



story by eyn swanson  
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The day we met up with landscape designer Kristopher Dabner—also known as The Greensman—and his friend Joyce McInerney for an educational tour of Kansas City's top green thumb outlets, he was preparing for a small lecture on edible container gardens he was giving the next day. Fortunately, our first stop was Soil Service Garden Center on Troost Avenue. Our first lesson: A surprisingly large number of plants can fit into a medium-sized pot. As Soil Service owner Brian Linch led us through the selection of early spring blooms—pansies, stock, linaria—we received our second lesson. "A successful container has to have three elements, and I'll give you the technical terms," Linch said. "It has to have a 'stickie uppie' plant, a 'filler upper' plant and some 'hanger downers.'"

As Dabner filled this mandate—including a bunch of purple kale (A) as a "filler upper"—he shared the personal planting philosophy he developed after visiting famed floral designer Christian Tortu's showroom in Paris. "I like to keep everything monochromatic within a container but then mix it up with different textures and blooms," he says.

The education continued at Van Llew's, an outdoor sculpture shop tucked along Prospect Avenue that Dabner frequents at least once a month. On the day of our visit, he and McInerney were searching for a fountain (F) for a very specific spot at her home. The two met "while floating on the lake" along which both their homes are situated, and Dabner has helped his friend reinvent both her interior and exterior in the

years since. As we picked our way through the crowded yard, Dabner pointed to a couple of planters which, though concrete, had a sophisticated finish. That sort of attention to detail, he says, is the sign of a high-quality piece.

An intricate finish also caught the duo's eye at Red Cedar Gardens in Stilwell. This particular piece (D), created by Italian designer Campo di Fiori, was quite a bit smaller than those we'd admired at Van Llew's, but its detail was nonetheless impressive. "Container pot culture has become really big," explained Red Cedar owner Ricki Creamer. And her customers are indeed willing to pay more for an imported pot. Situated on several charming acres behind Creamer's own home, Red Cedar is known for its perennials and hostas. In fact, Dabner left that day with a helleborus plant (\$12.50). "People should plant hundreds of these," Creamer said, pointing to a more mature version as we strolled through her display garden. Still early spring, only the hardiest of blooms had poked up their heads; noticing the crocus, Dabner shared another bit of wisdom: "I like to plant crocus in clients' lawns, right in the grass," he says. "That way, they bring color to the lawn in early spring but can be mowed right over in summer."

From Stilwell, we headed west to Lawrence, where our first priority was lunch. Molly and Robert Krause's fast-casual South American restaurant, Esquina, had been open for just three weeks, and we were eager to see if it lived up to the hype. It did. Every bite was delicious, from the sampler platter of three tacos (C/\$7.95)—we had the pork with mole rojo and pineapple-pumpkin seed salsa; the fish with ancho-lime coconut cream and fried plantains; and the chicken with salsa verde, queso fresco, tomatillo relish and toasted almonds—to the house salad (B/\$5.95) made with jicama, pineapple, avocado, veggies, greens, queso fresco and cilantro-lime vinaigrette.

Our final stop was Water's Edge (E), which Dabner has patronized since he was a student at the University of Kansas. Explaining that 50 percent of his clients usually end up with some sort of water feature on their properties, Dabner's eyes shown as he pointed to water hawthorn and parrot feather plants and described exactly how pond systems work. Clearly, he has a passion for conceiving and creating beautiful and Zen landscape environments. Sitting in the gentle spring sun that day amid the peaceful sound of bubbling water, it was easy to see why. 🍃

RESOURCE GUIDE: Esquina, 801 Massachusetts, Lawrence, 785-856-1625. The Greensman, 7213 Troost Ave., 816-523-1516. Red Cedar Gardens, 7895 W. 163rd St., Stilwell, 913-897-2286. Soil Service, 7130/7125 Troost Ave., 816-444-3403. Van Llew's, 7347 Prospect Ave., 816-523-1760. Water's Edge, 847 Indiana St., Lawrence, 785-841-6777.