling book in its publishing history. Most gardening books are considered a hit if 5,000 copies are sold. Well Tended has sold over 130,000 and counting.

"I started writing on deadheading perennials for gardening magazines and speaking at garden clubs on the topic," DiSabato-Aust explains. "To write a book for the sake of writing wasn't my intention. Timber Press approached me about writing a book. I was thrilled about the prospect, but I was so busy with my landscaping clients and raising my young son. I told them if

they could wait a few years, I would finish one for them." After two and a half years of hands-on research, she delivered a best seller.

Even with all DiSabato-Aust's successes out of the garden, she would never think of closing down Horticultural Classics & Consultations, her landscaping business located near Columbus, Ohio. It's known for mixed garden designs that are practical, functional and environmentally sound, using a wide palette of plant material with respect to color, texture and form.

"My entire inspiration for everything I do comes from designing and installing clients' gardens," DiSabato-Aust says. For that reason, she maintains at least three ongoing client projects. For her book research and knowledge, she not only relies on her current experiences with domestic clients, but also from her past experiences at such locations as DuPont's Longwood Gardens near Philadelphia, Montreal Botanical Garden in Canada, Kalmthout Arboretum in Belgium and Knightshayes Court in England to give her readers, including a big following in England, Australia and New Zealand, a broad-ranged look at best practices from around the globe.



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There are many picture books of drop-dead gorgeous flowers that everyone wants, but they stop there," she says. In her books, she gives practical tips on how to plant them, where to plant them and how to keep them looking great.

Scott Ogden and Lauren Springer Ogden

"The opportunity for a personal relationship with the natural world is essential to a garden, but may be lost simply by failing to include plants in a way that celebrates their inherent character and natural power," writes Scott Ogden and Lauren Springer Ogden in their latest book, "Plant-Driven Design." The book looks at garden design from a plant perspective, marrying site, region, plants and people while both embracing and transcending regionality. "Gardens are certainly for people, but to actually be gardens, they must be created with plants first in mind."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SCOTT AND LAUREN OGDEN.



Lauren Springer Ogden and Scott Ogden design gardens "with plants first in mind."

Many landscapers comment that the Ogden's book approaches garden design from a unique perspective that places plants, nature and horticulture on equal footing with art and architecture. Heralding this change in direction is a challenge to the design tenets of the last 70 years, where architecture has dominated how we experience our surroundings.

Through the years of landscaping for clients in Colorado and Texas, this process has taught the Ogdens that "careful plant selection and placement is their essential design consideration." They bring to their landscape designs the "call of the wild," by visiting natural places.

The Ogdens lecture internationally, emphasizing plant diversity and ecological attunement. They are unique because they study wild plants and have worked on gardening projects in 13 states

(spanning USDA zones 4 to 10), Mexico, Argentina, Europe and South Africa.

"One of the biggest challenges of becoming an author when you already have a profession is that it takes a long time to write a book like this," says Ogden. Since the Ogdens are also photographers, they spend a huge chunk of time taking and selecting photos to fill the pages.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SCOTT AND LAUREN OGDEN.



Ideas for a tropical mosaic garden.

As accomplished book writers on landscaping, the Ogdens are able to secure high-end and knowledgeable clients, many who own multimillion-dollar properties. They are also in demand as landscapers at public garden sites, including Naples Botanical Garden, Denver Botanic Gardens, Callaway Gardens and San Antonio Botanical Gardens.

"Most gardening books are around for a year or so and then they're gone," explains Ogden. "We try to write books like Tracy DiSabato-Aust that are manuals for our readers. That way they stay in print for awhile." The Ogdens catalogue about 40 plant species within their book.

Ogden also says that most people who write garden books are master gardeners to a certain extent, but garden only for themselves. Others are just reporters or journalists. "The fact that Lauren and I are working landscapers gives us a unique and more in-depth perspective," he says.

Scott and Lauren have written several books, together and separately, in which they pioneer

new plants and garden aesthetics.

"Gardening is something that is not universal across the U.S.," says Ogden. "There are different climate zones. Many books published today are dummed down so they are more universal."

For the past 20 years, Tom Crain has been a regular contributor to B2B publications, including many in the green industry. He is also a marketing communications specialist for several companies in the travel, agriculture and nutrition industries

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