



ART in the garden

Above: Henry Spencer Moore's 'Large Totem Head' holds court at the Kansas City Sculpture Park at the Nelson-Atkins Museum.

Opposite: Kristopher Dabner picked this structured piece for one client's geometric garden.

ALFRESCO ART CAN ENHANCE ANY GARDEN VIEW

BY MAUREEN SULLIVAN

If you've lived here for any length of time, you've doubtless enjoyed the Kansas City Sculpture Park at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, savoring the artwork and all it adds to the landscape. Or perhaps you've long been a fan of the Tom Corbin bronzes that grace the fountain at Kauffman Gardens. But have you ever thought about adding art to your own garden? We've talked to a few local pros for ways to go about doing just that. You may not have multiple Henry Moores like the Nelson, but with a little planning and forethought, you can achieve the same effect: A beautiful piece of artwork, nestled in the landscape to enhance the natural beauty that surrounds it.

PROVIDING A FOCAL POINT

Whether you have a piece you'd like to see implemented outside or you're considering investing in artwork to add to your garden, you might be wondering why you should do so, and will it really be worth it? The answer is a resounding yes. Not only will it beautify the landscape, but it will help shape it as well.

"For me, hardscaping, architecture, layout, and art pieces—art, sculpture, water elements—are the very backbone of the garden," says landscape designer Buck Buchan, owner of Buck Buchan Landscape Design. "I love to have different varieties of plants in the garden. But really, it's all about focal points and creating depth and excitement in the garden."

Kristopher Dabner, landscape designer and owner of the Greensman, agrees.

"I love sculpture in the garden. Using art adds depth," says Dabner. "You don't have to water or weed it, so using art is an easy way to get a low-maintenance focal point."

And just how are these alfresco

focal points determined? It's wherever your eye immediately travels, anywhere your eye is going to go as you walk out into the garden—like a vista, an alcove or niche.

Of course, art can be used to create a place of interest where none previously existed. For clients Constance and Ray Beagle, Dabner created a six-foot bright-yellow metal sculpture, with different sizes of twisted metal pieces and hoops.

"That's a sculpture that just really stands out—their yard is not so much flowers as differences in textures and color and greens," Dabner says. "So to have this bright yellow sculpture in the back of the yard really draws your eye to the back of the garden."

PLANNING IS PARAMOUNT

Just as important as highlighting or creating a focal point is how to go about doing that. The first rule of thumb is a familiar adage: Less is more. Strong pieces of art and fewer of them is always better.





Black ceramic bamboo sculptures accent this city garden.

and just like with your indoor collection, you want to pick pieces you love, that you'll want to live with. Then edit, edit, edit.

Once you've narrowed down your selection, the next challenge is making the art

seem a part of the garden rather than just a piece plopped down on the lawn.

"It's going to seem more comfortable if the artwork is worked into the landscape so that it seems it's been there for a while and things have grown around it, really complementing the landscape," says Dabner.

In addition to making the artwork harmonious with its surroundings, it needs to mesh with the style of the garden as well, either by matching things or providing a direct contrast. If it's a more classic garden, you might go with more classic elements, but a stark contrast with the garden style or the house's architecture can be striking as well. Dabner's clients the Beagles, for example, own a New England-style home, which sits in direct contrast to the bright-yellow modern piece in their backyard, as does a contemporary, red, metal sculpture by the front door. Another client of Dabner's, Brad Kemp of Lawrence, has what Dabner calls "a

nine-square garden" (featured in *Better Homes and Gardens*) where the front yard is like a tic-tac-toe board of nine 12-by-12-foot squares separated by four-foot-wide paths. The sculpture they found to match? A four-foot-square, rusty metal cube with holes cut in it that sits up on one of its corners.

"His yard is very geometric," Dabner says of Kemp. "[So] for him, we have this very geometric sculpture."

MAKING IT WORK

There are logistical issues to consider, of course. Is the scale of the artwork right for the space? And is the space itself right for art? The space should do justice to the piece and vice versa; if you need to see the piece of art in the round, for example, make sure people are able to walk around the entire piece. And unlike interior design where you're working with specific colors and objects, there aren't as many rules to follow outside.

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BE A MATERIAL GIRL (OR BOY)

If you don't already have a piece of art for your garden but are thinking about making the leap, it's wise to consider what the piece will be made of. The following materials stand the test of (outdoor) time:

- **Indiana limestone** or any other nonporous limestone variety, so that no water is absorbed
- **Granite**
- **Iron**
- **Copper**, the patina of which will change (and often will be enhanced) with the rain
- **Bronze**
- **Wood**, in a hard variety like teak, preferably treated with rosewood oil or something that minimizes damage from UV rays, water and weather

"There's more flexibility in the garden than inside the house," Buchan says, though he often does carry through color families or accent colors from the house to the garden. "I get really nervous when someone starts drawing lines because I think the garden is nature's area. We share that."

Just as there are no hard and fast rules for art placement in the garden, there aren't strict parameters for what constitutes outdoor garden art either.

shrub to a sculpture."

As a rule of green thumbs, you want to treat your garden like a room in your home: It needs to function, it needs to look good, it needs to be something you can maintain. And just like buying art for inside the home, go with what you love and want to live with. "Everybody's garden is different, hopefully, and is some sort of expression of them," says Dabner. "Their art is going to reflect that as well." ♦

Citing a Japanese-inspired garden he designed for clients Cheryl and Jeff Iernigan's Asian-style ranch on Ward Parkway that won the Kansas City Beautiful George Kessler Award last year, Buchan says: "If you look at that garden, the art there in some cases becomes the stones, the boulders. These are ton-and-a-quarter boulders you're seeing in that garden. There's a bamboo bridge—for that area, the bridge becomes the artwork."

Dabner has used gates and fences as artwork. "To me, anything can be art. You take something out of its context, put it in another location and all of the sudden it turns into art," Dabner says. "Art in the garden can be anything from a topiary

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